HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Wednesday, October 18, 2017

Legislative Chamber

Alternative Procurement Process and IT Services

Public Accounts Committee

Mr. Allan MacMaster (Chairman)
Mr. Gordon Wilson (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Ben Jessome
Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft
Mr. Brendan Maguire
Mr. Hugh MacKay
Mr. Tim Houston
Hon. David Wilson
Ms. Lisa Roberts

[Mr. Brendan Maguire was replaced by Mr. Chuck Porter.]

In Attendance:

Ms. Kim Langille
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Chief Legislative Counsel

Ms. Nicole Arsenault
Assistant Clerk, Office of the Speaker

Mr. Andrew Atherton
Assistant Auditor General

Ms. Ashley Richardson
Audit Principal

WITNESSES

Department of Internal Services

Mr. Jeff Conrad,
Deputy Minister

Mr. Chris Mitchell,
Chief Procurement Officer

Ms. Sandra Cascadden,
Associate Deputy Minister & CIO

Mr. Kevin Briand,
Executive Director - Business Solutions

HALIFAX, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN
Mr. Allan MacMaster

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Mr. Gordon Wilson

MR. CHAIRMAN: I call this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee to order. This morning we have with us the Department of Internal Services to discuss alternative procurement process. I would like to remind all members to place their phones on silent.

We'll begin with introductions, starting with Mr. MacKay.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

We have with us the Auditor General's Office this morning, beginning with Ms. Richardson.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

Let us introduce our guests. We're going to start on the right, with Mr. Mitchell.

[The guests introduced themselves.]

Okay, we'll begin with your introduction. Mr. Conrad, are you providing the opening comments?

MR. JEFF CONRAD: Thanks so much for having us this morning. We're glad to be here to talk about some of the work that we do at the Department of Internal Services. Most of you know that we are kind of a central group in the province that transactions a lot of the back end, what is considered the back-end function of government. We do about a million financial transactions a year. We do our internal audit function, we manage major purchases, and we handle information technology services. It's quite a range of back-end functions inside of the government.

We've consolidated, streamlined and generated a lot of efficiencies by consolidation within government and we've provided you with some materials, like some timelines and information related to some of that consolidation. We've worked specifically on the IT side and we've taken a lot of what we think are good, innovative solutions and long-term approaches to gain sustainability of government over the longer period of time.

It is, of course, a journey to try to get ourselves to the right place, but we continue on that journey and we think we're headed towards the right direction in terms of a lot of the work that we've been asked to do. We really believe that the work we do behind the scenes is really important in allowing other departments to be freed-up to do what they focus on. Part of the philosophy of this work is that we should try to be as good as we can at the work that we do, in order to take it off the hands of other line departments that are really focused on other critical services like Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Wellness, or other things in that area of work.

As you can imagine, there's a rapid pace of change in the world in which we live, both in terms of technology and in terms of government services, so it's one of our ongoing challenges to get the right services in the right place at the right time and to make sure that we're doing things like protecting privacy and ensuring cost-effectiveness and dealing with cyber security and a whole range of other fronts. It's quite a broad, complicated piece of work that we've been handed to do. We need to continually maintain and upgrade those services and, of course, procurement plays a key function in terms of how we do that work. So how we manage the procurement function on a go-forward basis is really critical.

I know we're here today to talk about alternate procurement, but about 80 per cent of the work we do through - the cost value of the work that we do in government, goes through a competitive process, and about 20 per cent of the work we do goes through some sort of an alternative procurement process. We'll talk more about this, I'm sure, but it is in an urgent, specialized or exceptional circumstance that we use alternate procurement. It is governed by a number of trade agreements like the Atlantic Procurement Agreement, the Canada Free Trade Agreement and a number of other things which recognize these alternate procurement processes as a set part of procurement, so it is a procurement process. It's not in lieu of procurement, it is a type of a procurement process.

We've done a number of things to help try and bring some clarity to this. Last year we modernized our procurement policy. In October 2016, we released a new procurement

policy that talks about a whole range of things in procurement, including alternate procurement and provides some greater clarity around that.

Of course, we've done a number of things internally around staff training and supports to folks and trying to improve the processes where we offer advice and guidance to other departments. Again, I'm sure we'll get a chance to talk about those things.

For me, the heart of this work is always the great staff that we have in our department and across government, trying their best to do this work and do it well. We have a wonderful team at procurement and we have a wonderful team at our information, communications and technology services. You see some of the senior leaders here today, but none of us would get to do the work we do without a great team behind us that every day does wonderful work, wins awards, gets recognized for the work they do nationally and internationally.

It's a really exciting time to be in this work. We absolutely acknowledge there's lots of work to be done but it is an exciting time to be leading on some of these things within a government context.

Thank you very much for having us this morning. I look forward to the discussion and I'll be glad to take questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Mr. Conrad. We'll move to the PC caucus. Mr. Houston, you have 20 minutes.

MR. TIM HOUSTON: Thank you for the opening comments. Internal Services plays a major role in IT service delivery. Is it the only provider of IT service delivery? Are you guys responsible for everything? Are there any departments that do their own?

MR. CONRAD: Inside of government - I always struggling with this a little bit because it depends on how you define IT and who's making the definition. So the core IT services - and I'll certainly let our CIO Sandra talk a little bit, but we provide the bulk of those services. Some departments continue to have services like analytical services and people running reports and using IT systems, of course, as users, as an important part of what they do, and then on the health side we provide a piece of the IT services for the IWK and the Nova Scotia Health Authority, but we have what we call the non-clinical part and the health authorities have maintained responsibility for the clinical services on the health side.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. So, you provide the bulk.

MR. CONRAD: We provide the bulk.

MR. HOUSTON: And, on the procurement side - would an individual department procure its own computer but you would procure the systems that run on the computer, or what's the distinction there?

MR. CONRAD: The distinction there would be we run the sort of strategic large-picture procurement pieces. Most of the buyers of things are out in the department. So, if someone's buying a computer, they're doing that through the department but setting up the contract under which you buy the computers would be work that we would be engaged in. So, again, we're providing advice and guidance and supports to those contracts. We're not the end decision makers. I don't know, Chris, if you want to …

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. No, that's fine; that's good.

I do want to talk about a specific program. I want to talk about Axios Assyst. Are you familiar with Axios Assyst?

MR. CONRAD: Certainly Sandra would be.

MR. HOUSTON: Ms. Cascadden, what program did Assyst replace?

MS. SANDRA CASCADDEN: The Axios Assyst application which is our service desk or our help desk application actually replaced multiple different applications in government. When we first came together as shared services, all of the different government departments were kind of using their own help desk software to take calls from their own department, to troubleshoot any issues that they were having as it pertained to technology or applications.

The Axios Assyst program actually replaced around six different applications in its launch. Some of those applications were actually used within IT itself. We had two or three service desks in IT and what was happening is when our clients made a call, they called into the first service desk and then that first service desk had to hand a ticket over to our infrastructure folks who then had to recreate the ticket and then respond to the ticket. That information would never get back to the first service desk, so we had a broken process in IT. So it replaced a number of those different systems and now we have one system across government and it's used by the Health Authority - there are no handoffs and kind of valleys where tickets could get lost.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. It replaced about six systems in your estimation. You mentioned the Health Authority in your comments, so this is used through the Health Authority and all the departments? This is the system now, Axios Assyst?

MS. CASCADDEN: Yes, it is actually used in multiple departments. When we determined that having one service desk tool was most efficient and effective, what we then did is we established this tool as a corporate tool all across government.

For example, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal have opted to use this service desk tool for some of their services that they're delivering to citizens. Citizens can call in, log a ticket about something that's happening in the province, and then TIR can distribute that ticket to the appropriate department. So not only did we standardize from an IT perspective, we chose a tool that could be used by other departments if they had the same need for taking a request or a trouble, and then resolving that trouble and keeping track of it through the whole process.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, it's a service desk tool. Presumably there are a gazillion service desk tools on the market. How did you decide on this one?

MS. CASCADDEN: When we were coming together as Shared Services, the Health Authority actually was leading the government in the decision of standardizing on a service desk tool. So the health authorities had gone out to a procurement process and they went through a very stringent process in which they selected Axios Assyst for their tool. They were partway through the implementation when we declared Shared Services and then started to take the Health Authority's IT supports in.

[9:15 a.m.]

What we then did is, the government did a deep dive on the functionality of Axios Assyst to see if it would fit the government requirements. We assessed that it did fit the government requirements, and we adopted the tool, which Health and Wellness actually went to an RFP on, for all of government. They already had purchased licences, and we could easily move the licences up to an enterprise licence to accommodate all of the provincial needs.

MR. HOUSTON: Is Axios Assyst fully operational across all departments?

MS. CASCADDEN: Yes, Axios Assyst is fully functional across the Health Authority and the IWK, as well as all government departments. The product itself delivers, I would say, multiple services through a whole continuum. It can take a ticket, resolve a ticket, and track the resolution of that ticket. You can do analytics around how many tickets you're getting for any specific cause.

We also have enabled self service, which is a function that enables people to go in and basically put their own tickets in, so you don't have to call the service desk, wait on the phone, and wait for a service technician to respond to your call.

There are other pieces of functionality that we continue to roll out. For example, we can roll out asset tracking as part of Axios Assyst as well as change management. Those other, higher-level functions are contemplated for the rollout, and we're working our way through them.

MR. HOUSTON: I'm looking at a chart that was provided. I guess it's a procurement chart. I could maybe get a copy of this tabled, but it was in your package. On March 2nd, there was an award to Sierra Systems for implementation of Axios Assyst. It's a $1 million contract. What was provided? What is that? What was that tender for? It was $1.1 million.

MS. CASCADDEN: The implementation of Axios Assyst was actually a three-year initiative, which may sound like a long period of time, but in order to implement these systems, what you really need to do is to redesign your entire business process. Not only do you have to redesign your business process . . .

MR. HOUSTON: If I may, that was the full implementation?

MS. CASCADDEN: Yes.

MR. HOUSTON: That was $1.1 million to implement Axios Assyst across other government departments, or to continue the Health Authority partial implementation that was going on?

MS. CASCADDEN: Sierra Systems was the only company that Axios Assyst appointed and authorized to implement their product. We had no option but to go to Sierra, because it's the only company that Axios Assyst has chosen to be their implementation partner. You buy the product from Axios, and you buy the implementation from Sierra. The implementation from Sierra was for the full government.

MR. HOUSTON: Including the Health Authority?

MS. CASCADDEN: We also have included the Health Authority in that as well.

MR. HOUSTON: There was a partial implementation going on at the time that this tender was awarded. Okay.

You mentioned in your comments that the Health Authority was already down the road with Axios Assyst; they had licences and everything. But there was another tender awarded on March 5th under alternative procurement, and this was for Axios Assyst licence, $645,000. So they had licences, but they didn't have enough. You had to buy a bunch more, correct?

MS. CASCADDEN: Yes, the Health Authorities had enough licences to cover themselves. Generally in government what we do is, we negotiate with contractors for something called enterprise licences which means that we can actually roll out those services to a defined set of clients, with no additional cost. So, we did have to increase the number of licences to include the province.

MR. HOUSTON: Can you tell me about a company called Livus Consulting? Are they part of this Axios Assyst? I see some tenders for Livus Consulting - $300,000, $500,000. Are they part of the Axios Assyst implementation?

MS. CASCADDEN: I don't recall the name of that company. I can follow up, but it doesn't ring a bell with regard to Axios Assyst. I will certainly follow up.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of the implementation, which you've mentioned is fully completed, I guess at this time - fully operational - but the tenders to Sierra Systems, the Health Authority was already going with Axios Assyst so therefore had to go with Sierra Systems, and then the government came along and said, that's a good idea, we'll do that too.

The tenders to Sierra Systems were initially awarded $3.8 million, the combination of the tenders, but it actually ended up costing - just from what I can see of a quick scan - over $7 million. This a pretty expensive undertaking, this implementation. Is that a fair summary?

MS. CASCADDEN: The service desk tools and everything that attaches to service desk tools is managing a fairly significant piece of our business. It's managing every contact with every client - whether it's a health care client or it's a government client - and tracking those contacts as well as managing assets, change management processes and things like that.

The implementation for these types of systems - really there are probably only about two that are of the category that we require in order to manage the services that we're managing, so I believe that the project was on budget. We did not go over budget for this project for what we were requesting.

MR. HOUSTON: Well the tender was for $3.8 million, but the government has paid $7.3 million. Can you explain how that's on budget?

MS. CASCADDEN: Through the alternate procurement process and through projects, we pay vendors based on milestones. So, if you see one payment to a vendor it may mean it's a payment for one year's worth of work; when you add up all of those payments, all of those payments are actually what it cost to do the implementation. So just looking at one vendor's one line is not what the whole project was about.

MR. HOUSTON: But with all due respect, I'm looking at actual tenders that were issued and the first one that I'm looking at is a non-competitive tender - statutory monopoly, Sierra Systems, and the text is: implementation Axios Assyst, $1,100,000.

So perhaps what I'm hearing - and just maybe some clarification - was this tendered in multiple pieces or was the tender actually for the full implementation?

MS. CASCADDEN: You don't tender in multiple pieces . . .

MR. HOUSTON: You shouldn't, that's what I'm asking.

MS. CASCADDEN: No, you pay in multiple pieces.

MR. HOUSTON: That's fine - I don't care how it's paid, but I'm looking at tenders that were awarded for $3.8 million and payments that were $7.3 million. That's what I'm struggling with. It seems to me that it was over budget, but you made the statement that it certainly wasn't.

MS. CASCADDEN: All of the documentation we have from our project team is that this project was not over budget. It delivered what it was supposed to deliver. The various alternate procurements here have to be all added up and the addition of all of those alternate procurements is the total cost of what that project cost.

So each of these alternate procurements - if you see a big line item, it is not the total cost of the project. It is associated with our payment schedule for those vendors.

MR. HOUSTON: I just want to make sure - are you saying that the tendering process was more closely aligned with when payments would be made as to what the actual cost was?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Conrad would like to make a comment.

MR. CONRAD: I'm not sure I understand. I believe you said earlier you have a document in front of you that says the tender was originally for $3 million, Mr. Houston. I'm not sure what document you're referring to. It might be helpful if we understood a little better what the source document is that you're asking about.

MR. HOUSTON: It's in your package that you sent here, but we'll get you a copy. It's a tender number - I don't know if you have tender numbers there - 60148190. The awarded amount is $3.8 million to Sierra Systems. My apologies - I should have had that there. We'll get a copy of that.

But I guess what I'm curious about is the Health Authority was in the midst of implementing a ticketing system and it probably suited their needs. The needs of the Health Authority ticketing system are probably different than the Department of Environment's ticketing system. If I'm blunt, it feels like we as a province purchased a Cadillac Escalade Stretch when maybe a Ford Escort would have done it for most departments. I feel like the cost is of the Cadillac Escalade Stretch, double, and that's what I'm concerned about because when I see a tender issued for $3.8 million and the cost is now up over $7 million - I know we heard today that it's fully operational but that's not what I'm hearing from people on the ground.

I'm just trying to get my head around, why are we doing this? What are your indicators that you can look at? What are your metrics that you can look at to say this system is doing what we need?

MS. CASCADDEN: Certainly. From the choice of Axios Assyst and the comment with regard to a system that may fit the Health Authority but may not fit the government - when you are in IT there are a number of things that, regardless of the industry you are in, it's the same process and the same tools are required. A service desk tool is one of those tools. So Axios Assyst from an application perspective, is actually in many organizations all over the world, doing the same type of IT function. That is, when a user calls in, the service desk person can actually log the ticket, track the information, access a knowledge base which will help them troubleshoot what the problem is that the person is having on the other end of the phone and help them solve their problem. Or if they can't solve the problem over the phone, create a ticket and move it deeper into the IT group.

The functionality that the Health Authority required is exactly the same functionality that the government required. We went through months of functional analysis with Axios Assyst with the Health and Wellness people at the table, and we laid out all the functional requirements for government and we basically have checklists of each one of those functional requirements, that Axios Assyst actually had the requirements that we needed, as government, and it was the tool that would work for government. We actually needed a tool to replace the multiple tools that we had.

Now change is difficult, change is exceptionally . . .

MR. HOUSTON: If I may, before we get into a discussion about change. If the department has a list of the functions that were required, do you have an update as to - somebody has said this one is operational, this one is operational. Is that something you can provide to us?

MS. CASCADDEN: Yes, I can actually provide a detailed synopsis of the entire project, including that.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, but not the cost? Can you tell me . . .

MS. CASCADDEN: Yes, including the cost, I'll provide the cost.

MR. HOUSTON: How much have we spent on Axios Assyst, as of today?

MS. CASCADDEN: What I will do is bring in a report that will have the actual costs itemized all the way through the project, where we are today, the functionality that we've actually implemented for what clients, and I'll provide that level of documentation on that project.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay but is that available today? Could we get that before the meeting is over, maybe? Is it something to be printed and sent in?

MS. CASCADDEN: Probably not the level of detail that you are looking for. I'll have to have people put it together from multiple documents.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. What about the cost? Is the cost to date something we could get somebody back at the shop to print off and send in?

MS. CASCADDEN: I'll see if we can get that before the end of the meeting.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you for that. Is there more implementation on Axios Assyst that the province is still looking to implement? In other words, how many more months or years will see our systems be engaged by the province implementing functionality of Axios Assyst?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Cascadden, you have 30 seconds.

MS. CASCADDEN: It will depend on the projects and the requests, based on the departments. If a department comes to us and says we would like to implement Axios Assyst, we may have to re-engage with Sierra in a separate project, in order to implement a version of Axios Assyst.

MR. HOUSTON: It'll have to be Sierra, right?

MS. CASCADDEN: It has to be Sierra.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. We will move now to the NDP caucus. Ms. Roberts, you have 20 minutes.

MS. LISA ROBERTS: I want to start, if I could - Mr. Conrad probably. On Page 14.3 in the budget for Internal Services we can see that there's more than 100 positions currently not filled in the department. You are 100 under budget, in terms of your FTEs. Can you explain why?

[9:30 p.m.]

MR. CONRAD: One of the things I provided in the package to you in advance was a little bit of a timeline, in terms of the formation of the department. It focuses primarily on the IT side of the organization, but it does give a bit of a sense of some of the challenge that we've had, or some of the development that we've had, in terms of the work that's gone forward. So this picture that I've provided with kind of with an arrow on it.

One of the things we say in the department is - although the department was created in 2014 and we're three years old, in some ways we've been one year old three times. It's a bit of a flippant way to describe the work. Originally, the department was created from - I believe it was seven different divisions coming from five different departments, which brought together about 600 people, inside of the department. We were that way for a number of months, and then we brought in some folks from the procurement side, from the Health Authority, and some other departments. Then the following year, in April, we brought in IT services from across government.

So originally, we had what was then a relatively small, 300-person CIO office. The following year, there had been IT staff spread throughout all government departments; we brought those into our department. The next year, we actually gave back a piece of what we had from our public works piece, back to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and brought in all of the IT people from the Health Authority. In the midst of all that, we were also centralizing our Freedom of Information, Protection of Privacy, Information Access and Privacy folks.

So, I tell that story a bit, because one the things that's happened is that we have not had a very stable environment in terms of workforce size. We went from 600 people to around 900 people, then we lost a couple of hundred people who went back to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. We brought in 300 people from the Health Authority and the IWK. One of the things we've tried to be really careful about is the stability of staffing in the department. We do have a number of vacancies, and we've had a fairly high level of vacancies in the department, relative to other departments, for the last several years.

One of the things we wanted to do was, as we took in new pieces, often they would come to us with vacancies already in existence. When we did the Health Authority work, and took the staff from the Health Authority, you can imagine. Because we took a piece of non-clinical and they kept the clinical, there were people that had dual roles prior to the transfer. So, they would keep somebody that had been 50/50, and we would take somebody that had been 50/50 and we'd each end up with a partially-vacant position or a fully-vacant position.

One of the things we wanted to do was to get stable before we made a lot of decisions about staffing. So we've been reasonably cautious, in terms of filling all the vacancies we have. We believe we're going to need the positions that we have, in the long term. This year in the budget process, we have given back a number of positions to the centre that we've come to understand that we don't need. We've repurposed quite a number of positions that previously were in one role, and we've moved them to a different role. So part of it has been this instability of transferring people in and out, and us really wanting to be thoughtful about understanding what we've inherited. So we talk about, transition, stabilize, and then transform. I know it's a bit of a long answer.

The other piece, I would say, is that it's a really rapidly changing environment, right? So the example that we've just been talking about around the help desk, has been, as we came together, we knew that part of our plan was to centralize help desk services, which drives us to more efficiency. Part of our plan that Kevin is heavily involved in, is to try and manage multiple systems that do similar kind of work. We knew we would be driving out some efficiencies, so we wanted to be careful not to fully permanent staff in areas in which, maybe down the road, we would be reducing staff complement there because of some of these efficiencies we've gained.

It sounds like a long-winded bureaucratic answer, and I apologize for that. But it really has been a process of us being careful about transition. We actually have been more aggressive in the last number of months, as our system has stabilized. We've now had about 18 months with the same organization. We've re-structured in many of the divisions, we've moved around a number of those resources, and we started to be a little more aggressive in terms of getting the right bodies in the right seats, we believe, over the last few months. I think you'll see that number change a bit into the future.

MS. ROBERTS: Thank you for that answer. Has the department tracked cost savings as a result of the positions being vacant?

MR. CONRAD: Absolutely. There are a number of things that happen with efficiencies in terms of savings. I apologize that I don't have those numbers with me, but we absolutely track the savings as a result of position savings.

One of the things that has also happened is as we've gone in and advanced some of these initiatives and other things, those savings become an opportunity for us to offset costs for government. Often within the organization we may be using those savings still within our budget for some other government-approved initiative as a way to manage through the transitions that we're going through. But we do track how many positions are vacant on any given day, how much money we've saved to date in that area, and what that money has been redirected towards within the department.

MS. ROBERTS: A quick question related to my colleague's line of questions around Axios Assyst. Does that software - I don't even know if software is the right word for it - have any human resources functions or is it strictly IT?

MR. CONRAD: It's an IT system and a tracking system. It's not a tool we would use to track things like vacancies, if that's what you're asking.

MS. ROBERTS: And it's not involved in hiring . . .

MR. CONRAD: It's not involved in hiring.

MS. ROBERTS: . . and on-boarding of staff.

MR. CONRAD: No. I mean there are human resource issues in terms of using it and all of that, but it's not a management of human resources system.

MS. ROBERTS: Alternative procurement practices are defined as "Specialized or exceptional practices that allow for deviation from the [normal] procurement processes." Which can include ". . . non-competitive procurement in the place of a competitive process, and a limited competition in the place of an open competition." What percentage of government procurement falls within the alternative procurement practice?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Mitchell.

MR. CHRIS MITCHELL: It varies year to year. We generally set approximately 80 per cent of the dollar value of procurement for government would go through a competitive process, leaving somewhere in the neighborhood of about 20 per cent in the alternative procurement process.

MS. ROBERTS: Has that changed over time?

MR. MITCHELL: It has remained relatively constant. We do a report annually that takes a look at a roll-up of a number of different empirical numbers. It has certainly remained that way for the last three or four years; it has been fairly consistent at an 80/20 split.

MS. ROBERTS: Can you provide some examples maybe other than the Axios Assyst story - which we kind of have the shape of now - of when this type of procurement would be appropriate and when it would not?

MR. MITCHELL: Certainly. As the deputy mentioned in the opening comments, when we redid the procurement policy for October 2016, we mirrored what was coming in the new CFTA. (Interruption) That's the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. There are 28 different justifications for alternate procurements. We were working with the departments on a draft of that, so we had an idea of what 28 justifications would be coming as a result of the change from the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) to the CFTA.

So we have 28 justifications, which would range from emergency situations that you would expect if the time doesn't exist for the government to make a procurement to areas such as copyright requirements to use the same person or the same company that has provided the service initially. Or, we went to an open competitive competition, we had no bidders that were successful and therefore we have an alternate procurement situation where we can sole source after that fact.

There are a number of them and they're all meant to be utilized with some real prudence. The default is to a competitive process and when there isn't or when it makes

more sense for the government for one of those 28 reasons, then the alternate procurement process is in existence for those particular reasons.

MS. ROBERTS: I'm just going to clarify. I have in front of me the Sustainable Procurement Policy from the Common Services Manual. Is that the revised procurement policy that you're referring to, from October 2016?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes, that's it

MS. ROBERTS: The whole thing is called the sustainable procurement policy, but there's no actual definition in the policy of what makes it a sustainable procurement policy. There's reference to a number of different Acts that have objectives, including the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act and the Green Economy Act. I was struck - there are references in a number of spots to social goals. The definition of sustainable procurement, which is under the definitions, says "A holistic approach to government procurement that considers the environmental, economic, and social factors related to the goods, services, and construction that are procured."

Is the intent that all government procurement would be considering environment, economic, and social objectives as well as best value for government, or is there a hierarchy of the different objective that you're trying to hit, with best value for government money being the first?

MR. MITCHELL: The answer, and I hate to say it, is it depends. The reality is that the sustainable part of that - social enterprise, et cetera - is always one of the factors, one of the lenses we use on the determination of best value, not best price. There would be a number of pieces that we would rank through what's important to a particular procurement. Some may have economic development as a larger percentage of the selection for the appropriate vendor; some may put that down to a lower level, where we would bring another lens on, depending what the procurement is that we're looking for.

In that policy you see, we worked quite diligently over a couple of years with Paul Emanuelli, who is with a renowned procurement law office in Toronto. The idea was that the predecessor to this policy gave very little how-to, if you like, for folks who are looking to try and remain compliant with the policy. This one designed the policy.

Attached to that is a manual which is broken down into a number of protocols which actually tells folks who are responsible for following the policy how to do particular things - one of which would be alternate procurement, another one would be procurement plans and how to create them, et cetera. It's much more defined as to how to do it, when people really want to follow the policy. We were finding that they were, but they just weren't getting the right kind of guidance. This designs a protocol which helps them to do that.

Then further, we created templates for all the different kinds of documents which you would go to market for - request for proposal, request for quote, request for information or those types of deal - so that we can make a consistent approach for government out to industry when we go there for the competitiveness. It has actually been duplicated. The policy says any of the MASH sector entities don't necessarily have to follow it, but in place of it they do have their own policy which also mirrors some of the things which are in the procurement policy for the provincial level.

MS. ROBERTS: Can you provide me with an example, or explain how alternative procurement practices have provided opportunities for social enterprises since the policy came into effect?

MR. MITCHELL: I don't have any specific examples on top of mind. I know we're actually doing a lot of work right now. The manager who is on my staff, Lynda Rankin, is actually creating some assist videos, if you like, that will go to the departments to have them better aware of what social enterprises are available for.

It's not meant to change the procurement practice so much as inform people that there are other opportunities they can take a look at in that social economic piece. It's an interesting balance. Government, in mandate to my position, says we have particular targets of benefits we want to realize. We want to realize - from the whole shared services concept - some aggregation of procurement, et cetera. We look for best value and some of that does equate to best price.

[9:45 a.m.]

So it's the balance between that and the ability of using the procurement tool for other things which are government priorities. In some cases, that would be a social economic benefit as well.

MR. CONRAD: I guess just to your question if I understood it properly, around examples of where we used alternate procurement for social enterprises, I guess one of the things I would point out is, that would not necessarily be the only tool where we might try and use social good or social benefit. There could be RFPs. The example Chris gave, and I'm a little bit a risk here but I think this is correct - where we're producing videos, we're actually using a social enterprise agency to produce the videos, which I believe we did as an under-threshold procurement. So it wouldn't necessarily have been an alternate procurement, but it would have been something where we had an option to go out and do that in a procurement vehicle.

I just wanted to be clear that the policy doesn't say alternate procurement is the tool to get us to social enterprise. It's a broader kind of concept around how we can think about social inclusion in some of the work we do.

MS. ROBERTS: Just so I understand clearer, be it alternate procurement or be it just like your typical procurement route, as you decide the objectives that you're trying to hit - how much are you going to value the price, how much you're going to value whatever environmental or social good - is that all done through a scoring system and that's how you would end up deciding on the successful bidder in the end?

MR. MITCHELL: That's correct. We'll work with the department who is looking to make the acquisition or go to market. There's quite a lot of front-end work, so we've put a government structure together, a charter for what it is that they're looking to purchase, and then we'll go through what the important aspects are with them. We have the responsibility from procurement to put that lens back on the social side of that, to look for best value, etc. It's very much a combined effort between the department looking to purchase and procurement on the government side to ensure that all of those things are included.

So when we go out to market for that good or service, the evaluation criteria are determined in advance and if there were points in there for economic development or points in there for particular experience or who they bring to the table as far as a particular person, they would all be included in and aggregated up in an evaluation scoring guide which would then, at the end of the day, mathematically determine who was actually awarded that work.

MS. ROBERTS: And how often do bidders ask for a bidder debriefing?

MR. MITCHELL: In my experience, again, it depends. It's available to any of the proponents once the award of a contract is made, it's open and made a recommendation to most of the unsuccessful bidders that, if they want to take advantage of that opportunity, it's actually a good growth opportunity for the non-successful bidders because it speaks to them, not relative to the other bids, but in their own, where they were able to gain good marks or where they lost points in the evaluation process. It's meant to be informative for the next time that they put a bid in with a government tender.

MS. ROBERTS: I should have been keeping better track of my time.

Under a previous Liberal Government, we saw 39 P3 schools built primarily by three developers. An Auditor General's Report in 2010 highlighted a glaring lack of checks and balances in the contracts and, then, in 2016, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives concluded that the P3's program in Nova Scotia was a failure, though it did do lots of good for those companies' bottom lines.

If the government were looking at the P3 model for future infrastructure projects, what role would Internal Services have in providing analysis to determine the possible risks associated with that model?

MR. CONRAD: Again, it's a complex question obviously. P3 processes generally require some sort of procurement process to go through. So, we would be working with the department - or departments, in some cases - considering going to market, on how to go to market to find the companies, what analysis they might use, setting up evaluation criteria, doing that kind of thing.

It wouldn't be our department that would be providing should they or shouldn't they use P3. That would not be a role for us. That would be analysis that the department would take on in terms of designing the program. There would be more . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, sorry, sorry to interrupt. The time has expired. We'll move to the Liberal caucus and Ms. Lohnes-Croft.

MS. SUZANNE LOHNES-CROFT: Good morning and thank you for your remarks. I have to say, deputy, that you said it was an exciting time for this work. I find it a confusing time for myself. I guess I'm not as into this topic as you would be and I'm glad to see that for you your work is stimulating. Mine is, too. I was very stimulated reading these notes in preparation.

I'm a little confused about the - I see you have done a new procurement policy and you spoke about it earlier. So we have a regular procurement and then we have the alternate and then the non-competitive. Can you just sort of brief me on the differences there.

MR. MITCHELL: Perhaps in it's most basic, the government in its desire to be open, fair and transparent, naturally moves to the competitive process. What that would be is, we would post an RFP, or a request for proposal, through our tenders website, making it available for anybody who wants to bid. We do that, generally, when we're aware of the fact that there will be multiple vendors who are interested in that work for the government.

So that's your competitive. Where we begin to move to a non-competitive is when either our analysis indicates that there may be only one vendor who is able to provide the goods or service that we're looking for, or one of those 28 justifications that are in the protocol of the policy which indicates there are some places in there that government would be better served not to go through a competitive process.

Internal to the competitive piece, we also break that down a little bit further. At the front end of a particular recurring procurement - for example, low-cost, high-volume items such as stationery and the like - the government will set up standing offers which allow for speed of purchase to be put in place. We also have an ability to do invitational competition. It's still competitive but we can invite vendors - two, three, four, five vendors - into a competition and limit it a little bit while still creating the time savings that would be done in an alternate procurement or sole-source procurement.

It's really meant to start from the sort of pendulum all the way to the competitive side. Go that way until there's evidence that it's either better for the government or there's no other option, then we'll slip into the non-competitive side which is governed by those alternate procurements that are provided in the package for the 28 justifications for that.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: So what is the advantage of all that, of the alternative types of procurement?

MR. MITCHELL: Depending on which of the 28 that you selected, the benefits would be if the government has a particular requirement for one of the examples, it would be in their best interests not to make it available to everybody, something that they wanted. If they wanted to hire, for example, an audit function to come in and look at a particular issue that they want and it's not particularly beneficial or in anybody's interest to make that available to everybody, then that's an alternate procurement reason for not going out to a public tender.

If we go to a public tender and nobody provides a submission or a bid that is evaluated as a successful bid and the government now still needs the good or service that it went to market for, it can now select an individual firm, either one of the original bidders or not, and engage in a direct one-on-one or a sole-source negotiation with that vendor.

It really depends. It's not meant to circumvent competitive process. It's meant to allow for the very small number of reasons why it's not in the government's best interests to go to an open, competitive, full process.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: This new policy was 2016?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes, ma'am, October.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Are you doing ongoing reviews and evaluations of how this process is going?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes, we do a number of different reviews. We create for government - through the Finance and Treasury Board - a report on savings which have been created as a result of the stand-up of a strategic procurement. I mentioned earlier that the numbers remain relatively consistent; this will be the first full year under the new policy. So, we'll determine at that time whether the number of alternate versus competitive bids has remained again consistently at around 80/20.

We also have a number of check-backs in areas such as a procurement advisory group for which I am the chairman. We talk to a number of the MASH sectors - the municipality, academic, school board and health sectors - to see whether the policy is doing for them what they're looking for. Does it provide them the guidance, does it allow them

to better run their procurement events with their vendor communities, and are they seeing successful tenders at the end of the day, realizing best value for money?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: And that's the work of the advisory group?

MR. MITCHELL: It's one of the good indicators back from them. The work is actually inside of ours. We have a compliance program which looks and determines if people are following the policy - are they posting their tenders on the website, do they post successful bids, are they providing vendor debriefs? It really is compliance to the policy, which is how we're actually determining if it's in place, if it's being utilized and it's being helpful to the folks who are doing those procurements.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: What is the follow-up for compliance?

MR. MITCHELL: The follow-up in terms of if they're not compliant?

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Yes.

MR. MITCHELL: We do an annual verification - right now we've done it with the municipalities. It's a letter to them asking them to confirm a sequence of questions. We have had to date very good compliance from the municipalities. The areas where they have not is usually seen on a per-RFP basis, and we get that indication from vendor communities who are displeased with the posting that's out there. We interact with the municipality or the school board, et cetera. Generally, when we point out the things which are not in compliance to policy they've modified their tender or their procedures in order to come in line with that.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: As an MLA I often get inquiries into tenders, especially around services like snow removal and property maintenance. Often these are three-year awarded contracts with a clause of quality control or whatever. I get complaints from constituents feeling that maybe some jobs are not done to their standards. Can you speak to how often that is reviewed, and what would I do as an MLA to respond to such a call?

MR. MITCHELL: There are two pieces. One is when we let the contract, there will be specific terms and conditions in a contract. For the example you used of potentially grounds maintenance, et cetera, there will be specific deliverables that the vendor needs to provide. Oftentimes I suspect some of the complaints you may hear is the individual has a set of their own evaluative criteria, if you like. So they want to see something done a particular way, and that may not be in line with what has actually been contracted out to the vendor.

If it is in line and it's just a case of the vendor not actually delivering to the level that they're supposed to or have been contracted to, the individual can lodge their concern either through your office or directly with the Transportation and Infrastructure Review

Department - in the case of ground maintenance - and then whoever is responsible for managing that specific contract would be in touch with the vendor and be able to modify the behavior - either to bring it up to the standard, which was identified in the contract or if it's not the first time that has been identified, there is a possibility for punitive damages in there. At the end of not being able to adjust that service, there is an opportunity to terminate contract for cause, if things haven't gone the way that they were supposed to be or had been contracted for.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: So termination has taken place in such circumstances?

MR. MITCHELL: Correct. It's very infrequent. Government is not in a position where it likes to terminate contracts for which a) they've put a lot of time in to creating and letting the contract, and b) it oftentimes creates a gap in service, so if you terminate one particular vendor you need to bring on another one, obviously because the service requirement still exists. It's not something that's done lightly and it's not done very often, but I have seen it done, both at the provincial level and at the municipal level as well.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I would like to change to the e-bidding. Has it gone online now? It's Fall 2017, so has it started?

[10:00 a.m.]

MR. MITCHELL: As the deputy pointed out at the start about change management, e-bidding in Nova Scotia is a fairly significant change management issue. A number of years ago, we went away from open tenders. We now only post our tenders on an electronic board, and e-bidding is the sort of the natural next step. Vendors will find their request for proposal of interest, create their submission in the tool, and submit. We will do all the evaluation within the tool.

It has had one delay. We were looking at early Fall. We were hoping to have it launched about the 1st of October. It's likely going to slide towards the end of October or the early part of November, and then we're fully on track. It's just a matter of having to fine tune some of the internal pieces of the tool, but we're on track for a launch the first or second week of November.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I know a lot of people are going paperless, but other than saving paper, what are the advantages to e-bidding?

MR. MITCHELL: There are advantages to the vendor community. In the wintertime, a number of people get stuck driving to Halifax to drop off tenders, get stuck on the bridge, or have a tire blow out. I know it sounds odd, but we have many, many of those where people are late for the two-o'clock tender drop. In this case, they'll put their submission in electronically.

We did eight visits around the province in the last month to explain to the vendor community what's coming. They're very excited for it. It's the same as anything - there's a majority and a minority. The majority of folks are already doing some form of e-bidding with other jurisdictions in the province and so are glad to see us step into the future. There are those who have concerns about it, whether that's a technological concern or whether it's - I don't do a lot of business with government, so can somebody help me?

We're doing our best to make sure we're out and explaining to folks how it's going to work. We have what I call a travelling road show, a vendor interaction capability that we can take to any of the communities and actually explain through how the process is going to work.

Those are the benefits to the vendor community. They get to build inside of a tool and submit electronically. The benefit to the government is that departments will now be able to create much more streamlined documents and evaluate within the tool. For the folks who haven't had the privilege of evaluating large, complex RFPs, they can be very, very time-consuming. The tool allows for that evaluation. The SAP Ariba tool that we have implemented allows for that evaluation. It's a time-saver and provides a consistency of approach from government and an ability to step into the electronic age.

People are now unable to submit responses which are thrown out right at the beginning of the evaluation because they forgot something. This tool won't allow you to submit until you've got all the right paperwork, so it's a benefit to both sides in that case. We don't lose really good bids, and they don't get thrown out of a process for want of just one particular piece of documentation missing.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: You mentioned that you had meetings around the province. Where were those?

MR. MITCHELL: I know Dartmouth and Halifax were two of the eight. I apologize - I don't have the exact locations. I know we were in Lunenburg. I know we were in Truro. We were in several other external places. (Interruption) I'm hearing Sydney. I would have to get you the list of the actual ones.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Will there be more as you go online?

MR. MITCHELL: There are none planned, but what we left the folks we were out there with was that we are happy to bring that exact piece or an updated piece back to the communities and listen to the concerns or questions and walk through how to make it successful as well.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I didn't know that you had one in Lunenburg, so I'm just curious. Did you just go to regular vendors that you would use and let them know you were coming?

MR. MITCHELL: No. I think we went through - the acronym escapes me - economic . . .

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Development?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes. We went to them and said we would like to do one here. We worked through them to get the individual firms or people who would want to come to it. Then we set up timings with them and went out to visit with them.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Some folks just aren't technologically blessed, I guess. Is there a tutorial component to that or a way for people who would like to go online for the convenience but may need a little bit of training, other than these meetings that you have had? Is there a tutorial or anything like that that goes with the program?

MR. MITCHELL: Right now we're building an electronic tutorial which will sit on our website, which is just a walkthrough from start to finish of how to do it. Also, we've set up our own help line. If the difficulty you have is procurement related, you'll call our help line; if it's tool-related, the SAP Ariba. There's a 1-800 help line that will help people actually work their way through the usage of the tool as well.

We've looked at both sides of that - procurement challenges as well as the tool or the IT challenge - and they're both available. As I said, we've now just built an e-training or an e-information tool which hangs in our website, which people can go and take a look at as well.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: Thank you. How much time left, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have four minutes remaining.

MS. LOHNES-CROFT: I think my colleague from Chester-St. Margaret's had a question about the e-bidding as well, so I'll close out.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. MacKay.

MR. HUGH MACKAY: I'll direct the question perhaps to whoever feels best equipped. Going back to the alternate procurement process, I'm curious as to how that leaves a proponent in their ability to negotiate on the contract. Is there some mechanism to make arrangements - once a proponent is selected, is there an ability then just to continue electronically in negotiations or does it automatically go face-to-face or in writing? How might that be handled?

MR. CONRAD: Just to be clear on the question, once a contract is arranged through an alternate procurement - how do we handle the negotiation of that contract?

MR. MACKAY: Correct.

MR. CONRAD: There are a number of ways. Obviously, transfer of documents and exchange of information through electronic means is common, right? So we're all working in the electronic age with email and a number of other tools, but I think the heart of the negotiation process is still an in-person meeting. It depends on the complexity of the contract. So again, if it's a very small - we're going out to buy a good, where we want to buy water glasses, it's extremely clear on what we want - we may be going straight price. So as long as you meet the qualification and it's a straight price bid, there may not be a lot of negotiation.

If you get into a large contract, like a multi-million dollar telephone mobility contract, you could be into months of in-person negotiations on service level agreements and cost recovery and how invoices work; a whole range of other things. So it would be a pretty wide range, in terms of options on how we would do that, depending on the nature of the contract we were out for. Does that answer your question?

MR. MACKAY: That addresses it fully, I think, or at least to my satisfaction. Do you have any comments towards how this amended procurement policy differs from what we have previously done?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Mitchell.

MR. MITCHELL: Basically, the old policy was designed to follow the agreement on internal trade. It was specifically much more what you would expect from a policy document - it was very high language, what does the government want to do and here's some following pieces.

What we learned from working with Paul Emanuelli and what we got feedback from the rest of the procurement folks was, they wanted more how-to. So, what we've done is, we updated and modernized it to be in line with the Canadian Free Trade, as well as creating a manual behind it - which we not surprisingly call The Policy Manual. It is composed of a number of protocols, which actually provide step-by-step, how-to directions for folks to use, so that there's much more clarity on what is required in the procurement process.

MR. MACKAY: Okay, thank you and I apologize if that was repetitive to some of your previous remarks. How are we doing on time, Mr. Chairman?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I do apologize, there's just seconds left. We'll save it for the next round. We'll now move back to the PC caucus for 14 minutes. Mr. Houston.

MR. HOUSTON: In terms of Axios Assyst, I guess now we've circulated two documents. One is the actual tender so I'm looking at Tender 60148190 and that's for a tender awarded to Sierra Systems for $3,840,650.

This other document is a summary of contracts and financials. I guess we got this through FOIPOP. I thought it came through the package, but it was a FOIPOP. You'll notice about maybe halfway down that page, that particular tender is there, and it says that the paid amount - I guess at the time of this - was $7,310,000. I'm just trying to get my head around a $3.8 million tender with a paid amount of $7.3 million. Maybe you can shed some light on it - am I reading that correctly? Have we paid much more than the tender was awarded for?

MS. CASCADDEN: What we did was, back in 2015, we awarded the tender to the $3.8 million as per indicated and we ran that contract up until August 2016. At that point, what we did is we then extended the contract to March 2018. In the original tender, we indicated that we had the opportunity to do that if we required additional time and additional effort as we determined we wanted to roll out more modules. We're rolling out more modules of the application, so we're doing the software and asset management module, and that's why we're requesting more services from Sierra.

MR. HOUSTON: So does that mean that the scope of the tender changed - you added more modules?

MS. CASCADDEN: We opted to roll out additional modules, all within the products that we own.

MR. HOUSTON: So the initial tender wasn't the full scope, because in time you changed the scope.

MS. CASCADDEN: The initial tender was for certain modules in the application, and we opted to just tender at the time as much as we wanted to procure at the time. Now that we are moving through the application and wishing to extend the modules that we own, we added to this.

When this went out - remember that Sierra is a sole source, they're the only ones who can do this work, so we had to extend the dollar value associated with the Sierra work to get the other modules and the other functionality in.

MR. HOUSTON: How many more times will it be extended in your estimation?

MS. CASCADDEN: Again, if Sierra is the only company who can do this work with us, and another department comes to us and says, we would like to use this ticketing tool - this service desk tool - to do something in our department, we would then engage Sierra, which would increase the contract in order to put that new functionality in because

they're the only ones whom we can work with to do that. So, you could see this increasing as we get new projects and new requests from other departments.

MR. HOUSTON: If I think of a big project like SAP - there are thousands of SAP consultants. It provides some pricing flexibility if you get a competitive process. There are a number of ticketing systems, yet we find ourselves with one specific ticketing system that has one consultant who has been paid $7.3 million on an initial $3.8 million tender. I look down the page, another $1.1 million. I look down a little further, another $645,000. Pretty big numbers. How high could this go?

MS. CASCADDEN: Again, a couple of points. One is, the vendors themselves - Axios Systems - make the determination of who they authorize to implement their software, and so if they authorize only one company, you go with that one company. Some vendors have options and they authorize multiple companies.

MR. HOUSTON: Would you say that's a risk in picking that product?

MS. CASCADDEN: It was a risk. It was identified as a risk. We assessed the risk and we assessed that it was an acceptable risk to us at that time.

[10:15 p.m.]

MR. HOUSTON: But was it an acceptable risk in the context of, we're putting a $3.8 million tender out and now it's just like - it can keep going on and on and the risk increases now every time. I guess, in for a penny, in for a pound at this stage - is that kind of where we find ourselves? The Health Authority was through an implementation and the government came along and said, okay, well, they've already put some money into this, let's carry on. What's the lifespan of this product?

MS. CASCADDEN: With any products of this magnitude, the lifespan is fairly significant. It could be 15 to 20 years, once you've implemented a product like this, because you're not pulling it out. There are a lot of business process redesigns that happen as you go into this product. It doesn't mean that we couldn't. In this particular area, we do our research. We go to Gartner, who is a research company, and we see who the top companies are who play in this quadrant. There are really only two companies who play in this quadrant, to the level of the service and the functionality that we have assessed that we require.

MR. HOUSTON: Let me finish off on the lifespan. Axios Assyst is built on Adobe Flash, and Adobe just announced they're going to stop improving or distributing Flash in 2020. Does it matter?

MS. CASCADDEN: The company has to work within to evolve their product, and we rely on the companies - because companies build their products on various versions of

whatever common pieces of software are out there. It could be anything from a database version in Oracle. So, it's not uncommon for companies to build on whatever the current products are, and when those products from those companies change, those other vendors have to change their product line, so they would have a product path that they would have to . . .

MR. HOUSTON: So it doesn't matter to you. It matters to Axios but not to the province.

MS. CASCADDEN: Absolutely. Right.

MR. HOUSTON: I'm still to receive the information on how much we've spent on that product to date? Perhaps you have it already. Do you have that information available, on the total cost that's been spent on Axios to date?

MS. CASCADDEN: So, what I have, from our project manager is, the original budget was around $11 million - between $11 and $13 million, from our project manager. She's saying that we are on budget. What we have done is that we've allocated the budget to stay on budget.

MR. HOUSTON: Allocated the budget to stay on budget, what does that mean?

MS. CASCADDEN: That means when we initially did the original budget, we may have thought we were going to put more money in one area, and we decided, no, we want to move the money to some other area in order to make sure that we do stay on budget, to deliver the products and services, that we basically said that we would.

MR. HOUSTON: Would it have been reasonable to tender - if you have an $11 million project, with a sole source, would it have been reasonable just to tender the $11 million? So people could see what we're dealing with here? Why would we tender $3.8 million and then extend it up to $7.3 million, and then probably extend it to $9 million? Wouldn't it have been fair, if there was a project plan that says this is an $11 million project, and this is for licence and this is for consulting, that we tender that consulting piece?

MS. CASCADDEN: At the very beginning, when we're bringing the Health Authority on board, and they had already, kind of, gone in this direction, and they were actually part-way through their implementation, we did an assessment on whether, if we tendered, would we get very many companies responding back to this? As I have mentioned, there really aren't a lot of companies that play at this level. So you have to consider, what's the cost of tendering? What's the possible outcome? You do assess the company, how they perform, how they deliver their services, you assess the functionality - all of those things.

Through that detailed assessment, we determined that the Health Authority did their due diligence; the functionality that we were looking for was appropriate. The cost that we had assessed that this project would cost us, and what Axios Systems said it would cost us, were all within acceptable ranges, and so we opted not to go out to a full tender on this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Conrad has a comment, Mr. Houston.

MR. CONRAD: I realize Mr. Houston, you're focused on Axios so I don't want to interrupt the flow. I guess I did just want to say that, often in our tendering processes, it's not unusual for us to build in the opportunity to add in other components. So not just in the IT world, but we're looking for consistency of service and approach across government. We often do tenders up one number, but make clear in the tender process that we may add in municipalities or universities or crowns or something else down the road that changes the size of the overall tender.

MR. HOUSTON: Thank you for that, but it even magnifies my concern that you had an $11 million project and you tendered $3.8 million, knowing it was going to be $11 million; in fact, the ministerial approval was for $13 million. That's a big, big gap from $3.8 million to $11 million to say we can maybe add a few things in.

I don't really understand why only $3.8 million was tendered. It doesn't really seem that that was the reality of what was being asked of the service provider. The reality seems like it was an $11 million project. Why did we accept a tender for $3.8 million? That's the part that I don't understand. If there's not an answer today, I'll accept that there's not an answer but, if there's an answer I'd love to hear the explanation.

MR. CONRAD: Again, I think we go to market for the pieces that we know of at the time we go for market and allow for opportunity to bring other things in as things change, as we grow, as we do other things. So, you know, again, we can get more information for you as we committed we would but I don't know at the time we went to market that we were fully approved for a project of this size. We were going to market for a piece we knew for sure we were doing and I suspect - I don't have the details in front of me - but I suspect said to the market when we went there's opportunity that other things may be brought in. So, we can find that detail for you, sir.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. Fair enough.

In my last couple of minutes, I want to talk quickly about Flextrack, Flextack?

MR. CONRAD: Flextrack.

MR. HOUSTON: Flextrack is a matching service I guess. Government wants a product and consultants are on there and there kind of is a marketplace that matches them

up. So the province pays Flextrack a fee of 2.1 per cent for contracts that are satisfied through this marketplace, correct?

MR. MITCHELL: I'd have to verify. I thought it was 1.5 but we can validate the percentage on what it is and it's essentially the overhead for Flextrack on the government's behalf to manage what has been historically run as a standing-offer process and this allows, as you've mentioned, sort of a matching of government requirement, quick turnaround, good control over, and then, what we're able to do is, in a number of different areas . . .

MR. HOUSTON: Okay. So the contractor on the other side, do they also pay a fee to Flextrack do you know?

MR. MITCHELL: The actual payment for Flextrack doesn't come from government. The percentage that we're going to confirm is actually off of the payment. So, if government had a $10,000 bill from a vendor, the vendor is paid $10,000 less that fee. The government doesn't pay an additional fee on there.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay and you don't know - the vendor may pay something on top of that or they may not.

MR. MITCHELL: No, they don't. The vendor logs in with Flextrack to be one of the vendors who can be identified.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, that's fine. The 2017 Public Accounts for Internal Services showed $4.8 million going to Flextrack. That's the full value of the contract. Some of that would be fees and some of that would be the full value. What would that $4.8 million be? That wouldn't be just fees, would it?

MR. MITCHELL: No, what happens is - we kind of touched on it earlier about what's local and what's not. So, all of those things which we actually pay for or government engages vendors for, there's a cheque cut to Flextrack, Flextrack cuts that percentage out, and, then, that's a flow-through out to the vendors for the services which we would have otherwise paid for from a government perspective.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, the $4.8 million is for services.

MR. MITCHELL: Yes, sir.

MR. HOUSTON: Okay, so, in terms of the presentation of that in the financial statements, when I see a line item of $4.8 million to Flextrack, it actually could be 100 people that money's going to. Right?

MR. MITCHELL: That's correct. So, they'll take their percentage off that and then that's transitioned through them to the payment to the vendor who's actually providing that service.

MR. HOUSTON: Right, so I . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order. Time has expired.

We will move to the New Democratic Party caucus and Mr. David Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for being here today. I want to turn to the one person/one record project and I know just about a year ago, I think it was in December, early December 2016, the government announced that they'll be moving to the next phase of the one person/one record project. I believe it's a partnership with Department of Internal Services, NSHA, and - would it be Department of Health and Wellness, I guess? I'm just wondering, are you the lead on that project moving forward, or is it one of the other two partners that are in that project?

MR. CONRAD: No, I wouldn't say we're the lead on that project. We obviously have an important role both through from an IT perspective and from a procurement perspective as a partner on that but the Department of Health and Wellness would be the primary lead.

I guess it depends on what you define as lead but they would have the lead in terms the service they're looking for, what's the acceptable solution in terms of patient care. We would be a co-lead, particularly on the IT side, because we split this responsibility for clinical and non-clinical.

On the IT side, we would co-lead with Health and Wellness and then from the procurement side we would be providing advice and guidance on process.

MR. DAVID WILSON: In the announcement in December the government indicated there was going to be a request for supplier qualification, or an RFSQ in early 2017. Are you aware of that? Did that happen in early 2017?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes indeed, the RFSQ did go out. There were a number of submissions as a result of that and there was a selection or a down-select from the submissions to the vendors who have been identified as going forward.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Then also, in that same announcement, it indicated that once that happens, the government will review the results and then make a decision on the next step. Have they made any decision? I'm trying to recall, trying to keep up to date on the announcements, especially around this topic. Has government made a decision on the next step, after that RFSQ was issued?

MR. MITCHELL: It would probably be best from a Department of Health and Wellness perspective but the answer is we are still in the process of determining from the RFSQ the next steps and the chronology of what those will be but they would certainly be in a better place to say how they're going to proceed with that.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Here we are in mid-October and I think initially when it was announced, and I'm trying to find where I saw that, they indicated it could be roughly a two-year project to get this up and running. Would you say that government is on track with that? I know there was a general election between that announcement and now but I would assume that the work continued on within the departments. Will government achieve that timeline of about two years, to have implementation of the one person/one record?

MR. CONRAD: You are right, Mr. Wilson, certainly during the general election there was work that continued on through staff and activity continued on in the background. The procurement process at its heart attempts to be apolitical in terms of the way we run the process. The requirement to have a minister making decisions on a daily basis on a decision like that is not necessary.

We are, at this point, on track in terms of the processes that we've jointly agreed to, obviously at a large, complex issue and ongoing complexity in terms of the providers in the field, the mergers and acquisitions and a number of other things that are underway there. We remain committed to the timelines and remain committed to the process but it is a complex project with multiple partners that is going to have to go forward.

MR. DAVID WILSON: So are you able to - and then maybe a little bit more on that - give us an idea of the costs so far? Where does the budget lie? Is it divided up among the three organizations? That's part of the frustrating part, trying to get some of the total amounts of what a project like this will cost, where it does have implications in a number of departments - especially the IWK, the NSHA, Health and Wellness, and Internal Services.

Are you able to give us any kind of ballpark? If you don't have it with you right now, I'll be more than willing to take the information later on what the costs are so far and do you feel you are on track where you maybe anticipate where the budget will end, once implementation happens?

MR. CONRAD: No I'm afraid I wouldn't have that information with us. It will be, as you rightly have anticipated, kind of a diversified budget. Again, I'm a bit bureaucratic, I know, but I'm always hesitant to answer the question because part of it is what the project budget is to get us up and running and the cost of sort of getting to solution, versus the cost of full implementation and then having all the practitioners involved - where the cost of that is, and sort of that total cost of change to the entire system.

Again, I believe we're on track and on budget as far as to this step but when you're in the early stages of a big, complex piece like this and you're doing something like a request for supplier qualification and early stages of RFP development and those other things, until we have a provider and know the solution - I'm sure it feels evasive from your side but it's very difficult to nail down final costs when you're still in the market trying to resolve. We can certainly work with our colleagues at the Health Authority to try to get some further joined-up information back to the table.

[10:30 a.m.]

MR. DAVID WILSON: Thank you for that, I appreciate it. I have maybe just a quick comment on that just to, hopefully, make you understand how important I think the work you're doing here is on another area of concern of many Nova Scotians, and that is access to physicians. Recruitment and retention of physicians is an issue that should be a priority for government. Having the opportunity to sell a project like one person/one record to attract physicians is extremely important. If there is any delay, then I think that impedes the province's ability to get physicians here.

Another quick question, and then I'll hand it off to my colleague. I know there was mention of internal trade and Canadian free trade. What implications of the negotiations of NAFTA are on your desk right now? I'm trying to pay attention to it. I don't know where we're going to land on this with the indication of President Trump (Interruption) I think that adds to my confusion.

Anyway, do you have a quick comment? There are implications for the Province of Nova Scotia if that deal is not renegotiated or there are significant changes to it. Any comment on that? Are you playing a role in advising our federal government on making sure that the best interests of Nova Scotians are at the table also?

MR. CONRAD: That's obviously a question best answered by our colleagues at Intergovernmental Affairs, who have a team on this. I can tell you that I know for sure that they are participating in conversations with the federal government. The federal government is the lead. We have a team at Intergovernmental Affairs who is travelling to the various negotiation sessions. They have been in Washington, Ottawa, and Mexico City at the various sessions. They provide advice and guidance on the Nova Scotia impacts to the federal negotiators who are in the room. I know from that perspective that they're very close.

For us, the piece that we're most directly involved in is, a question in NAFTA around data sovereignty. Is there a need to have data housed in Canada versus it being housed in other jurisdictions with free travel of data across borders? It's very unclear at this point, I believe, where that's going to end up. That's probably the area that our department is most closely monitoring and paying attention to.

MR. DAVID WILSON: I think I have brought up the Patriot Act before in other discussions, but maybe we'll leave that for another topic day.

I'll pass my time off to my colleague.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ms. Roberts.

MS. ROBERTS: I did want to go back to the conversation we were having before I ran out of time, related to P3s. Can you clarify, does the department have a method for comparing the long-term value of investing in publicly-owned infrastructure versus paying public money for assets that are held by private companies?

MR. CONRAD: Back to the conversation we just started, that wouldn't be a role for our department. That would be an analytical role that would be undertaken by - it obviously varies a little bit in the system, but generally it's Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal who takes the lead on those large public infrastructure projects, in collaboration with partners like Health and Wellness if it's a hospital or Education and Early Childhood Development if it's a school. They are doing analytical work on the value, the structures, and the process - that broad set of implications.

I do know, for example, that on the hospital side they have been in the market recently and hired a consulting company to help Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal and the Health Authority work through what all those factors are, how they should be considered, and what the pros and cons are. I'm not completely in that loop on all of the factors that they're considering, but we would be involved and engaged in conversations.

Then once they have made the decision, we would get more involved in terms of whether they're going for publicly-owned infrastructure and what that set of proposals would look like and how you would go to market for that, versus would you go to market for P3. Obviously P3 is a generic term, so you can go to market under a P3 model for various pieces of the infrastructure - the design piece, the design build piece, the design build operate piece. So even within P3, there is a fairly complex kind of evaluation of which pieces you are going to get done.

That really wouldn't be in our department where we would have those evaluations and checklists on what makes sense for government and what doesn't. It probably is most appropriately addressed to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

MS. ROBERTS: In my last few minutes I'm just going to switch gears entirely to Freedom of Information, which is under your department as well. Over the last year there have been some significant changes in the process for Freedom of Information requests from a client perspective. I'm wondering if you could speak to any changes to the request fulfillment process, and specifically, is the department able to access and provide information transmitted by BlackBerry pins?

MR. CONRAD: We have had a number of changes, as you note. We believe it has been a very positive piece. We've done two primary sets of changes. One is we've amalgamated the Freedom of Information staff from across government offices into a single unit, which has really increased our capacity and our ability to manage and have professional services.

We've also recently implemented a case management client tracking system that has a public component available. We're the first jurisdiction in Canada that you can do end-to-end online Freedom of Information requests and responses electronically inside of government. Those two things have really significantly advanced us in terms of our ability to process and manage the requests.

Inside of government, government records are defined as what is available for access, so we don't have a specific process on texts or pins or those kinds of messages. It is a process that says it is a requirement that people, who are making government decisions and doing government business, create records which are accessible for Freedom of Information requests. It's more in the area of doing work to ensure that people know that when they're making decisions, they need to create records that then become available, rather than having a specific policy related to texts, for example.

MS. ROBERTS: What measures is the department using in order to make sure that FOIPOP requests can fully access the way that decisions are made? How do you make sure that you can access those records?

MR. CHAIRMAN: In ten seconds, please.

MR. CONRAD: A lot of training is being done right now across government - senior officials, Cabinet members, deputies - to ensure that people know their obligation to provide those records.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you for the quick answer. We'll move now to the Liberal caucus and Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: Thank you folks for your time this morning. A few quick questions. Am I correct in understanding that Flextrack is kind of the new standing offer process or are they different?

MR. MITCHELL: It is a replacement for a number of standing offers, which are in place. It is not a replacement for all of them. The government does multiple standing offers for other services, but it has replaced a couple of them. Professional services was one. We've recently added temporary services, now managed through Flextrack, and executive search is as well.

MR. JESSOME: How often are standing offer lists refreshed? How often do you actively look for - or do you actively look for new vendors if standing offer lists are existing?

MR. MITCHELL: The answer to the first part of your question is, standing offers generally go to market, we select and open up for vendors to join them and then we lock them for a period of time - one year, two years, three years.

One of the benefits to the Flextrack solution in the four areas that it - a vendor can join or choose to come out of that program at any time along that period of time. So the contract with Flextrack is a three-year. We've also extended for the two extension years and this year we'll go back out to market for a Flextrack-like solution. There are competitors to that program, but they'll certainly one of the ones who will bid.

Standing offers go for a fixed period of time. Vendors have to be on it from the beginning of the standing offer and remain on it for the period of the entirety of it. Flextrack provided quite a considerably larger amount of flexibility for folks to get on and get off all the way through that three-year process.

MR. JESSOME: Okay, understood. Is there a benchmark or a standard that you folks at procurement would try to adhere to with regard to, I guess, completing an RFP process? Or is it kind of fluid, depending on what the task at hand is?

MR. MITCHELL: Maybe just to clarify it, do you mean is there a standard sort of amount of time it would take us from the start to the end? It varies dramatically. If we've gone for a request like a tender which is just a low price, and we'll select all the way through the complexity to the example earlier. An OPOR-level of complexity has a first step which would be an RFSQ, or supplier qualification, through an RFP stage, through an evaluation and then through a negotiation stage.

It can be lengthy and it depends very much on the complexity of the product or the service that you're looking to purchase.

MR. JESSOME: Okay, thank you. My last question, there were awards referenced in the deputy's opening comments. I'm just wondering, it's not a hockey game you guys are playing, so what are they and what's going on?

MR. CONRAD: Maybe Mr. Mitchell and I can share this one. We didn't win the Conn Smythe or anything like that. We've been very privileged. We have, as I said earlier, we have wonderful staff in this organization who work very hard, are very professional about what they do and I get the great honour on occasion of getting to stand up and take credit for all their hard work. It's one of the privileges of my job.

We were blessed last year. The Institute of Public Administrators of Canada runs a national award in combination with IBM on innovation in government. Last year we won the gold medal for Canada for the Trunked Mobile Radio System which is the radio system that supports all of the government services, as well as fire departments and ambulances and ground search and rescues and others. It's the most integrated radio system in North America and we won the gold medal award last year for that.

This year we were blessed to win the bronze level award from IPAC and Deloitte for the Shared Services Initiative of the Government of Nova Scotia, which has realized now in excess of $50 million in savings over the three years, plus the other benefits which are really significant, in terms of what we've won. Just yesterday, actually, we discovered that one of our Information Access and Privacy staff has been shortlisted for the IPAC/Deloitte Public Sector Leadership Award nationally, for the work that we've done on freedom of information processes and development.

Chris's procurement team has won an international procurement award four years in a row, I believe, awarded out of the U.S. We're the only provincial government in the country to win that award and we've won it four years in a row. On Sandra's side, I believe there's at least two or three coming. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the technology ones, Sandra.

MS. CASCADDEN: Certainly. We have also won an award for the work that we've done around the freedom of information and the technology systems that we put in place around that.

MR. JESSOME: I'll pass it over to my colleague from Clare-Digby.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you. First, I actually want to thank my colleague to my right here for making this session interesting and in adding some questions for me, believe it or not. He doesn't get that very often, I'm sure.

I want to delve into something we haven't touched on. I was a manager with the provincial government for some time and dealt with procurement on the managerial level. Getting tenders out and across government - I'm sure it's a challenge. I know that a lot of departments probably go to you for that information.

In a few different areas in that, quickly, how do you interact with other departments to ensure that they are following proper protocol and implementing proper procedures in all of these various worlds that we have here for alternative and direct procurement process?

[10:45 a.m.]

MR. CONRAD: There'd be a kind of wide range of processes. Fundamentally, you know that the policy documents that we've released are a key part of how departments know the work that is required to be done. Some of the material that's released in terms of the training programs for individual staff that go with that whether that's a recent round of training on our technology solution we've implemented, which was called SAP Ariba, and day-to-day supports from Chris's team - so people out there doing the work calling in to Chris's team to get technical advice and guidance. Then at my level, conversations as a member of a steering committee or with my deputy colleagues around kind of the bigger, broader projects that we'd like to implement.

I don't know, Chris, if you want to talk at any level about the work your team does, which is tremendous in this area.

MR. MITCHELL: I think maybe just as a short addendum to that, we work exclusively with the departments who bring their requirement for the procurement to us, so they have abilities below certain thresholds - the Health Authority included. Above those thresholds, they input their requirement through our SAP Ariba tool, and then we work with them to determine exactly what it is that they're looking for. We work with them to ensure that they understand the steps that they need to go through, the requirements for ministerial approvals for funding, etc.

There is a lot of work that goes in the front - captured under what we call a procurement plan - to ensure that they understand what it is. More critically, to ensure that as the client department, they understand their role in the going forward. That's from creating technical specifications to evaluating bid proposals that are received, etc. It's very much a combined effort between the department who's looking to buy something, and the ISD procurement services looking to support that.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you. In the world of exemptions for alternate procurement practices, those are reviewed on a fairly regular basis. So I've just a direct question first on that and then a follow up on it. How often are they reviewed and how are they reviewed for all the exemptions that you have?

MR. MITCHELL: You caught me flatfooted about how often they are. The interesting thing about exemptions is they're for things that you just wouldn't necessarily tender for. For example, you pay the power company, you're going to pay Nova Scotia Power Inc, so there's an exemption. You're not expected to go to market for that, right? You have a magazine or a paper dropped off at the front. You're not expected to go to market for who you're going to buy the newspaper from.

So the exemptions very much ebb and flow. They'll stay in place provided that the service that you're looking to have exempted from a procurement continues to make sense,

I guess, is the reality of it. If there was a second power company and there was no longer a monopoly, then the exemption for Nova Scotia Power Inc. would no longer exist and we would go to somewhere where we tender for that.

MR. WILSON: Very good point. I'm glad you brought up Nova Scotia Power Inc. and the opportunity to close off monopolies. As these exemptions change - they do change I would assume. The list of exemptions that would be there - it's your responsibility to roll those out to all of government?

MR. MITCHELL: From a policy perspective, yes. We would make known what those exemptions are.

MR. WILSON: Okay, thank you. I believe I only have approximately four minutes, three minutes. Where's the other finger? Okay.

Just quickly, on Axios Assyst. I heard a lot of good questions and a lot of good answers. Just a few things that I did want to follow up. You said that there was a fair amount of risk assessment that was done - actually, you said there was a tremendous amount of risk assessment that was done on that system. I know that it's complicated. The crystal balls are not out there in that world at all and I must say that with the evolving world of technology, how you make these decisions, I'm sure, doesn't come lightly. How many people would have been involved in that risk assessment - any idea roughly? This would be for Ms. Cascadden.

MS. CASCADDEN: I know we had multiple teams involved, certainly representing the Health Authority as well as the government. We would have had representation from anyone who was using any existing system to ensure that the functionality of any of those existing systems would have been built into this one.

I can't tell you exactly the number of teams, but as part of the package that I'll put together, it will include the risk assessment, and people who were engaged in that. That was back about three or four years ago. We have to dig for that information but we will provide that information.

MR. GORDON WILSON: I would assume your department would have taken the lead on that, and then it would have been subcommittees underneath of that?

MS. CASCADDEN: That's correct. Coming together as part of Shared Services, we are the lead for providing client services all across government and the health sector, and part of providing those client services - that's your service desk, your desktop support, your device support - this is the major tool that that group needed. Because we provided those services, we needed the tool to enable us to provide the services, so we absolutely were the lead.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Exactly. And it's been two years, I believe? I didn't quite catch the date since the implementation?

MS. CASCADDEN: We would say that it's between one and a half and two years, that we have implemented what we would consider the core functionality of the application, and now we're extending it into the other areas which are part of this service delivery model.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Okay, and quickly also, just a couple of seconds - part of the initial work that made you go in that direction, you had mentioned how the Health Authority had already been going down that road. Do you know how much money they would have invested in that, at that point in time?

MS. CASCADDEN: I don't, off the top of my head, but I can certainly add that information to what we're asking for as well, that I'll provide you.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Feedback from staff to date - is there any ongoing with the effectiveness of it, or within your own department?

MS. CASCADDEN: So certainly, I would believe there's probably some mixed feedback. For those people who are at the service desk, the front line taking the calls, there are huge advantages to anyone who was on the health service desk because they had to work within two systems, within two screens, transferring information from one to another. They now can take the call and process the call - one system, one screen.

The infrastructure folks are struggling a little bit with this, because they were so used to working in their own ticketing tool. The problem with that is, they were doing all of their work and the information wasn't getting back to the client, that their problem was solved, so there was a break in our process. Our infrastructure people absolutely loved their own tools, but that isolated them from everyone else, and that's not the end to end services that we wanted to provide.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Order, the time has expired. I even let the answer go over the limit a little bit there in my generosity towards Mr. Wilson.

So, with that, we will now allow Mr. Conrad to provide some closing comments.

MR. CONRAD: In response to the question about where we did the procurement sessions. Our staff forwarded this - I believe we said we were in Lunenburg, and in fact, we were in Bridgewater, so just to correct the record. We were in Halifax, Dartmouth, Sydney, Truro, Pictou, Bridgewater, Yarmouth and Kentville so far. Those are the sites we've been in.

Thank you all very much for the questions and the dialogue this morning. We really appreciate the chance to be here. As I said a number of times, we have tremendous staff in our department. It's incredibly fulfilling for all of us as senior leaders to be working with this group of really committed people who work so hard on behalf of Nova Scotians. It's a great privilege for us to come in here and talk about the great work that they do, so thank you very much for the time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Thank you to all of you for answering our questions.

Our next meeting is on November 1st. It is an in camera meeting and it is with the Auditor General to discuss the November 1, 2017 Report of the Auditor General. It's also Take Your Child to Work Day so if anybody wishes to do that, we do need to get agreement from the committee, given that the meeting is in camera, that any of those children who come to work with you - or with anybody here, a staff member - understands that the meeting is in camera.

I do need to get the approval of the committee. So the question put to the committee is, are you okay with children attending that meeting should any member of the committee or a member of staff like to bring their child to work that day?

Would all those in favour please signify by saying Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

It is agreed.

Is there any other further business to come before the committee? Hearing none, this meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:54 a.m.]