

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Shared Computer Services Evaluation
Committee of the Whole—2018-2019 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Finance—February 8, 2021

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. We will now move to Information Systems Shared Services beginning on page 147 with information on page 149. Questions? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. The first line item here, government chief information officer, the revised estimates for 2020-2021 showed \$2.8 million, and then otherwise, it's usually around \$385. Can someone explain to me what happened in that, the current year, to make that such a large expense? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. There was an additional \$2.412 million approved to help accommodate the costs associated with safe reopening of the Northwest Territories schools as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response. This would have included, for example, computer devices and electronic devices, Internet connectivity devices, turbo sticks, to students who may not have had access to those resources otherwise. That is the reason for this particularly high item in 2021. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Is it just an accounting thing that it shows up in Finance rather than ECE? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. This was a joint item, so there are also items that, when you have an opportunity to look at ECE tomorrow I believe, you will see there are going to be items reflected there, as well, for the safe reopening of schools. It was the tech component, the technology component that fell within the chief information officer's area, so as I say, again, a joint item between the two departments, this portion, the technology portion, being with us. Other elements fell within ECE. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Thanks for the information. One of the things that was promised when ISSS was formed a few years ago, and it resulted in 70 people being moved around within GNWT to move to Finance, was that there was going to be a critical mass of people and that it was going to make responses on designing computer-based systems and databases a lot quicker and better and so on. Has there actually ever been an evaluation carried out of that function, and if so, can the Minister share it with us? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't know that we have actually completed that at this point, but I did anticipate that there may be some technical questions. Perhaps, as I say, again, while I don't think that's been completed to date, I would like to suggest turning it over to the chief information officer, just to speak a bit to what work has been done so far in that consolidation and what improvements may have already been realized. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Wind.

MR. WIND: Thank you, Madam Chair. What we have done is developed a performance management framework or at least a preliminary performance management framework, the measures of which are reflective in the performance measures that will be published in the department's business plan going forward. The outline of those are available within this document. The challenge in looking back retroactively and evaluating past performance prior to the establishment of the ISSS was that measures and performance management metrics did not exist in departments beforehand, so it's difficult to have a comparison to.

One of the primary objectives of establishing the ISSS was to start to consolidate and kind of simplify the technology environment and reduce investment over time. That is something we are moving towards with, for example, the eServices program and developing a common application architecture to support these services across all of the GNWT. It's also going to be what allows us to move forward with the open government initiatives related to open data and things like that. Prior to establishing the ISSS, those functions would have been done in a more disjointed fashion across all the different departments. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Wind. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks for that information. I am kind of surprised that we did not actually have a program evaluation framework or some kind of evaluation framework prepared in anticipation of this change. Can I get a commitment out of the Minister that she is going to share what she can at this point with what these performance measures are that have been identified and a timeline to actually get this evaluation done? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, we can certainly get the information that has been completed to date on this. Lucky Department of Finance, we are up first to go through a government renewal process this spring, so it may well be that more comes out of that process. Of course, we will be continuing to bring all committee members, all members of the committee, up to speed as that process unfolds. Yes, in the meantime, we will get together what we can that has been put together. Just to make a comment, I agree with the Member's point some time ago that we need to improve the culture evaluation within the GNWT, so I do certainly share that perspective. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Yes, thanks, Madam Chair. I wish the Minister was here two or three years ago, when this was being talked about because I raised that at that point and was kind of fluffed off and nothing was done. I shouldn't say nothing was done. It just seems like we have not made the progress that I think we should have. I just have one more question on this, which is: I presume that responsiveness to departmental needs is going to be one of the performance indicators; can someone confirm that and how it's going to generally be measured in some way? Because part of the rationale for doing this was that departments were going to get quicker and better results in designing their web-based applications and databases and all this kind of stuff, and if we are not measuring that and we do not have some way of tracking that, I don't know what we are doing. Can I get some sense of how that responsiveness to departments is being tracked and identified over time? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I will turn over in just a moment to Mr. Wind, but just by way of some example, when COVID-19 took hold last spring, when all of the government was being asked as much as possible to work from home for the safety and protection of all residents, we did roll out the Teams meeting software. There was, in fact, tracking underway about how quickly it rolled out and tracking about help inquiries that came in and tracking as to the effectiveness and use of the software and its functionality. I have seen firsthand the ability to do that, that cross-government work, in a quick fashion and in a hurried fashion in response to the pandemic. I know the question is more general than that, but certainly that was, I would suggest, a success that was seen and is providing a whole other level way of doing business, which speaks to some of the other questions being raised about where we are going to find some efficiencies. However, to the more generality of the question, if I could ask Mr. Wind to comment, please?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Mr. Wind.

MR. WIND: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are two measures that have been identified in the performance management framework, I think, that relate to the Member's comments. The first is around the effective implementation of approved IMT capital and O and M projects, and the measures are the number of approved projects completed on time and the number of completed projects delivered on budget. We will also be introducing outcome measures for projects, as well, so that we will be able to assess whether or not projects deliver the intended outcomes, that they are not just delivered on time. Also related to that, we will be undertaking an annual client satisfaction survey with our peers in the departments to assess client satisfaction with the ISSS, as well. Those are the two that I think most closely relate to the Member's comments. Thank you, Madam Chair.