



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister  
and deputy First Minister

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Racial Equality Strategy: OFMDFM

18 March 2015

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

### Racial Equality Strategy: OFMDFM

18 March 2015

#### **Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Alex Attwood  
Ms Megan Fearon  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Mr Alex Maskey  
Mr David McIlveen  
Mr Jimmy Spratt

#### **Witnesses:**

Ms Linsey Farrell	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Ken Fraser	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dr Denis McMahon	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I welcome the officials from the Department who are joining us today: Mr Ken Fraser, head of the racial equality unit; Dr Denis McMahon, director of the equality, good relations and economic policy directorate; and Ms Linsey Farrell, from the united community secretariat. Thank you for coming along; we look forward to hearing from you on the initial findings on the racial equality strategy consultation. I invite you to make some brief opening remarks, after which members will ask some questions.

**Dr Denis McMahon (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** I will keep my remarks brief because I know that you will want to get into questions. I will begin by giving you a sense of some of the messages that have been coming through; you may have heard some of these already.

It is worth saying that the consultation on the racial equality strategy took place in the summer and autumn of last year, starting on 19 June and finishing on 10 October. The consultation document — it was a consultation document and not a strategy; it is important to distinguish between those two terms — 'A Sense of Belonging: Delivering Social Change through a Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014-2024' was developed in conjunction with the racial equality panel, which is made up of minority ethnic representatives and representatives of the wider community. There were six public events, in Belfast, Dungannon, Newry, Craigavon, Derry/Londonderry and Ballymena. The locations were selected in light of the size of the black and minority ethnic (BME) population according to the 2011 census. We wanted to tailor it to make sure that we got as many responses as possible. There was an online survey, and presentations were made on request to academic institutions, local groups and trade unions.

The consultation document contained 10 chapters, each with specific questions, built around six aims: the elimination of racial inequality, combating racism and hate crime, equality of service provision, participation, social cohesion, and capacity building. A lot of issues came out of that, but some of the most popular issues or, rather, those that were most often raised, were around legislative reform, the desire to have a baseline assessment, an action plan, a need for clear links with Together: Building a United Community and Delivering Social Change, and adequate, ring-fenced funding for the strategy. That affected the responses and, in summary, as you would expect, people were looking for more concrete actions and commitments around specific targets.

The idea was to analyse those responses, and we have broken them down into a number of responses. The issues that were most common were legislative reform, a baseline assessment, wanting the strategy to be accompanied by an action plan, clear links and ring-fenced funding. The issue that most frequently arose was the need for legislative reform, with 51% of representatives coming forward to ask us to agree a reform of the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and make it a priority. None of the respondents disagreed with that.

The respondents who agreed with legislative reform also agreed with the Equality Commission's proposals on reform. I will not list those now; you may be familiar with them, and we can take you through them, but they are about strengthening the legislative basis. There were no additional suggestions for legislative reform. However, 37%, or 36 respondents, explicitly called for a baseline assessment and 24%, or 24 respondents, said that the assessment should consist of using existing research, while 17% said that new research was required. Thirty six respondents, or 37%, wanted adequate ring-fenced funding, while 34%, or 33 respondents, said that there needed to be clear links between the racial equality strategy and T:BUC and Delivering Social Change. Thirty two per cent of respondents thought that the strategy needed to be accompanied by a cross-departmental action plan.

Those are the major themes that emerged, but there are others. One of the things that came through in particular was the need for a refugee integration strategy and for Roma and Traveller strategies. We had quite a significant response around those issues; we received template responses in large numbers.

You will have had some briefing already around some of the issues that people wanted to raise. We welcome this as an opportunity to make sure that the strategy, as it is developed, builds in those views and reflects them and results in as strong a document as possible to be able to deliver for a very vulnerable and potentially disadvantaged group.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK. Thanks for your opening comments. I am encouraged, to a certain extent, that you seem to have identified some of the plethora of issues that have been raised in relation to the consultation document. I want to ask you first about the timelines. The Committee received a briefing in March 2014 that the consultation would be published in April 2014, but it was published in June 2014, and the consultation on the document closed in October 2014. We are now at March 2015. What is the explanation for the delay, and when can we expect publication of the racial equality strategy?

**Dr McMahon:** There are a number of factors around getting to this point. Obviously, it took a lot longer than we would have collectively wanted, but there were key decisions to be taken at each point, and it took some time to get to where we are. Moving forward, we want to see the strategy being developed over the summer months, taking views into account. We are currently arranging meetings with stakeholders to make sure that we are getting those views on board, particularly those of the Common Platform and —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I am sorry, Denis. Did I hear you say that you were looking to develop the strategy over the coming months or the summer months?

**Dr McMahon:** Over the summer months.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Of this year?

**Dr McMahon:** Yes.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK. Do you think it is that far away?

**Dr McMahon:** Well, it depends on a couple of factors. There is a view that we should do the baseline work before then. We want to do as much of the baselining around the statistics as we can.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** You received these responses prior to October 2014. Has any work been done on developing the strategy?

**Ms Linsey Farrell (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** The consultation formally closed on 10 October 2014, and some late submissions were accepted after that, with the approval of Ministers, until the end of October and into November. The analysis of all those responses has been ongoing since then. Some of them were significant responses, and the consultation has shown a very high response rate, which is really positive. We need to give it the attention that it deserves and take on board the issues that have been raised throughout. We have been continuing with the analysis, and we will be in a position to put forward a more detailed analysis to Ministers in the coming weeks.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I imagine that some listeners will find it quite concerning that we are still talking about those timescales before the production of a strategy, but that is the update that we have received.

**Ms Farrell:** I should add that it has been really useful to engage, particularly with what was known as the Common Platform group. We met the group just before Christmas and gave a commitment at that stage, because of the range of issues that were being raised, that we would go back to the group and engage further. Since then, we have had some discussions with the Community Relations Council (CRC), which was leading on that work, and, because of that, that invitation has been widened out much further than just to the signatories to the Common Platform to take in as wide a range of minority ethnic groups as possible. A date for that is in the diary for mid-April. It will be very useful to pick up with groups then and drill down into the detail of the issues that have been raised through the analysis.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK, well, perhaps we can get into some more of the detailed concerns then, and you can update us as to what progress is being made in relation to those. I want to pick up on what sounds like a degree of improved consultation across the sector. How does that impact on concerns in relation to the configuration and appointment of the racial equality panel?

**Mr Ken Fraser (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** It is fair to say that the racial equality panel membership has been stable for a while. It was appointed a good wee while ago.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** What is a "good wee while", Ken?

**Mr Fraser:** It is a matter of years; at least two or three years. We had representation of a number of key people from the minority ethnic sector, amongst others. We had Patrick, for instance; Deirdre from the CRC; Paul Yam from Wah Hep; and Katy Radford from the Belfast Jewish community. I could go on. There are a number of people there.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Are there any specific proposals around leading the panel or changing the appointment process for the panel?

**Mr Fraser:** Yes, we intend to pick that up, dust it down and refresh it for taking forward work on the implementation of the strategy. There was a suggestion that there was a lack of transparency in how the process was carried out. Perhaps, looking at it in retrospect, it seemed "untransparent", but, at the time, everyone understood it and was quite happy with it. It involved people putting their own name forward. It could not have been more transparent.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** From what I have heard today, engagement with the wide number of organisations available to input into a robust strategy is what we should be looking for. If there is a way to improve how the racial equality panel does that, I would be interested to hear what you are going to do to ensure that that takes place.

**Ms Farrell:** Certainly, in terms of the session in mid-April, when Mairead [*Inaudible.*] will focus on the implementation of the strategy. I think that the architecture and the structures underneath that, such as the panel and other similar structures, might come up as being the focus of that grouping.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** We will probably come to that as well. That is helpful. There were concerns about the evidence base and the data on which the consultation document was based. There were concerns that that was data from as long ago as 2001. Would you like to respond to those concerns?

**Mr Fraser:** I am happy to respond to that. I am sorry that I did not make my point clearer, but the point I was making was that lots of the issues that were there in 2001 continued to be issues in 2014, when the consultation document was published. We had the Paul Connolly evidence from 2002, I think, and evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2014. The point I was making was that we should have moved more; we should be pushing things further. We have put together and commissioned a paper on the evidence base. So, we have a much sounder grasp of the evidence base, and, hopefully, we will be able to share that with people fairly shortly.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Is that going to be a contribution towards establishing the scale of the challenge and the baseline of the issues?

**Mr Fraser:** Absolutely, yes. Respected academics have done an evidence-gathering exercise on it, so —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** What stage is that exercise at?

**Mr Fraser:** It is at final draft stage.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK. Another significant concern that you have, rightly, acknowledged relates to race relations law in Northern Ireland and how that has fallen behind pace with the rest of the UK, Europe and international standards. Can you update the Committee on what proposals are in place to address that issue?

**Dr McMahon:** Over the last two years — I cannot remember the exact date — we have looked at the full range of equality legislation internally to see where the gaps are, including, obviously, racial equality issues. We have also had views from the Equality Commission. There is no doubt that the legislation needs to be looked at and strengthened. On the back of this, we see proposals going to Ministers on what that legislation would look like.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** What is the timescale for putting those proposals to Ministers?

**Dr McMahon:** That would be part of the implementation and part of the action plan. One of the key elements of the action plan is to get proposals in place. We are not going to wait until the strategy is published. These proposals will be developed alongside the strategy over the summer months.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Denis, in our previous session, we had an allusion to the fact that the update of that race relations law is now beyond 2009, when an Assembly motion unanimously supported the update of the race relations law. You will appreciate that people will want more clarity and accuracy than, "in line with the implementation plan". Do you have a particular timescale or deadline in mind as to when you will put forward proposals on race relations law to the Ministers?

**Ms Farrell:** Over the coming weeks, we will be sending a detailed submission to Ministers with all of the issues and the analysis coming out of the consultation. Obviously, the most pertinent issue will be the reform of the Race Relations Order in the legislation.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Did it surprise you that that was one of the most commonly raised issues in the consultation?

**Dr McMahon:** No, it did not — to be blunt about it. The bottom line with all of this is that the consultation process is important. We need to, and we have, taken it seriously. The question now is how quickly we can get that translated.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** How much of a priority is the prompt production of the strategy and action plan for Ministers at this moment in time?

**Dr McMahon:** I think that the Ministers very much see it as a top priority. That is my understanding.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** There are obviously some detailed submissions made in relation to the action plan and monitoring, going as far as, if I heard correctly, the need for a cross-departmental action plan, cross-departmental monitoring and a call on the Assembly Committees to get directly involved in the monitoring of progress on that action plan. Can you give us any more detail of what you think that might look like?

**Dr McMahon:** The first thing that I would say is that that is welcome. There is no doubt that this cannot be an OFMDFM strategy. It has to be a cross-departmental strategy, and all the Departments have to continue to pull their weight — as they are at the minute — and we have to make sure that other Departments across the board pull their weight on this.

We looked at the Delivering Social Change and Together: Building a United Community structures to see whether there were ways of using those. In the past, we set up groups that had champions or departmental representatives on them. You start off with people at a senior level who can make decisions and commit resources and then, over time, it tails off. We wanted to try to use the existing structures that have senior officials from across Departments on them. The other side of that is that we also need structures that have people in place who know what needs to be done, and that includes representatives from the BME communities. We need to get the balance right, and we are looking at that. There are two sides to that: first, we need a panel that is representative and can bring forward proposals and make sure that it scrutinises what government does; secondly, we need senior officials to sit round the table and sign up to the specific actions, and that needs to be followed up on. Then that needs to be scrutinised.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** What does the current cross-departmental action plan process for Building a United Community look like at the moment?

**Dr McMahon:** There are two elements: the ministerial panel and the programme board. The ministerial panel has met twice, and the programme board meets —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Twice since when?

**Dr McMahon:** Since the launch of T:BUC.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** In May 2013?

**Dr McMahon:** And then the programme board —

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Just to be clear: the ministerial panel has met twice since May 2013. Is that right?

**Ms Farrell:** Together: Building a United Community launched in May 2013; that is right.

**Dr McMahon:** I can come to the Delivering Social Change (DSC) programme board in a minute. The programme board for T:BUC has senior officials from across all Departments, and it meets bi-monthly. The DSC programme board is basically a ministerial subgroup, and it meets quarterly. It has been meeting quarterly throughout.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Is that the ministerial subgroup for racial equality?

**Dr McMahon:** Delivering Social Change. There is a programme board that is chaired by junior Ministers and which has officials on it from across all Departments. Again, it meets bi-monthly.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Do you see the actioning of the racial equality strategy and the monitoring of it fitting into those structures?

**Dr McMahon:** To be honest, we find that you start with senior officials coming from all of the Departments, and, after six months, a whole different set of people would come along because new panels and new structures would be set up for new initiatives. We have tried to keep a standing group of officials at deputy secretary level there who can have the clout to make sure that their Department does what it needs to do support whichever strategy we are looking at.

**Ms Farrell:** We have had some useful meetings with the good relations programme board to look specifically at the issue of race hate and to utilise that cross-departmental structure that is in place already to identify ways that Departments can work together more effectively to address that. That has met twice, with a further meeting planned for April.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Where do you anticipate responsibility for the racial equality strategy lying further to the restructuring of the Departments?

**Dr McMahon:** Under the current decisions, racial equality policy would move to the Department for Communities.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** How would preparation for that transfer of function affect the timescale for production of the racial equality strategy, if at all?

**Dr McMahon:** We are working on the basis that it will not affect it because it will have to be done this year anyway. It is a question that is coming up across the board across all the Departments at the minute. Where functions are moving or changing, there is a lot of this discussion. The view very consistently across the system is that we need to deliver. We cannot just put things on hold.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** How does the fact that the consultation response said that it needs to be a cross-departmental strategy fit with it going to one particular Department rather than the Executive Office?

**Dr McMahon:** There are already a lot of examples of cross-departmental strategies being managed from different Departments. You have the ministerial group for public health taking forward the public health strategy, and, in DOE, there was a climate change group that had officials from across Departments. There are various cross-departmental functions that are taken forward by other Departments. In fact, it depends, in a sense, on what is most appropriate on an issue-by-issue basis. There should be absolutely no reason why only one Department should do cross-departmental working. All Departments should be working on a cross-departmental basis. That is a message coming up through every consultation that we do.

**Mr Maskey:** Thank you for your presentation. I appreciate that you cannot be as candid as you might want to be, given the issues that you are dealing with, and that you cannot speak for the Ministers, of course. There are a couple of things. Obviously, we are covering the change in the structure around here. As you know, OFMDFM does not have authority per se. A lot of people think that it does, but it does not. It cannot tell Departments what to do and all of the rest of that, even currently. I am a bit concerned that, if the policy is to be further dispersed among Departments, it is more essential that we get whatever we are going to do mainstreamed so that it is done and does not rely on somebody at the level of First Minister and deputy First Minister. In my opinion, that will nearly be lost if we are not careful.

I am anxious about you going out again in April to consult with the sector. I think that you said that you were doing that. What will you consult on? If I were in the sector and somebody rang and said that they wanted to meet in April, I would tell them to take a walk, because I would have been consulted until I was blue in the face, with all due respect. I say this to you, but you are not the people who carry the can here. It is really a political steer that is required here. When do you expect or hope to get a political steer from the First and deputy First Ministers before going back out to the sector? If it was me, I would not want to be talked to again in April. Bear it in mind that we are well into March now. Unless somebody was coming to tell me "I have taken on board what you have said, and here is what we are going to do", I would not want to see anybody; I would just want to get on with my work. I am being genuine about that, because it is frustrating if you say to people "Well, actually you know we were with you last year, round about the same time". I fail to see what additional information you would get by talking to the same people.

**Ms Farrell:** What came out when we met the Common Platform group before Christmas — now, obviously, it is a wider group that we are going to meet — was that they had put forward a lot of issues within their response, and there were things that we wanted to explore further with them. We have been careful not to say that this is another consultation. We are going to meet the groups on a much wider basis to explore some of the issues that were raised through their response. That response will be very much the basis of the discussion, with, as I mentioned earlier, a focus on implementation. They have put forward some ideas about how racial equality strategy could be implemented, one of

which is racial equality champions. We would like to explore these ideas. These are things that may have been tried previously and that may not have worked, but we would be interested in hearing from the groups again and asking them "Look, you have said this. Now, how might that work in practice?", almost like a co-design process. What might that mean in practice? How might that work where it has not worked before? We are being very careful not to say it is another consultation. We are going back as a follow-up to the response that was put in by Common Platform.

**Dr McMahon:** Just to add to that, a very clear message that came forward was that people wanted to be involved. I totally accept that if we were going back out to ask "Can you tell us again what you told us before?", there would quite understandably be frustration. It was more a case of us listening and saying that people did not feel as if they had enough involvement; they had had the opportunity to be consulted, but they wanted to get into the design of it and what it will look like. We are trying to do —

**Mr Maskey:** I appreciate that, and my concern would be that you could identify champions in every Department tomorrow. Somebody decides they will not do it, and there probably are still some in existence, but that misses the big picture points. All the organisations and consultees have told you what the big ticket items actually are, so I am just making the point — I hope the Committee will support this view — that we would urge the First and deputy First Ministers to send you out with a very clear understanding of what you are going to do about the big issues. What are you going to do about setting the law? What are you going to do about improving the law and setting the highest standards? All the rest of it is bells and whistles.

**Dr McMahon:** Yes, that is helpful.

**Mr Maskey:** I want that recorded, no matter how we do it. Certainly, after we have the presentations, I will be making the point that I would like OFMDFM to be setting a very clear pathway to reach these high international standards, which people have rightly argued for in all these consultations.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I wholeheartedly agree with you, Alec. It has been quite some time since the Ministers have been at the Committee, which is why, earlier, I proposed that they attend in relation to some of the other issues that we mentioned. Maybe we are working towards a couple of issues to raise with Ministers, but there are clearly some big issues there, and I wholeheartedly support the Committee seeking progress on them.

**Mr Attwood:** Patrick Yu said earlier:

*"racial inequality is far worse than 10 or 15 years ago."*

While some of us do not have all the facts and figures, we all have the intuition or judgement that that is certainly the case: racial equality is worse now than 10 years ago. That sets the standard against which we should judge ourselves, you should judge yourselves and the Ministers should judge themselves. At the earlier session, I said that I had a sense, in the evidence that was being given by the five representatives of the sector, that it was a bit like September/October 2013, when the Committee was advised that the then Victims' Commissioner had advised OFMDFM — "formally alerted" was the language that she used — regarding her concerns about where another significant policy area was lacking. I think we are probably in the same space again, if not the language. We are being "formally alerted" by the sector about the deficits, to put it at its mildest, in what is coming forward.

It affirms my view — this is not a comment on the three of you because I know one or two of you better than others, and I know that you work hard, but it is my own view — that until we bring into the life of government the specialists in each sector — be it racial equality, childcare or victims and survivors — we will continue to fail the public policy challenges and tests. That is true of other Departments, as well as OFMDFM. Government does not have the range and capacity that the sectors do. We need to have those sectors in the life of government, otherwise government, in my view, will continue to be limited — if not inadequate — in how it responds. That is what the Scottish Government do, for what it is worth, inadequate though it was. I tried to do it in DOE and DSD when I was there. You will know a bit about that, Denis. We are in that space again, because the truth of the matter is that we are not going to have any new racial equality law in the lifetime of this Government, and then it will go to another Department, and we will see what happens then. That should be the perspective taken by OFMDFM and by you, and in that regard I share in the comments made by Alex Maskey. It still requires certain questions to be asked of you. A draft equality strategy went out that was based on facts and figures from 2001 and did not reference the last census, which leads to a requirement that

academics are doing a piece of work, which is in final draft, about the evidence base around the strategy. How did that come to pass?

**Dr McMahon:** It is probably important to say that the strategy was not simply based on 2001. Ken clarified that earlier. First of all, it is —

**Mr Attwood:** Did it reference the census?

**Dr McMahon:** It referenced the census, and it was —

**Mr Attwood:** It relied upon the census figures.

**Dr McMahon:** Ken, do you want to —

**Mr Fraser:** It does not specifically reference the census. It references research that was completed in 2014, so it is years post-census. It was a consultation document and not intended to be a strategy. People have misunderstood, perhaps, what it was intended to do. It was not going to do all the things that people thought it was going to do.

**Mr Attwood:** Which really begs the question that it should have been a consultation about what it was intended to do, rather than being something less than that.

**Mr Fraser:** It was intended to elicit people's views on these things. I bookended the research with the Connolly research in 2002 and the Joseph Rowntree research in 2014.

**Mr Attwood:** Even though you have done all that, you still have to go out and get academics to update all the research. Presumably you accept that the evidence base on which you were working was limited — maybe not even adequate — to the point that you are now, at the eleventh hour, having had a consultation and before you go and speak to Ministers, going off to get academics to do more research to underpin what you are proposing.

**Dr McMahon:** There are a couple of points. The first point is that, for me, evidence is not simply just numbers; it is numbers as well. In a sense we were acknowledging your point, because the fact that we are going back to engage with stakeholders again is recognition that this was not the strategy, as Ken quite rightly says. We have not got a broad welcome of what we put out there. We might as well be open and honest about that. That is where we are. While it is not that we have not been engaging, we will be engaging more intensively on actually developing the strategy. I accept that point.

Is there a need for more research? In fairness, the document itself makes that point loud and clear. I think there is a need both for more research and for the baseline monitoring to be much improved. I totally acknowledge that. In fairness, in terms of the document itself, it was not that we were ignoring anything that had happened since 2001. That was not the case.

**Mr Attwood:** I am just worried that the consultation was a suck-it-and-see exercise, rather than something more meaningful and material. Can I ask you a second question? There was evidence given within the last hour about the life expectancy of ethnic minorities, infant mortality being higher and that the:

*"provision of health care is not equal."*

Given that evidence, which is critical, acute and worrying, and given what you said earlier about how you are responsible for the equality strategy but other Ministers are responsible for delivery and actions, how do you think, where we sit now, that issue is going to be addressed [*Inaudible.*] Ministers in the next few weeks around infant mortality, life expectancy and health care not being equal? How is that going to be addressed between now and then in a way that actually translates across into the life of the Department of Health and into the lives of people from an ethnic minority background?

**Dr McMahon:** One of the things that we are going to need to do is look at all of the possible levers. One of the factors that have led us to this point is that we spend a lot of time focusing on funding and putting together funding programmes. That is incredibly important and that is one key lever, but the

danger is that ethnic minority funding programmes are not of themselves going to deal with the issues that we are talking about.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Can I ask a brief supplementary question to that, if you do not mind, Alex? What is the current budget for the minority ethnic development fund?

**Mr Fraser:** It is £1.1 million plus crisis funding over and above that.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Per year?

**Mr Fraser:** Per annum, yes.

**Dr McMahon:** That is real and it is making a difference, but in itself it is not going to sort out the fundamental issues that need to be addressed. That is where the legislation comes in as one lever. That is where there is potential to impact on wider mainstream programmes. That is one of the advantages. The Department for Communities is going to be a very big Department with a lot of responsibilities, so there is scope there to ensure that a lot of the actions that that Department takes forward are directly linked with the racial equality strategy. In addition to that, a lot of it is going to come down to the scrutiny and the monitoring. I think it is a fair point to say that there have been previous issues that the Committee has been informed about, and it has raised the profile of particular concerns. Those are all of the things that we think are going to make a difference. Baseline monitoring is going to be absolutely crucial; there is no doubt about it. There are some good examples of where administrative information does capture ethnic minority background and so on, but that needs to be replicated right across government, and that in itself will have a huge impact.

**Mr Attwood:** The question was this: how are you, in the next short while, going to prevail upon OFMDFM and through it, with Health, deal with the issues that were identified here earlier like life expectancy, infant mortality and health care being unequal? I have not heard an answer to that. Whilst this might be an unfair characterisation of the evidence given earlier, it seems to me that that evidence was that there is a lot of good work going on within the groups, and some councils, that the government strategy is funding.

**Dr McMahon:** What people have said to us is that we need to focus on legislation and some of the other levers. That is what we need to do. Something like life expectancy has a huge range of factors associated with it. Part of that is obviously health and social care, but it goes far beyond that. There is a whole range of different determinants that affect that. A lot of the funding we have been providing has not been meant to replace mainstream provision; it is to try to make sure that mainstream provision is accessible. That has been one of our main approaches to tackling those issues, but clearly we need to go beyond that.

**Mr Attwood:** The point behind all this is that if there are not hard outcomes, there is very little. The evidence earlier, when it came to education, was that there is:

*"a lower level of belonging and a higher level of exclusion".*

When it came to employment, the evidence was:

*"Employment problems have been identified by research as the main barrier to integration".*

You have heard the evidence in respect of health. Any strategy of any value will have to respond to those three assertions on education, employment and health. I do not hear any sense that those areas are being identified as the hard outcomes and that there is going to be a strategy developed that, through OFMDFM and in proper relationship with the other Departments, is actually going to tackle it.

**Ms Farrell:** Throughout the ongoing development of the strategy, we will be developing outcomes. We are starting that work in line with the shared aims and what has come out of the consultation. That will enable us to go to Departments and work with them to develop those shared outcomes that will help us achieve change against the areas that you mentioned.

**Mr Attwood:** I will conclude here. The opening comments were, "evidence is flawed", "key inequalities not addressed", "lack of action", "issues of governance" and "questions of resources." Those are the five tests of what you are doing.

**Dr McMahon:** It is important to say that it is a fair criticism to say that the work to date has been more around activities and funding than outcomes. That is not unfair; it is also not unfair to say that about a whole range of policy areas. There is a general realisation growing across government that we just cannot keep trying to put together new projects and funding programmes and hope that they will deal with our most intractable problems, because they will not. That is clearly not going to happen.

The other side of that is that, if that is the route we are going down, it is absolutely right that we need to work with stakeholders to make sure that we are measuring the right outcomes, but it also is absolutely clear that we will not be able to link that directly to inputs. That is physically not possible. We can measure inputs and activities, but it is not possible to say, "That is going to lead to a different outcome", as in a population measure. It just is not possible, because there are so many outside things that you cannot control outside of that. We need to be honest and say that. If we are going to be serious about tackling outcomes, we need to be honest and say, "There's no point in us pretending that we can change an outcome by producing a certain amount of funding."

The best we will be able to do is identify the outcomes that need to change. It is a fair point to say that we have not done enough on that, and that is part of what will come out in the strategy. The next step is to look at how we can influence those outcomes, rather than sitting here and telling you that we can do it through the minority ethnic development fund or anything else. It is not going to be done with a single programme. I do not know if that is helpful.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** I suppose a follow-up is that the Department was told this in October. We are in mid-March, so why is it going to take until mid-April to meet with the Common Platform?

**Dr McMahon:** We have already met with representatives of the Common Platform, and we are following that up with a larger session to get into the actual detailed design work. That is where we are at the minute.

**Ms Farrell:** We have also engaged separately with CRC in the interim around that.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** One of the key priorities is the update of race relations legislation. Will updated race relations legislation be delivered in this Assembly mandate?

**Dr McMahon:** It is unlikely in this Assembly mandate, I have to say, because the only way you could do it at this stage would be through accelerated passage. Given the breadth of the legislation, it is unlikely that that would happen.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** You mentioned the minority ethnic development fund, which is £1 million a year. That is a drop in the ocean, but it is vital to the organisations who receive it. It is my understanding that a call for applications has yet to go out for the financial year 2015-16. Is that right?

**Mr Fraser:** It is set to go out. We expect to be making the call very shortly.

**Dr McMahon:** We are going to be looking at arrangements to try to ensure continuity of funding.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** What does that mean? Given that the new financial year is weeks away, how is it viable for organisations to provide continuity? I presume that that has resulted in a number of organisations with protective notices and everything else that goes with the level of timescale that they are working with. Surely you are into the realms of considering year extensions, given how late the call for applications is going to go out.

**Dr McMahon:** We are looking at extensions, but not necessarily for a year.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** For what time frame?

**Mr Fraser:** To cover until the people are informed as to whether their bids have been successful or otherwise.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** How will that change the sustainability of an organisation? This sounds like a fairly disorganised process, similar to the processes that the Victims and Survivors Service was subjected to, which Mr Attwood has alluded to throughout the session. We are weeks away from the end of the financial year, organisations have had no call for applications, and you are only going to give an extension until a call for applications goes out, at which point they could be advised that they are not —

**Mr Fraser:** No, no, no. The extension will be until the decisions are made and grant awards are indicated.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** When will that be?

**Mr Fraser:** I hope that it will be the end of April or early May at the latest, but we will sit down and see what we can do.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Is that an adequately organised process?

**Mr Fraser:** It is not an adequately organised process, but we only heard about our budget very late on in the game, so we do what we can in the circumstances.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** Are you in close consultation with the sector to keep it up to date with developments?

**Mr Fraser:** We have informed the sector frequently, and there have helpfully been a number of AQs.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** In relation to the baseline monitoring research you mentioned, is it possible to tell us who is conducting that research and what its terms of reference are? Would it be possible to provide the Committee with the research?

**Mr Fraser:** We can approach Ministers and ask if they are happy with that. It was Ann Marie Gray and Goretta Horgan who did the research, but I will provide you with the details.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** OK. Unless members have any further questions, I will bring that to a close.

As I started by saying, it is encouraging to some extent — that is an extremely qualified "to some extent" — that you seem to have listened to and received the wide-ranging concerns that exist in relation to the strategy. I sincerely do not mean this in a political way, but as a member of the Committee I find it hard to conclude after today's session that racial equality is an urgent priority for the First Minister and deputy First Minister and their office. It is hard to conclude otherwise as a member of the Committee charged with scrutinising work in that regard. Perhaps you can take that on board, and we will receive a more detailed update from you in the near future about the timescales for progress on some of these issues. Given that the most important issue raised consistently in the consultation will not be addressed in the rest of this Assembly mandate, the Department has its work cut out to reassure anybody that I am wrong.

**Mr Maskey:** I repeat the point that I made earlier: that does not apply to the deputy First Minister. I can assure you of that.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That is on record.

**Dr McMahon:** It might be worth making one point of clarification on the legislation. Without accelerated passage, it is difficult to see how the legislation would go through in this term, but that does not mean that draft legislation cannot be worked up and consulted on. It is important to clarify that.

**The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Lyttle):** That is helpful clarification.

Thank you very much for being here. It is obviously an important issue, and, as other members have said, you obviously have a commitment to it, and I wish you well in the work that you have scheduled in the coming weeks and months.