



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Programme for Government:  
Mrs Arlene Foster (First Minister),  
Mr Martin McGuinness (deputy First Minister)  
and OFMDFM Junior Ministers

9 March 2016

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

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)  
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Andy Allen  
Mr Alex Attwood  
Ms Megan Fearon  
Mr Paul Frew  
Mr Chris Hazzard  
Mr Gordon Lyons  
Mr Alex Maskey  
Mr David McIlveen

**Witnesses:**

Mr M McGuinness	deputy First Minister
Mrs Foster	First Minister
Ms J McCann	Junior Minister
Mrs Pengelly	Junior Minister

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** We welcome the First Minister, the deputy First Minister, junior Minister McCann and junior Minister Pengelly. Normally, the Committee allows five minutes for opening comments but, colleagues, I am sure that we can stretch to five minutes each after the two principals. I invite the First Minister to lead us off.

**Mrs Foster (The First Minister):** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to come along with the deputy First Minister and the junior Ministers to speak to you and hear from you this afternoon. Obviously, it is the first time that I have been to the Committee since I was appointed as First Minister. As you know, I have spent the last couple of weeks going up and down the country talking to people. People have been very clear that they want devolved government to work and they want it to work for everyone. Speaking for myself — I am sure that the deputy First Minister takes the same view — I want to work with colleagues in the Executive and the Assembly to improve the lives of all our people. In doing that, our aim should be to work as servants of the people who send us here.

As I indicated on the first day I was appointed as First Minister, I want to try to set a new tone in Stormont of working together to get things done and to help to end narrow point-scoring and bickering,

particularly in the Chamber. I trust that, in that spirit, we can have a positive exchange of views at the Committee. I also recognise that not everyone in the room agreed with the Fresh Start Agreement, but I certainly believe that working collectively and implementing the Fresh Start Agreement is the best way to ensure that our politics deliver.

Turning to the Programme for Government (PFG), it is, of course, the Executive's highest-level strategic document, setting out our priorities for the Assembly term and the actions that are needed to address them. Our aspiration for the next Programme for Government is to try to establish a shared vision for the public sector in the form of shared outcomes and to foster collaboration and support of greater efficiency and effective delivery of outcomes.

The Stormont House Agreement, as you will be aware, requires the parties that will form the next Executive to resolve the PFG before Ministers are appointed. That constrains the time that is available for the development work following the next election. For that reason, preparatory work is now in hand to help us to set the course for the way forward. It will be important that the processes that lead to the development of the next Programme for Government take into account critical influencing factors, in particular the aspirations of our people and their priorities; the financial position of the Executive, of course, and the budgetary responses to that position; and the increasing recognition that the achievement of well-being is at the centre of government's role, and that a coordinated cross-sectoral outcome-focused model of governance is required to deliver on that.

For those reasons, we must construct a Programme for Government that articulates a clear vision, identifies concrete action for delivery and also obviously incorporates a robust mechanism for accountability and governance to ensure that all Departments effectively support the achievement of the identified outcomes. Of course, none of us would say that health is just delivered by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety or, indeed, that education is just delivered by the Department of Education. We want to try to get away from that silo mentality so that all of us in government are responsible for the delivery of the Programme for Government, regardless of what the target might be.

**Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** Thank you, Mr Chairman. When the last Programme for Government was developed, the Executive had just completed their first full Assembly period. The intention then was to build on the institutional stability that was established in the previous period and to move to a clear delivery focus. The Programme for Government set out to demonstrate that the Executive could deliver for citizens, and its content reflects that intention. Essentially, it is a list of the most important things that Departments would do, in most cases mandating Departments individually and without much need for collaboration. The track record of the Executive in those terms over the past period has been strong. Of the 82 commitments, over 80% have been achieved. We have successfully moved from keeping the show on the road to getting things done. We now need to go a step further.

We propose that the next Programme for Government should be characterised by a focus on achieving outcomes and making a difference. We must acknowledge that long-standing economic and social issues will not be addressed by business as usual approaches. Of course, people have been talking about greater collaboration and intelligent, evidence-informed policy for quite some time. Collaboration and a focus on outcomes are being practised across the public sector. Now, we want to empower their expansion through an outcomes-focused Programme for Government. For that reason, we propose that the next Programme for Government will be built around a shared outcomes framework for the public sector. This must be a small set of clear, focused statements that describe the changes that we are aiming to deliver for people, and these must be rooted in a sense of well-being. The outcomes must be clearly articulated and capable of measurement, and they must constitute a mission statement for delivery by the public sector as a whole. To support the collaboration that is required to deliver the outcomes framework, it will be critical that they feed into the important strategic planning instruments of government. For that reason, we expect that major Executive strategies will link directly to the delivery of the outcomes framework and that the work of the wider public sector will do the same.

In that context, we also hope to see community plans being produced by local government, aligned with the framework. By doing that, the complementarity of community plans and the aims and priorities of government will be assured and opportunities for collaboration will be increased. For that reason, it is imperative that local government plays an active role in shaping the outcomes framework, and work on that has already started.

Early development work is in hand to identify potential outcomes for consideration by the incoming Executive. This has involved engagement with expert and representative stakeholder groups and will be informed by the recent work of the Carnegie Trust round table on well-being, the advice that we have commissioned on public-sector governance and delivery from the OECD, as well as the substantial programme of citizen engagement that we have developed over the last 18 months. There has been engagement by the local government sector with each of these processes, and we will wish to see that continue to ramp up in the next few months as we continue the development process. In addition, significant delivery capacity resides outside the public sector.

More than ever in the present financial climate, we must look for opportunities to partner with the community, voluntary and private sectors. We believe that we can support that collaboration through a shared outcomes framework by setting a clear direction that others can buy into. It will be critical to the success of the framework that it is owned jointly by all of us in the Executive. Each Executive party has been engaged in the collaborative design process to begin to construct a framework for the next Programme for Government. We are grateful for that participation and we hope to see that spirit of cooperation continue to be evidenced in future.

In your meeting today, you will want to consider some aspects of delivery over the past period, and our officials are here to assist you with that consideration. However, it is important to us that we come before the Committee today to set out how we intend to establish a context for a more significant impact on the lives of people here in the coming years. We are happy to answer any questions or take advice on how we can develop our approach and optimise the support of the Committee in achieving that aim.

All of us in this room are conscious that, over the course of the last two and a half years, things have been very difficult, not just on the streets but with the huge challenges that we faced around budgetary matters and so forth. Whatever about people's view of the Fresh Start Agreement, the fact is that we have a Fresh Start Agreement, and it has been a good start.

Arlene has taken over as the new DUP leader and First Minister. She is the third DUP First Minister I have worked with, and I think that our initial conversations have shown a very clear commitment to drive forward together to build a better future for all the people we represent. Of course, that means that there are huge challenges for all the parties in this room. There was one aspect of that agreement that we spoke about this morning during our visit to the Victims and Survivors Forum meeting that took place in Titanic Quarter, which eluded all of us during the Fresh Start discussions. However, I think that we are all hopeful, and some of us are maybe even optimistic, that that problem can be resolved and that we can move forward on the legacy issues that are so important for many people in society.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thank you both very much for those briefings. Later in our session today, the Committee will be looking at a different legacy, which is our own work programme over the last five years. It would be interesting to get your take on how you think we are doing. Given that the deputy First Minister has been in position throughout the mandate, it might be appropriate to ask him first. I know that some people think that "Martin first" is a political nightmare to be avoided but, on this occasion, perhaps we could try it.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Well, it is definitely a new concept to ask the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, or indeed, any Minister in any Department, to sit in public judgement on the work of the Committee. I work on the basis that all of the parties and individuals in the Committee are very genuine people, very concerned about their constituents and very concerned to be part of institutions that are working in the interest of society, and I have never questioned that in the past. I think that there is a tremendous amount of goodwill. I know that, in public sessions, whether in the Chamber or here in the course of these deliberations, there is always a temptation for people to score political points. We have probably all been guilty of that at stages in our political careers.

In the main, I think that what has happened in the Assembly, in the Executive and in the Committees, given where we have come from in the past, has been transformative and is something to be admired by many people across the world. Sometimes, those who are closest to what happened here are perhaps not as appreciative of the changes that have taken place, but whenever I speak to people in the international community, they are full of praise for the contribution made to the peace process by all politicians from every political party. We all know that the institutions went up in 1999 and collapsed on three occasions between then and October 2002. There were no institutions between 2002 and 2007. It was only really in 2007, when we all came together as a truly inclusive Executive, that we began the work of getting to know each other — maybe even getting to like each other —

and also recognising that we have a huge responsibility, with the eyes of the world and our own people looking at us. I give a fair wind to the Committee; I think that the Committee does a good job.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** First Minister, you have been a Minister in two other Departments. Have you had a sense that the relationship between OFMDFM and this Committee is different or more challenging? We have had great difficulties sometimes in getting answers and the timely delivery of papers over the last five years.

**Mrs Foster:** I have been Minister in three other Departments, not two. You are right: I have had experience of three other Committees, and all of those relationships were very positive. I appeared in front of those Committees on many occasions, and we worked through legislation. I have been challenged on decisions and have been quite happy to come and answer for those decisions. I do recognise that things have been particularly difficult between the Committee for OFMDFM and the office over a period of time. If that was taken out of context, you might ask why that was the case, but we have to remember where we were. Martin has already made reference to us having a particularly difficult time, especially when we found ourselves on the precipice of not having a devolved Administration here last year. We came extremely close, and it was only due to the good offices and leadership shown by my predecessor that we are here today. Others, including yourself, decided to leave the process; he decided to stay. For what it is worth, I think that he made the right decision, and I supported him in that. As a result, we are before you today, as First Minister and deputy First Minister, to be challenged on how the Programme for Government worked over the past four — then extended to five — years and on how we view matters going forward in terms of the next Programme for Government. It is right that we are here. Do I think things were always done right in the past? Would I have done things differently? I do not know, because I was not here at the time. All that I can say is that, now that I am in this office, for however long that is, I look forward to a good relationship with the Committee.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I relish the opportunity to challenge your analysis, but it would be an abuse of my position, and this is not the occasion to do that. I feel that the Committee has done some very good work over the past five years, not least the NIPSO legislation and shaping the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill. I would like to start with that because, last week, we heard from Amnesty International and from Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA), who professed disappointment about not being briefed with regard to the options papers. We have a letter from, dated today, saying:

*"We have written to the Programme Director of Amnesty International to inform him of the two options".*

When was that letter issued to Amnesty?

**Mrs Foster:** I think that letter was issued at the same time as the letter was issued to you. As far as I can remember, I signed the two of them together.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** So, when they came to us last week, they had not been informed.

**Mrs Foster:** I do not believe so, but I do not have the details in front of me so I am sorry; I cannot answer that. I know that junior Minister McCann had a meeting with the group.

**Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** You are obviously talking about the issues around the options paper and the decisions that were made at the Executive. There were two different agreements at the Executive on two different issues. One was about the mother and baby homes and the options there, and the other was about clerical abuse. Basically, what happened in terms of clerical child abuse is that the Executive agreed to engage with the Safeguarding Board, which was established, as you know, by the Department of Health to examine the issue of clerical abuse and child abuse and to make recommendations to the Executive. In terms of the mother and baby homes, they also agreed to establish an interdepartmental working group, which was led by Health, to review the evidence with the objective of making recommendations to the Executive within a six-month period. After the Executive took those decisions, I met a number of organisations and individuals to explain those decisions. I did that because I did not want people hearing it through the media and I explained that. I got round to all the people I had been in contact with and informed them that that was the decision that the Executive had taken on that day.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** In that meeting, were you working in your capacity as a Member of the Legislative Assembly rather than as a junior Minister?

**Ms J McCann:** Well, probably, yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** You say "probably" but the letter says "definitely".

**Ms J McCann:** Yes, but I undertook that because I did not want people just hearing it through the media. I thought they had the right to know in their capacity as victims and survivors.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** So will today's letter be the first communication, formally, from the Department to Amnesty and SAVIA?

**Mrs Foster:** Yes. This was a decision of the Executive on 10 February. As you know, all Executive decisions are meant to stay confidential until the outworkings happen. After that, we were to write to the various organisations, and we have now done that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Do you accept the criticism from these groups that what happened was that you decided to look at options and that the decision arising from that is to set up committees to look at more options?

**Ms J McCann:** I know from my engagement with individuals, victims and survivors, and the groups that represent them, that there have been a lot of issues in terms of a lot of people who fell outside the remit of the initial inquiry. I have to say that we listened to people and a lot of them were quite elderly. For example, some of the people who worked in the mother and baby homes were over 18 when they went into those institutions. I think it is understandable that they were distressed that they had not been included in the first instance. We did carry out some work over a period in engaging with them, and I contacted the inquiry chair to see if he would widen the scope, but his decision was that it would not be feasible at that time. However, he has since included another three institutions within that, and I know that he made some comments around redress as well. I understand the sense of frustration that victims and survivors feel and their sense that things are not happening. I understand that there are a number of people who fall outside the remit of the initial inquiry and I take on board that criticism.

**Mrs Pengelly (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** I think it is worth adding that these issues are very complex, and we and previous junior Ministers have, in the past, highlighted to the Committee that there were complex issues involved, some of which included the interpretation of the terms of reference by the independent chair of the inquiry. I think that it was right and proper that we respected the independence of the chair. In the interim between Ministers receiving the scoping report and the current development in respect of the Executive decision, the chairman — I know that you are aware of this — decided that, looking at the terms of reference, he could include, for example, examination of the Brendan Smyth allegations in three of those modules. He also decided that he could look at a number of the mother and baby homes, particularly pertaining to those under 18 years of age.

Given how this has played out and how the chairman has adjudicated on the matter, I think that it would have been premature for us to jump in at the stage at which the scoping study came up, because some of those issues are being dealt with by the inquiry into historical institutional abuse (HIA) and by the statutory inquiry. We are now examining the remaining elements of that. I think that further work is required. You have heard from officials in the Department that there is a lack of data and a lack of information. I think that it is right and proper that we seek that data and information before making informed decisions about the way forward.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I am sure that you will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that the chair has decided that he can look at the activities of Brendan Smyth insofar as they were within institutions.

**Mrs Pengelly:** Pertaining to —

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** So, we still have, potentially, victims of abuse in a non-institutional setting who do not have recourse to the inquiry. The previous position of the Department, as articulated by a previous junior Minister, was that those people could go to the police or to social services. Is that still your position? Do you think that that is still a valid and appropriate position, not

least given the fact that Sir Anthony has now said that he will recommend redress for those who fall within his remit?

**Mrs Pengelly:** The terms of reference are very clear; this is about systemic abuse in institutions.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Yes, and I am now asking —

**Mrs Pengelly:** It is very clear that clerical abuse falls outside that, and we have recommended —

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is it still your position that people who fall outside the remit should go to the police and social services, rather than having their own inquiry?

**Mrs Pengelly:** Absolutely everybody with information and anybody who has been a victim of a criminal act should go to the PSNI. We have made that very clear. On the second question that you asked, we have indicated a pathway where we are seeking further information, data and research to inform decisions. That is the decision of the Executive on this matter. There was a judgement that there was insufficient data and information to make that decision at this juncture, so we have asked for information to come back within, I think, a six-month period.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Sir Anthony is, I think, due to report in January 2017.

**Mr M McGuinness:** That is right, yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I know that I am speculating, but I think that it is important to look ahead. If he is recommending redress, I think that the victims and survivors might have a reasonable expectation that there will be a budget line in the 2017-18 financial year. Is that your intention?

**Mrs Foster:** Obviously, there is no point in talking about hypotheticals. The reality of the situation is often difficult enough to deal with without hypotheticals. We will await Sir Anthony's judgement. Whoever is in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will have to assess where the funding comes from. Obviously, the various institutions will have a duty to come forward in respect of money, and we would certainly expect that to be the case, as has happened in the Republic of Ireland. We will then be able to assess how much money we will need in respect of budgetary pressures if there are, indeed, to be any redress recommendations.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thank you.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I think that we are, in all probability, looking at the prospect, when the report comes to the Executive in 2017, that such recommendations will be made. It would naturally follow that whoever is in responsible positions at that stage vis-à-vis dealing with this will make provision for such an eventuality financially.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** OK. Thank you.

**Mr Lyons:** I thank the Ministers for coming along. I would like to have a look back over the last Programme for Government and look forward to the next one. First, job creation is obviously very important to people. The Executive set themselves a very ambitious target for the number of jobs that should be promoted over this Assembly term, and they have managed to smash through that target. That has been very beneficial indeed. Over 37,000 jobs were promoted during this mandate; the provisional target was 25,000, so that is extremely positive. It is right that we remember that the figures for jobs and investment represent individual people. Those people now have a job as result of the actions that have been taken, and that is very positive. In my constituency, Invest NI has been directly responsible for the creation of 800 jobs, which is very good news. Unemployment has been cut by a third during that time. Although we have a lot of successes to look back on, how can we ensure that the pace of job creation stays the same?

**Mrs Foster:** The 37,000 jobs are to just March 2015. To date, we are well past that. We have created well over 40,000. That gives me great pleasure because I remember well when we were trying to decide on that jobs target in 2011. It started at 20,000 and moved to 25,000. I remember sitting in the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Chairman indicating to me that there was no way we could reach that sort of figure in the mandate. So, I am particularly delighted,

given my previous roles, that we were able to create those jobs at a time — I think people forget this — when we were going through a difficult world recession. We were able to bring more and better jobs to Northern Ireland than ever before, so that is a good Programme for Government commitment that has been met.

Looking to the future, the devolution of corporation tax powers and the ability to set the date and rate has been given to us. We look forward to using that extra tool in our box for attracting foreign direct investment in particular into Northern Ireland in a way that we have not been able to do. That will give us access to companies that we have not been able to get. I hope that that will aid job creation in the coming years.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I absolutely agree with Arlene. Attracting that number of jobs during a world economic downturn was a pretty incredible achievement for this Administration. Key to that was the support we received from North America, in particular from successive US Administrations, from the Clinton, Bush and Obama Administrations.

We should not forget the tremendous contribution made to job creation and economic progress by our indigenous businesses during that time, but our relationship with the US is crucial. We have a good and close relationship. The First Minister and I will travel at the weekend to New York, Washington and California. The message that we have been bringing to the United States, particularly since Dr Paisley and I first went there in December 2007, is that things have fundamentally changed here for the better in terms of the security situation. Peace had arrived. That was a good news story in the United States.

What is critical to continuing to improve the jobs position for our people, including young people, who need a particular focus, is the ongoing success of the peace process and an ongoing good-news message that we are continuing on an upward trajectory in making a success of what we are trying to do. That is why the activities of those people still out there who believe that violence is the way forward need to be unreservedly condemned. We saw an example of that last week with an attempt to murder a prison officer about to do his duty. All of us are conscious of the need to continue to work closely with the United States of America but also with those who are working day and daily on our behalf — the Police Services North and South — to thwart the activities of those who would try to plunge us back to the past.

**Mr Lyons:** You mentioned the importance of North America in the support that has been given as well as foreign direct investment. What have the Executive done, or what can the next Executive do, to ensure that we get the benefit of the emerging markets with job creation and investment?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Arlene answered that. We know there is intense interest among key businesses in the United States about our proposition here, more so now that we have a decision on the basis of affordability within the Fresh Start Agreement, that we will have a reduced rate of corporation tax. We are in a good place going into the next term of the Assembly. The work done by Arlene, as ETI Minister, and by Dr Paisley, Peter Robinson, myself and other ETI Ministers after Arlene has been hugely important in attracting foreign direct investment here. Obviously key to that is the build-up of relationships, and that is why we are very focused not just on the North American relationships but on building relationships in China. We have had a number of good-news stories from China about our exports — our pork exports etc — and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has been there on several occasions. We are very focused on trying to build relationships wherever we can utilise the outcome of those relationships for the benefit of increased manufacturing exports and, obviously, the jobs that will flow as a result.

I know that there were a number of bad-news stories about manufacturing, with the Michelin situation and Bombardier, but the reality is that there are more people working in manufacturing in the North now than there were in 2008 when the downturn began. We need to ensure that we continue to encourage that and encourage those companies, many of which are indigenous companies that are having huge successes selling their wares abroad.

**Mr Lyons:** Tourism can be part of that job creation, and we obviously have a great natural resource around the country that should be exploited for tourism. What is your vision of tourism going forward? We obviously want to see more people coming here and spending more time here. From a constituency point of view, obviously, after visitors come into the country and visit Fermanagh, we want to get them up to East Antrim as well. I am hoping that the Executive will encourage that in the next Assembly.

**Mrs Foster:** You get the brownie points for mentioning Fermanagh. Of course, the target is to make the tourism industry a £1 billion industry in Northern Ireland by 2020. I think that we are on track to do that. We have certainly been able to attract more people here, and we have found that large-scale events have been a great part of that. Having the infrastructure for tourism has been vital as well of course, with things like Titanic Belfast, the Giant's Causeway visitor centre, all the investment that has gone into the city of Londonderry and all the investment that goes in right around the country.

It is important that we get people to come, and that is a wider proposition in relation to having direct access. I am pleased to have seen more direct access growing inside and outside Northern Ireland over the past period. It is so important that more people visit us. When they come as tourists, they may often come back for other reasons as well. That is why it is important to challenge perceptions about Northern Ireland, and we can only do that when we bring people to Northern Ireland so that they can see what is available.

In the past, some people may not have seen tourism as a mainstream industry. It is vital for Northern Ireland in so many ways, and I hope that the Year of Food and Drink this year will play a very strong part in that.

**Mr Lyons:** I have one more question, Chair, if that is allowed. One of the most successful programmes in your Department has been the numeracy and literacy programmes within Delivering Social Change. Over 18,000 young people were assisted with their numeracy and literacy, over 85% of those achieved their individual target and 300 teachers were employed because of it. At what stage is the assessment of that programme, and will we be at a point where that could be a mainstream programme and core funded for the Department of Education?

**Mrs Foster:** I obviously was not in the Department at the time that it was brought forward, but the whole idea was to try to do something different. That is what Delivering Social Change has been all about. If it works, it can be mainstreamed. I believe very strongly that some of the elements of the literacy and numeracy programme and the nurture programmes have been hugely successful. We are looking to outcomes in the future. Sometimes those outcomes cannot be measured until 10 years later, and we have to figure out how we will manage all that in the new Programme for Government structure. If a child of three or four has an early intervention, you will see the benefit of that further down the line. That will not happen within a couple of years, but it will happen in five, 10 or 15 years, and we have to work out how we deal with that. That has been a hugely successful process to date.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Just to go back to the previous question, I was in your constituency, just three weeks ago, at a meeting with representatives of the local business community in Larne, and they, too, emphasised the importance of tourism. We all accept that East Antrim and North Antrim are some of the most beautiful parts of the island of Ireland, and we need to exploit what they have to offer. I absolutely agree with Arlene. There is tremendous potential in the tourism industry, and we are very focused on taking full advantage of all that.

On the Delivering Social Change programmes, particularly the issue that relates to literacy and numeracy, at this early stage, it has been signalled up as a huge success. The Education Minister has agreed to fund a legacy programme, which aims to harness the success of the literacy and numeracy signature programme through sharing the innovative learning and best practice identified through the school system. We all have to learn from good practice that is happening in some of our schools. I was very interested to see the fantastic report, which was reported widely, including on the news in England, about the success that Jarlath Burns is having at St Paul's High School in Bessbrook, where the community is very proactively involved in the education of its young people. A lot of lessons can be learned from that. We all know that the key to success in any school is having an innovative, imaginative and very intelligent principal. The work that Jarlath Burns is doing there is something that many schools could learn from.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I think that the literacy and numeracy project will be hailed as a roaring success but will not be mainstreamed. Was that not one of the ambitions of the entire project?

**Mr M McGuinness:** In putting together our next Programme for Government, which we are presently engaged in and which will have to be signed off on by whatever parties wish to take up positions in the Executive in the aftermath of the election, I think that there is a very powerful argument to ensure that it is mainstreamed.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** There was another signature project with the objective of nurturing our children, and that was the play and leisure project announced in October 2013, with a budget of £1.6 million. Has that money been spent?

**Ms J McCann:** There was a difficulty around the Delivering Social Change central fund moneys. We were hoping to do that play and leisure project as one of the future signature projects. The 4 Nations Play Symposium is taking place here over the next couple of days. The previous junior Minister Jonathan Bell and I were at one in Scotland about two years ago. It is coming together to let people know the benefits of play on a child's development and the benefits of parents sharing that with their children.

Some of that money was put towards the councils to take forward their play and leisure policy, and while we did not have the money to do what we wanted to do in the initial stages around the signature project that you mentioned, we did invest some money through Playboard and other organisations.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** How much did you spend?

**Ms J McCann:** I am not sure of the actual spend. Emma, do you know the actual spend?

**Mrs Pengelly:** It is worth highlighting that Delivering Social Change was not about the signature projects. The signature projects were indicative of the agenda. The agenda was very much about trying to encourage risk and innovation in other Departments. It was trying to encourage good design in projects, and it was very targeted on evidence-based, outcomes-focussed delivery. I think that we achieved that. It got a huge amount of interest from other Departments that came forward with ideas that they wanted to be funded centrally.

Some £27 million was spent against the initial six Delivering Social Change projects. That was our reaction, in a sense, to understanding at a very early stage that the SIF profile, for example, was going to take longer than we anticipated. So, instead of doing nothing, we moved into the space of actions under signature projects.

In relation to the play project, as Jennifer has highlighted, initially, there was an announcement of a signature project. However, when we looked at the profile of the initial six, we realised that, unless we were getting additional money coming into that, it would not be possible. However, OFMDFM has a very good record in relation to play. If you look at the number of play facilities, early years, and intelligent and developmental play that has been funded through the likes of the social investment fund already, and also through our signature projects, you see that we have a good story to tell. That is very much at the heart of the Delivering Social Change agenda, which is about getting policies that are multi-policy and multi-objective. It is not just a social investment or regeneration project; it is also a play, recreational, developmental and educational project.

**Ms J McCann:** Officials might have the exact figures. I do not have them with me. When you at look the summer camps, for instance, as part of Together: Building a United Community, you see that it is actually modelled on that type of programme, where children from different community, cultural and religious backgrounds come together to a summer camp for two weeks, a week or whatever the organisation chooses to do. We had a number of pilots. Last year, over 300 young people went through those pilots. We will take them forward this year.

Emma and I actually went to a celebration event. I have to say that it was all about play and leisure. It might not have been specifically headlined as the play and leisure signature programme, but that was all part of Delivering Social Change, when that framework came in, and Together: Building a United Community. I suppose that it is a sense of where all those strategies join up and are not all sitting in different silos and places. That was also part of bringing that forward. The council part of it was an essential component, too.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I am interested that you describe a programme as a silo. If junior Ministers stand up publicly, as they did in October 2013, and say that, "We are going to have a play and leisure project, and we are giving it a budget line of £1.6 million", it is perfectly valid for the Committee to ask what happened to the money.

**Mr D McIlveen:** Thank you very much, Ministers, for coming today. I just wanted to move on to small and medium-sized businesses, which obviously have had mixed fortunes throughout this Assembly

term. I wonder whether, at this stage, we could get some indication, from the Department's point of view, on the general health of the SME sector today.

**Mrs Foster:** As you know, about 90%, I would say, of the economy is based around the SME sector in Northern Ireland, probably more so than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Therefore, it is one that needs our attention greatly. Recently, I spent some time in Coleraine with some micro-businesses; in other words, businesses with fewer than 10 employees. It was really about trying to facilitate them and allowing them to take time to think about their business — where their business was going, how they could innovate and how they could employ research and development techniques in their business when it is such a small business. We have been doing a lot of work, right across government, on how we can facilitate, encourage and provide the ecosystem for those businesses to grow and develop to the next stage.

As you will well know from your time on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, we have very large companies in Northern Ireland and very small companies in Northern Ireland, and there is not very much in between. We do not have the medium-sized company in Northern Ireland. It is really about how we facilitate companies that want to grow up to the next level. I know that Invest Northern Ireland has spent a good deal of time around that.

To be honest with you, David, there are some companies that do not want to grow. They want to stay in a very comfortable space. Often, they are family businesses and are facilitating those family members and providing them with a good standard of living. They do not want to take the risk to go to the next level because they could lose it all. Of course, having come through a worldwide recession and all the risks associated with that, many companies in Northern Ireland are now risk averse. They do not want to take that chance. We have to try to say that taking a calculated risk is good for business and that we shall try to provide help and facilitate them. As you know, Invest Northern Ireland has provided a lot of different mechanisms whereby they can access funding that is not maybe as risky as taking bank loans and what have you. That has been quite successful as well.

**Mr D McIlveen:** This Assembly term is probably the first since devolution returned to Northern Ireland that actually took place in a time of bust as opposed to a time of boom. Therefore, it was always going to be a challenging environment to work in. A few months ago, the deputy First Minister mentioned the manufacturing industry and said that more people are working in manufacturing today than there were in 2007-08. Is it fair to say that that transfers in equal measure over to the SME side of the house as well, in that more SMEs are operating now in Northern Ireland than there were at the start of the Assembly term?

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Just before you answer, I understand that the two Ministers have an overarching responsibility for the Programme for Government, but we are pretty much into ETI territory. We will allow the Ministers to answer as they wish.

**Mrs Foster:** I will let dFM answer, if that is the case.

**Mr M McGuinness:** We have had the conversation about the fact that, when the present term of the Assembly began, we were straight into a world economic downturn, which was the worst that the world had ever seen. There was hardly any country in western Europe that was not very seriously affected by that. To record the success that we did in terms of foreign direct investment was pretty phenomenal.

At the beginning of that process, SMEs were hurting very badly. We took the decision to keep business rates down to try to encourage as many people as possible to keep their business going. I think that there is a sense in the SME sector now that we are decisively coming out of that recession. Morale is better than it has been for an awfully long time. We still have a way to go, but, even in my constituency of Mid Ulster, the headline in the 'Mid-Ulster Mail' just a few weeks ago was about hundreds of new businesses having started up in the constituency. We are in a healthy enough place, but we are not complacent about the future.

**Mr D McIlveen:** I thank the Chairman for his direction, but I come back to the reason why I raised it, which is quite relevant. Obviously, there have been successes, and, clearly, from what I am hearing, that is one of them. How do we ensure that that will be a foundation stone of the next Programme for Government to ensure that the successes that have been achieved are not just continued but built on to try to take it to the next level?

**Mrs Foster:** You make a very fair point. Sometimes, when we achieve a success, we say, "Well, that's been achieved" and set it to one side instead of saying, "Well, that has been achieved. How do we build on that for the next Programme for Government?". It will be of no surprise to you that I firmly believe that, if the economy and economic development — I take what the Chair said about your question — is not at the heart of the Programme for Government moving forward, a whole lot of other things will not happen, either. If we have sustainable economic development regionally across Northern Ireland, it will be of benefit to everyone. If people have jobs, they can do so many things, and things will develop in a positive way. Economic development and growing the economy in Northern Ireland has to be at the heart moving forward.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I accept that you are perfectly entitled to ask such questions.

You have a fantastic opportunity coming next week: you will be representing Northern Ireland in Washington during St Patrick's week. You will have, as the Americans say, face time with the President, the Vice President and the Speaker. You will host a breakfast in Washington. That is a fantastic opportunity to sell Northern Ireland and generate more foreign direct investment. How difficult is that going to be given your separate stances on the UK's continuing membership of the European Union?

**Mrs Foster:** It is not going to be difficult at all. We are very much looking forward to going out and talking about what has happened in Northern Ireland, the fact that we have a fresh start and are very positively looking to the future. Whatever about 23 June, 24 June will come, and Northern Ireland will still be here, and we will still have a job of work to do. We take that very seriously. That is the message that we will bring to the United States of America.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Obviously, there will be a debate about this over the next number of months. People have strongly held views about it. Others are probably wondering what their position should be and have not made up their mind. Other parties have been quite decisive about where they stand. I respect everybody's position in relation to the matter. However, when Peter and I went to the United States — we were phenomenally successful in attracting foreign direct investment, as many people in jobs know — the question always came up from businesses as to whether there would be a referendum and what the consequences of an opt-out from Europe would be. We would be foolish not to recognise that it probably will be an issue for the business community, but we are going there with a very good message about the Fresh Start Agreement, our ability to work together and our determination to ensure the economic success not only of the Administration but, more importantly, of the people we represent. The way that I look at it is that the referendum will be over on 23 June and that we will deal with the aftermath of that when it comes. We need to remember that we attracted foreign direct investment at a time when we did not have a lower rate of corporation tax. During that whole four or five-year period, we still were attached to the rate of 20-odd per cent that London had, but we still managed to attract foreign direct investment. Of course, the assessment made by Invest NI was that, if we had a lower rate, that would accelerate. Obviously, all these things have to be taken into account, but I think that, when we go there, we will go with a very united message about being open for business and the ability we have as political leaders to work together for the betterment of everybody.

**Mr Maskey:** Thank you, First and deputy First Minister and junior Ministers. There are two issues that I would like to cover. The first is on T:BUC, and I will come back to the second, which is about victims.

T:BUC is a major plank of the Programme for Government and the Executive's work. The Committee held an inquiry on that and engaged with quite a range of organisations and sectors. Can you give us a sense of your hopes? The First Minister and the deputy First Minister referred in their opening remarks to the last period of time, which was rather difficult and challenging, to say the least. I think that sometimes we need to remind ourselves of that. Against the backdrop of the very challenging political circumstances that there were until fairly recently, and obviously, we have come with a long history, I very clearly have the view that the Executive have a responsibility to provide leadership, resources, programmes and so on for the furtherance of T:BUC. How do you say to others out there, including people around this table, that we all have a collective responsibility to tackle the long-standing contentious political issues that are out there and that affect us all? I do not believe for one second that any political party or any Executive can deliver a united community on their own. It requires a lot of other people putting their shoulder to the wheel. Would you like to comment on that? When I heard people who are working at the coalface telling me that they were not sure how to define sectarianism, I could not quite understand that at all. In fact, I do not accept it at all. I am just trying to make the point that, clearly, the Executive have a big responsibility, but so do others. How do we

remind ourselves collectively that others have responsibilities as well, including people out in the community?

**Mrs Foster:** I think a lot of good work has gone on, even at a time when this place was not in particularly good shape, I have to say. I have to pay tribute to the way in which the officials continued to work with very many groups right across Northern Ireland. T:BUC has included the children and young people's part of it and the marvellous work that has already been referenced at the summer camps and, indeed, United Youth, which I know junior Minister Pengelly has been very much involved with. It has also included the advances that have been made on shared communities and urban villages, some of the shared neighbourhoods works, the safe community work and, of course, the cultural expression work. That has all been going on, and sometimes I think we forget about the good work that has been going on because it has been going on quietly on the ground. In the short period I have been in this office, I have had a chance to see some of that good work, and, again, we need to build on and continue what has happened and to look at other opportunities to do more of it. That is where my vision is to try to build on what has been achieved thus far.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I think the Together: Building a United Community strategy is very important for us moving forward, but I come from the school of thought that you can have all the strategies in the world but that, if we are not giving political leadership, we are effectively doing a grave disservice to the most important people of all within our society — our young people. Arlene and I have just come from an event at Mencap, and we were at an event earlier this morning. Everywhere we go, we meet young people, the overwhelming majority of whom are hopeful and optimistic about the future. The number of young people who are involved in negative stuff within our society are few and far between, but there is a huge responsibility on us as political leaders not to undermine the T:BUC programmes by not having the ability to work together to build a better future for the people whom we represent.

Of course, people tried to tear us apart over the last term of the Assembly, whether it be the attempts to kill or the successful attempt to kill two soldiers at Antrim, the killing of police officers, the killing of prison officers, the flag protests or the situation up at Ardoyne. All those situations are reported internationally, and they are bad news stories for us as we try to build a better future for our citizens. I think that we all need to be very conscious of our responsibility to give strong, decisive leadership and to make it clear to those who would try to drag us back to the past that we are not going back to the past. We are committed, even though we have our different ideologies and different allegiances. Our greatest allegiance is one that we can share, and that is to peace. So, we need to ensure that we continue to send out positive messages about our ability to work together. Also, we need to complement that by ensuring that the T:BUC strategy is working at all levels, whether it be the summer camps and the other different ways in the process that we bring young people together, the urban villages, the myriad other issues within T:BUC, which are all good and which, even at this early stage, you can see have been embraced wholeheartedly by everybody who has participated in them.

**Mr Maskey:** Can I just finish off on the second point, which is on victims? You mentioned meeting the victims' forum this morning. There were a lot of issues dealt with on legacy, institutions and so on, but there was a period of difficulty in the Victims and Survivors Service, and there was a lot of focus on trying to get all that rectified. Can you give us a sense of your satisfaction at this moment in time with the services provided to victims?

**Mrs Foster:** I think we always have to be aware that we are dealing with a wide range of groups and individuals. Therefore, it is always a challenge. Can we do things better? Yes, we can always do things better, but the general feeling from those victims that I speak to is that the Victims and Survivors Service has really bedded down now. It has been given an early indication of its budget this year, and I accept that there were difficulties last year in and around the budgetary process and that that caused difficulties for a lot of victims' groups. They have been given the largest ever opening budget line this year, with £14 million. The general sense that I get from the victim sector — I am leading myself out to be very strongly corrected — is that things are moving in the right direction. There is good integration between the Victims' Commissioner, who we had a conversation with this morning, the victims' forum and the Victims and Survivors Service. They are all working together in a very strategic way. They are looking at the strategy today and tomorrow to see what they need to look at and see whether they can do things slightly better. Certainly my sense is that we are on the right road. It has taken us some time to get there, but we are on the right road in the victims and survivor sector.

**Ms Fearon:** In the week that is in it, it would be remiss of me not to mention how great it is to see three strong, smart women. Watch yourself, Martin.

**Mr M McGuinness:** And a weak man.

**Ms Fearon:** Your words. Your Department has the massive responsibility of equality. It would be the sense of some that, while the pace is slow, we are getting there. With that in mind, there are two strategies in particular I want to ask for an update on: the sexual orientation strategy and the racial equality strategy.

**Mrs Foster:** We agreed the racial equality strategy, as you know, before Christmas. We have asked the Departments to send us their racial equality champions for each Department. We are waiting for the feedback on that. So, that is up and running. It is my hope that the sexual orientation strategy will be released before the end of the mandate so that we can have it dealt with because we gave an undertaking that it would be.

**Ms Fearon:** Given the crisis that we have seen over the last number of years and coming to a head this year in Syria and given the Syrian refugees that we have taken in here, what is the latest on the second group that we expect to arrive?

**Mr M McGuinness:** We expect the second group to be around 60-odd people, some of whom are suffering from very traumatic conditions. We expect them to arrive sometime around the beginning of next month. The intention is that they will go to the north-west. We are at a very advanced stage of preparations.

Arlene and I were there to meet the first group when they arrived. Jennifer and Emma were also there, as were several other Ministers. That has gone fantastically well. All in the community and voluntary sector, statutory agencies and Departments weighed in. That has been a very successful integration of those people into our society. The next group will be similarly well-treated with every avenue to ensure that their happiness and peace of mind are dealt with in the next number of weeks.

**Ms Fearon:** Do you think we could do more?

**Mr M McGuinness:** The European Union has been very severely criticised for the very low success rate it has. We are only a tiny percentage of the European Union. From our perspective, we want to take in those groups in a way that means we are not overstretching ourselves and doing a disservice to people who arrive here in big numbers.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Fifty-one Syrians came in before Christmas. In a population of 1.8 million, that could be characterised as not a lot of people. Have you any sense of any additional stress or strain that is putting on the statutory services?

**Mrs Foster:** I am not aware of any particular stress or strain. We have had no alarms bells ring. Obviously, we are under the UK-wide scheme. It is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office scheme. We are part of that scheme, so we have to work within it. We have very close liaison, but I have to say that I was very proud of our statutory agencies and, indeed, all the voluntary agencies that were involved when we went to meet those families.

I think they had arrived just a couple of days when we met them. Even then, we had a sense that they were content. Bear in mind that they had come through a horrific time. Some had been in camps for two years, yet they seem to have fitted in very well. We certainly have not been made aware of any difficulties by the agencies.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I am sure it would have been reported back to us if there had been any difficulties, but there have been no reports whatsoever. That does not surprise me, as we were full of admiration for the people who were there when we met them because they were some of the most compassionate, caring people you could hope to meet. There has been great support from within the community, the statutory agencies and the community and voluntary sector.

You always know when you look at the faces of people whether they feel at home and content. They were a very content group of 51 people with their children. It was really something to be proud of. I think we need to keep being proud of ourselves, and we do that by ensuring that the next group that comes are treated in a similar fashion because of the horrendous and traumatic circumstances they have all come through with war in their country.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I was approached by people who had a view that some of the refugees will have suffered long-term torture and, therefore, need psychological services that are not available in Northern Ireland. I only mention that; I do not have an evidence base, but if you are saying that the next 60 may fall into that category, I ask you simply to have on your radar that there may be specific services that we may need to access.

**Mr M McGuinness:** We absolutely do. We are very conscious of that.

**Mr Attwood:** Thank you very much for attending. I may come back to the previous point in a minute. I want to start with historical abuse and the various scoping reviews.

In March 2013, the then junior Minister Bell acknowledged that it was an issue for persons outside the Hart inquiry. Subsequently, a scoping review commenced in December 2013, and subsequent to that, a further scoping review was undertaken by senior civil servants in September 2014. So, it has been nearly three years since the issue was identified and many, many months.

In junior Minister Pengelly's evidence, she said that one of the reasons why the new scoping exercise was undertaken by the Department of Health was:

*"a lack of data and a lack of information".*

If those reviews had been ongoing for years, why is that, at the end of those scoping reviews, the Committee is being told today that there is a lack of data and information?

**Mrs Foster:** I think that, simply, Alex, more people are coming forward. They have come to me, for example. They have come to my constituency office, and I have been able to signpost them to officials in the Department.

The very specific scoping review is about people who were in mother and baby homes and who are not covered by the inquiry. As you know, the inquiry chairman widened his inquiry to take in some of those people. We want to see who has been left out and how we can deal with them. Where the clerical abuse is concerned, we want to find out what has not been covered by the inquiry to date. In other words, outside institutions, and where there are issues that we need to gather up.

There is no mystery to this. Unfortunately, as the inquiry has developed, more and more has come to the fore. That is the issue.

**Mr Attwood:** I appreciate that, but it has been 27 months since the first scoping review began and 18 months since the second one began. I do not think the issue is a lack of data or information. There may well be more data and information coming on, but, at the conclusion of those scoping reviews, is there some huge gap in data and information, as suggested by junior Minister Pengelly? Surely there must have been much more certainty during the conduct of the two reviews so that, by now, something more definitive could have been done other than referring the matter to the Department of Health.

**Mrs Foster:** I will let junior Minister Pengelly answer for herself because she has been in the Department in another role longer than I have. Rather than trying to close matters down, we are trying to make sure that we cover all bases and do not miss people out. I think that the HIA inquiry has been very inclusive, but, unfortunately, its terms of reference do not reach everybody, and we have to deal with that as a consequence.

We are trying to ensure that we are as inclusive as possible. In doing that, we have more work to do. I know that is frustrating — I am not suggesting that it is not — particularly for the victims and survivors. I accept that.

**Mr Attwood:** It is frustrating for the victims and survivors after such a long time and two reviews. If you speak to the victims and survivors who represent mother and child and clerical abuse, you find that they have very firm figures. They may well be changing because people will inevitably come forward as they are given confidence, but there are figures out there. The point I am making clearly is that, after this length of time, there should have been more decisiveness in what should or should not be done. I do not think that an argument that there is a lack of data is the most compelling argument to present. Could I move on —

**Mrs Foster:** That is fair enough, Alex, but I am saying to you that we are trying to work with the victims to ensure that all the issues are dealt with, rather than, as has happened in the past after thinking that we had set up institutions to deal with something, somebody saying, "Well, actually, I was in another institution. I was abused elsewhere". How do we answer that? We are trying to be comprehensive. I accept that that is frustrating, but, again, I say to you that we did not have normal politics last year — we just did not. Therefore, things that perhaps should have been dealt with were not.

**Mr Attwood:** I will ask you a second question. The deputy First Minister said that, in all probability, the Hart inquiry will bring forward a compensation proposal. I think it is a bit more than a probability; I think that Judge Hart said that he will bring that forward.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Yes, but I do not want to pre-empt the whole —

**Mr Attwood:** Yes, but the principle has been established: he is bringing forward a recommendation. It is not a probability; it is a certainty. Those are his own words. My question arising from that is this: with all due regard and respect to the Hart inquiry and mindful of how long victims and survivors have been waiting, not least in respect of the new scoping reviews, would it not be wise to undertake work now on options for compensation not to prejudice the work of the Hart inquiry but to say to victims and survivors, "For all the delays of the last two or three years and before that, now things are going to move quickly"?

**Mrs Foster:** We are very much aware that some independent work has been done, and —

**Mr Attwood:** It is about to be announced.

**Mrs Foster:** It is about to be announced by Professor Lundy. We, of course, want to see what that entails and involves. We will take receipt of that and give it very due consideration.

**Mr Attwood:** But do you not think —

**Mrs Foster:** This Committee would be the first to come to us if we did a piece of work that was redundant when Judge Hart said, "Well, actually, whatever about all the work you have done, here's what I think should be done". Obviously, we are all aware that there are different models of redress and different ways to deal with the issues. Officials are very much aware of that. However —

**Mr Attwood:** Would it not create some certainty in the minds of victims and survivors —

**Mrs Foster:** I think they have that certainty when they hear what Judge Hart has said in relation to —

**Mr Attwood:** They have heard from Judge Hart, yes, but would it not deepen the certainty if FM and dFM, now or in the Programme for Government — this is the view of the Committee, which was agreed unanimously at last week's meeting — committed to a compensation scheme?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I accept what you are saying. I probably should not have used the word "probability", but the reality is that there is going to be a recommendation for redress. When Anthony Hart makes his recommendations, we will have to take into consideration the following questions: who will he apportion the liability for that redress to? How much of it will fall on the Executive and this Administration? How much of it will fall on other institutions? That is the complicating factor.

**Mr Attwood:** I accept that there are complicating factors, but I think that victims and survivors — this is the view of the Committee — would say that a commitment should be entered into now to scope out what the options are, work those options against the number of people involved and look for an interim scheme, as there was in the rest of Ireland before there was a primary scheme. I ask you to consider that further.

I will ask you a third question. If all the work heretofore has been undertaken by FM and dFM, why is the work now being given to the Health Department on the Magdalene laundries and —

**Mrs Foster:** It is not all being given; it is just leading on it. It is not just the —

**Mr Attwood:** Why are FM and dFM not leading, having led all the way on this? Why is Health now leading on that bespoke piece of work? It seems to be incongruous that FM and dFM have done it all so far but are not doing this piece hereafter.

**Ms J McCann:** First of all, the Safeguarding Board is an arm's-length body of Health. The Safeguarding Board was one of the ones dealing with the clerical abuse. An interdepartmental group has been set up; it is similar to the task force that was set up before the HIA inquiry was set up.

The reason Health is involved is that that is where the Safeguarding Board sits. Obviously, the Safeguarding Board did a piece of work and has the expertise on that, if you remember the issue about young people in care homes. It has the expertise in that regard, so that is why it was felt that the Safeguarding Board was the best place to put that work.

**Mr Attwood:** I hear that argument and am prepared to accept it, but, on the face of it, there appears to be some incongruity.

The Committee also said that, at the end of six months — this is from last week — a paper should go to the Executive and a decision should be taken within two months of that. Is that the sort of time frame that you are working to? A paper comes out within six months, and decisions are made by the Executive two months thereafter. I think that victims and survivors, who were here earlier, want that sense of dynamic and good authority.

**Mrs Foster:** It is right that the Committee take a very close interest in this matter, particularly given the way in which victims have interacted with the Committee. Yes, there is a timescale of six months for the work to be carried out by the Department of Health, and if, for whatever reason, that slips, I think that the Committee needs to be made aware of it so that it can challenge it and ask why it is the case. Yes, it is six months.

**Mr Attwood:** I think that the Committee has a view that is more precise than any slippage being —

**Mrs Foster:** No, I am just saying that if there is it is up to you.

**Mr Attwood:** PFG commitment 38, which is one of 13 OFMDFM commitments, is to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. I have only one question. When the Children's Commissioner was here a few weeks ago — I do not want to put words into her mouth because she would not congratulate me — she was forthright in her views about extending anti-discrimination legislation to persons under 16. I have to say that, throughout the mandate, your officials have been more and more forthcoming to the Committee. I want to acknowledge that because, once or twice, I might give them a bit of a hard time. They have been more forthcoming, and that probably includes some people who are not very far away from you at the moment. It is clear that, whilst papers might not have gone to FM and dFM on this matter so far, the consultation is very strongly in favour of extending the legislation to under 16s. I think that that is the view of one of you. Is it the view now of the other?

**Mrs Foster:** I will wait until the consultation proposals come to me.

**Mr Attwood:** You are First Minister —

**Mrs Foster:** Yes. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Attwood:** The deputy First Minister has always talked about leadership. Is this not a time to say, "Look, we are going to do this"?

**Mrs Foster:** Look, Alex, I have been in this job for two months, and I have been —

**Mr Attwood:** You just said how wonderful young people are, and you are right, so let us treat them as people who are entitled to protection.

**Mrs Foster:** Let us also treat matters with due process, and let us hear what has to be said.

**Mr Attwood:** I will move on from that and ask you another question. I was with Alastair Hamilton this morning; I do not think that I am breaching a confidence. He talked in more affirmative terms about the PFG process. I picked up in one or two places that there is a more coherent process around the PFG, and we will have 14 days afterwards to agree it. Looking at the Scottish example, you will know John Swinney better than I do, and I am sure that you both share my very high opinion of him. He has built a social partnership model into the life of the Scottish Government in respect of the relationship between the Government and the unions. There have been models of that in the South. There was a social partnership model that then went, and there were various other subsequent agreements. Is it not time to build into the PFG a rigorous parallel or integrated process that, among others, involves the unions. Given that the unions and the people whom they represent, especially at the lower-wage level, have, although not exclusively, in many instances carried a very heavy burden because of the pain of austerity, is it not time to have, if not a social partnership model, which is what I would prefer —

**Mr M McGuinness:** Arlene and I met the unions yesterday, and I think that we absolutely agreed on the bringing together of a Programme for Government, and that work will continue over the next couple of months. As you rightly say, in the aftermath of the election, in the 14-day period before Ministers are appointed, there will have to be an agreement and a conclusion to the discussions on the Programme for Government. We see a role for the unions, and we think that it is very important that, on an ongoing basis, we have a much closer working relationship with the trades unions. We have committed ourselves to do that in the time ahead. We also need to remember that we have learned lessons from the Scottish model in how they put their Programme for Government together. Indeed, some of their people have been very proactively involved with us on the work that we are undertaking to put our Programme for Government together.

**Mrs Foster:** Sir John Eldridge has been involved in the process, and that is working very well. Martin is right: we had a very good meeting with a wide range of trades unionists yesterday, but you are also right that there are many others that we need to engage with, and we are doing that. I have always said that Government do not have all the wisdom; we listen carefully to what is being said outside. Indeed, on one occasion over the past 12 months, the unions brought forward a solution for dealing with a budgetary problem that worked very well for us. We will engage with them in the future, as, indeed, we will engage with the business community and the voluntary sector as well.

**Mr Attwood:** My experience in Government was that you got answers from the unions; they were tough with you, but you got answers. I am arguing not so much for a relationship but for something formalised and institutionalised. Moreover, it is also my view, for what it is worth, that, until we bring the external world into the life of Government and populate Departments, whatever sectors they may be — poverty, human rights, business, trades unions — you will not have a fully dynamic Government.

In the answer that you gave to Megan you confirmed where you are on the racial equality and sexual orientation strategies, but you did not say anything — you were not asked — about the anti-poverty strategy. Nine months since the High Court judicial review and poverty is deepening because of welfare, among other factors. Child poverty figures could be, in real terms, above 30%, and, at the end of this mandate, we will not have an anti-poverty strategy. The figures are acute and critical. Do you regret not having that in place as we end the mandate?

**Mrs Foster:** Jennifer will bring you up to date on where we are. We are complying with the judgement of the court. As you know, we believed, as a Department, that the anti-poverty strategy was being dealt with through the framework approach that we had taken. The court decided otherwise, and we have to accept that that is the case. That being so, officials have been working very hard to bring forward proposals on the anti-poverty strategy, and Jennifer can bring you up to date as to where we are.

**Mr Attwood:** Before Jennifer comes in, do you regret that, at the end of this mandate, after five years, there is no anti-poverty strategy in place?

**Mrs Foster:** As I said, Alex, we took the view that we were dealing with the anti-poverty strategy through another mechanism. The court took a different view. It is not as if we were not dealing with those issues. I always take the view, and you have heard me say it before, that it is not about the strategies; it is about the interventions and the actions that we take to deal with the issues. If you are asking me whether I accept that we have not been tackling poverty, we have been tackling poverty through a wide range of programmes. That is the important issue, but Jennifer will bring you up to date with the strategy.

**Ms J McCann:** An anti-poverty strategy based on objective need was what the court said, and that is what we are working towards. Officials have been engaging. Any strategy that we have is only as good as the paper it is written on unless there is delivery at the other end of it. Moreover, when devising a strategy, whether the racial equality or gender equality or any other strategy, it is important that we have a new way of working and that we have consultation first. We have had a number of consultations on the gender equality strategy, the racial equality strategy, and the anti-ageing strategy — the active ageing strategy. If there was an anti-ageing strategy, it would be OK. *[Laughter.]*

**Mrs Foster:** I would like that; I am all for the anti-ageing strategy. *[Laughter.]*

**Ms J McCann:** I always call it that. We have to engage because it is clear that we need to reflect the concerns of those who brought forward the judicial review in the first place. There is a robust opinion out there about objective need, and the anti-poverty strategy needs to be based on objective need, as people have said. So, our officials are now engaging with the stakeholders to bring that piece of work forward.

**Mr M McGuinness:** You probably know better than most that this is a Department completely different from all other Departments, where you have to get agreement on how to take things forward. We do not always get agreement, although we do on most things. However, you have identified one of the issues on which there was a difference of opinion.

**Mr Attwood:** Was it not your position, deputy First Minister, that the Programme for Government was the anti-poverty strategy? Those were the instructions that you gave your barristers in the judicial review. Therefore, whilst there may be difference, you gave the same instructions to the barrister.

**Mrs Foster:** To be clear, there is no disagreement about our bringing forward an anti-poverty strategy. That is exactly what we are doing.

**Mr Attwood:** The real reason that I highlighted it is that I think that there is a catastrophic situation arising in respect of child poverty. If you read any of the narrative about poverty groups in Britain and the welfare changes that there have been and that are yet to come, you will see that there will be even more on the far side of the Bill that is going through Westminster at the moment that we are now subject to in respect of social security provisions. That was the flavour of the evidence given by the Children's Commissioner when she was here a couple of weeks ago. I will ask two very quick questions.

**Mr Lyons:** Quick? You?

**Mrs Foster:** It is all relative.

**Mr Attwood:** I have speeded up remarkably in the last while, I think. *[Laughter.]*

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** All those in favour —

**Mr Lyons:** It just shows you how bad you were.

**Mr Attwood:** That could be true as well. I will get this over the line very quickly.

I have to say to you, First Minister, that I think that it is a very benign interpretation that, when you read the report that came out from the University of Ulster today in respect of corporation tax, it made the important point that economic circumstances are very important for the benefit of corporation tax to accrue and that, somehow, economic circumstances around in or out of the European Union do not have an impact here and, very possibly, a disproportionate impact here, given that we are on the margins of Europe and given the economic circumstances that we face here. I think that it is very benign to say, "It'll be OK on the night".

**Mrs Foster:** That is not what I said, Alex. As you well know, Invest Northern Ireland and I went on many trade missions, but we spent very little of our time in Europe. We spent most of our time in new and emerging markets, as that is where the focus is, and that is where we are right to focus. The deputy First Minister and I do not agree on the way forward on the European Union. We have to reflect the fact that we all have differing views. However, this is a referendum, and people, not parties,

will make the decision. So, everyone will have to make their own determination as to what is best for Northern Ireland and, importantly, for the United Kingdom in the future. I have made my determination, and the deputy First Minister has made his, known, and we now deal with that.

**Mr M McGuinness:** We all recognise that the debate over the next number of months will be mostly an economic one. For us, it is probably fortunate that it will not be fought along nationalist/republican/unionist lines. So, as Arlene said, right across the parties, there will be different views. Everybody awaits that debate with considerable interest.

The complicating factor for us is that it is coming in the middle of an Assembly election campaign, and, as the Committee will know, Arlene and I wrote jointly with the First Minister of Scotland and the First Minister of Wales to ask the Prime Minister not to have it in such close proximity to the Assembly elections, but he disregarded the three Administrations and went ahead. That presents a problem for us with the Assembly elections.

**Mr Attwood:** Can I just finish then with two questions to the deputy First Minister?

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** It was two a minute ago.

**Mr Attwood:** It is a double-header. The first is that the media have concentrated on the question on national security that there should be no rock under which anything should be hidden, and the Victims' Commissioner said this morning in the same interview that there should be no excuse for not cooperating with the HIU and the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR). The fact that she made both points was very important because, whilst many issues are still to be resolved in the legacy negotiations, those are two — cooperation with the ICIR and, generally, by people in state and non-state organisations, and also the issue of national security. Do you agree?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I absolutely agree with the negotiation that we all went through to establish the mechanisms and structures. The purpose was not to have them sitting like ivory towers, not being used by the public. I think that the public will use them, and there will be a duty and responsibility to cooperate with those mechanisms and structures on everybody who can assist victims in search of the truth. I encourage people to do that.

**Mr Attwood:** Beyond encouragement, in order to create certainty for victims and survivors about an ICIR process that is proposed to be voluntary, do you accept that principles should be established now placing an obligation on anyone with information to respond to requests by families through the ICIR? It would go beyond encouragement to give a level of certainty so that victims and survivors would get some information that might hopefully help to bring a sense of healing or closure to them.

**Mr M McGuinness:** It is about working out the balance between its being a voluntary process and one that compels people. I presume that that is what you are hinting at?

**Mr Attwood:** A hybrid.

**Mr M McGuinness:** A hybrid could work against relatives wishing to access ICIR to gain the truth about what happened to their loved one.

**Mr Attwood:** Finally, you do not have to respond, Martin, but —

**Mr M McGuinness:** But you are going to ask it anyway.

**Mr Attwood:** I am. Do you think that your reference to the economy in the North being in a healthy enough place was a variation on the political slogan, "Recovery is working for you"?

**Mr M McGuinness:** That is a silly comment. When I was asked about the state of SMEs, I made reference to what was happening in my own constituency — that I thought that SMEs and others in the business community recognised that we were coming out of the downturn but that there was still a long way to go. You have misrepresented what I said —

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thank you very much.

**Mr M McGuinness:** — and, I presume, quite deliberately.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** We move on to the Deputy Chair, Chris Lyttle.

**Mr Lyttle:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks very much for your comments so far, Ministers. It is genuinely good to see you here, and I think that that is reflected in the wide range of questions that have come forward. In fairness to the Department, you have an extremely wide portfolio. I will try my best not to do an "Attwood" and will be as concise as I can with my questions. *[Laughter.]* I mean that as affectionately as possible, Alex.

I start by agreeing with the First Minister that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see devolved government work. Peter Robinson said that this mandate had to be judged by delivery, so whilst ongoing stability is, of course, to be welcomed, we need to see progress. We have seen some. As one who is passionate about community relations, I am glad to see that we have a community relations strategy in place, and although my party is on record regarding the perceived inadequacy of it, there is a strategy in place. There are an additional 40,000 people in work since 2010, and we have seen the devolution of policing and justice, which has brought more and more people to support those issues in Northern Ireland and has further isolated those who seek to destabilise us. We recently had the good news that Belfast is the best UK city, according to 'The Guardian' travel awards, and that is something to be positive about. For many, though, the pace of progress is too slow, and there are issues that need to be addressed.

Let us look at some of the PFG targets in that respect. The target for the childcare strategy, PFG commitment 33, stated that a childcare strategy with key actions was to have been published and implemented by 2015 and to have achieved expenditure of what, I think, was a £12 million Budget. I understand that we are close, but the childcare strategy has not yet been published, and about £4 million of the £12 million was spent; also, 2,000 childcare places out of a targeted 7,000 have been achieved. Could you update us on why that target has not progressed faster?

**Ms J McCann:** First, you are right that the childcare strategy will be out soon. On Bright Start, you mentioned a figure of £4 million. However, the figure actually spent is £4.2 million, with a further £3 million profiled up to 2018-19, and that is before the strategy is out. We believe that the figure will rise substantially once the strategy has been published.

I had meetings with you on this, Chris. We looked at bringing Bright Start childcare first actions forward. It was school-age childcare, from four to 14, that seemed to have the biggest gap, so that is what our 2015 first actions would look at, including creating places for the social economy sector, rural childcare for children with disabilities, and extra places in that. Our strategy was to sustain or create 5,000, as you said, and 7,000 school-age childcare places, so between those two, with the day-care settings, there are 3,000 in disadvantaged areas, 2,000 to 3,000 in new schemes in the schools estate, and 1,000 in rural areas. That is a big piece of work to undertake with no strategy.

When I am out and about, I regularly visit childcare settings and provision and there are issues that we will need to look at around the 25% in disadvantaged areas, for example. With the spend of £4.2 million, and the other £3 million being profiled, we are seeing it being rolled out. It is not perfect; we would rather have more money so that we could have a childcare place for every child who needs it. However, we are doing two things: providing childcare for working parents who need it, and also providing it for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who live in deprived areas, to help their development. The earlier a child goes into a play environment or a childcare setting with other children, the better their potential future lifetime opportunities and the earlier they can get on the ladder. It helps them to realise their potential, their talents and their skills; that is all part of the childcare strategy that we are rolling out. We are looking at all different aspects of it.

While some people have criticised us for being slow to date, I think that what we have achieved is positive. We will also be releasing the Bright Start Through Health summer scheme in the next few weeks for children with disabilities, so that has all quickened in pace. We are moving forward, and we are doing what we said we would in the draft strategy.

**Mr Lyttle:** OK. Will you work to ensure that robust, updated targets are in place in the next Programme for Government for childcare strategy?

**Ms J McCann:** Certainly. Childcare is a priority in every Department and for every party in the Executive. It is an Executive strategy, and we are keen to see it maintained as a priority. I have no

influence on what goes into the Programme for Government, but there is definitely a commitment from Ministers to treat it as a priority.

**Mr Lyttle:** Do you have any influence on the budget that will be allocated for childcare in the years ahead? We hear that, to roll out the childcare strategy, significant budgets of approximately £3 million per year will be required. What work is being done to ensure that there is an adequate budget in place, given that, as you said, in the family bills childcare is second only to the mortgage for most people?

**Ms J McCann:** I totally agree. When we looked at Delivering Social Change, we put £12 million aside for childcare and for the strategy going forward. You rightly said that childcare costs a substantial amount of money for parents who are working. We want to make sure that all parents are looked after and that affordable quality childcare is there for the parents who need it. The key issue is that it is affordable, but it is also important to a child's development. We also have to recognise the fact that some children, for whatever reason, need that provision. That is why we are looking to complement the social economy sector and why the social economy sector was one of the first places that we looked at.

Again, there is a gap in childcare in areas of deprivation and disadvantage, including in the rural community and for children with disabilities. We were trying to identify the gaps and put in money where it was needed.

**Mr Lyttle:** Obviously, it is extremely important to target areas of social need. It is welcome that there is some support for private provision in the next strategy. Private providers whom I spoke to and worked with would ask the Executive to keep in mind the increase in the living wage and how that will affect their costs. They are also keen to hear whether a potential increase in free childcare in GB will have a Barnett consequential in Northern Ireland or whether a similar policy will be brought in here. Will you bear that in mind?

I will move on from children and young people to older people. Many Ministers engage strongly with the Pensioners Parliament, and I was privileged to be at it again yesterday. You covered anti-age discrimination legislation to a certain extent. Given the strength of the consultation and the evidence that we received that the legitimate exemptions that are needed for children can be delivered, why was it not possible to deliver that legislation with the inclusion of all ages prior to the end of this mandate?

**Ms J McCann:** From the previous discussion, you will be aware that there was a difference of opinion on that policy. Nobody around this table is under any illusion that there was a difference of opinion. Also, the wider community knew that there was a difference of opinion. The compromise that we were looking at was for it to apply to over-16s, but, when we went out to consultation, there were, as you said, challenging recommendations from people who represent the younger people's sector. The issue went to the Equality Commission. You will be aware that the Children's Commissioner and the Children's Law Centre approached the Equality Commission, and we await the outcome of that. That is the reason.

**Mr Lyttle:** Can the issue be progressed promptly in the new mandate?

**Mr M McGuinness:** We have to continue to work on that. Obviously, it is another issue on which there are different views. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but we have continually to seek to reach as much agreement as we possibly can.

**Mr Lyttle:** Another issue for older people is fuel poverty. A fairly stark statistic shows that, in the winter of 2012-13, 550 people aged 65 and older died from cold-related illnesses. Another issue that was raised at the Pensioners Parliament was the warm homes discount scheme. That scheme is, in effect, a credit of £11 or £12 a month on energy bills, which could save older people on pension credit in the region of £140 per annum. The scheme applies in GB but not in Northern Ireland. Can that scheme be applied to Northern Ireland?

**Mrs Foster:** It would be for DETI's energy division to have engagements with the power companies and all stakeholders. The scheme has never been introduced here, and, when there was discussion about it across the water, a wide range of Members of Parliament wrote to us about it, even though it would not apply here. We have a different way of levying. There is another levy that comes out by

way of renewables support. The figures that you quote on fuel poverty are for 2012-13. The price of oil has reduced considerably since then, which, we hope, will have an impact on the figures. We will, however, continue to engage with all the bodies that represent pensioners, not least the Pensioners Parliament. You said that you engage with them, and I am sure that they engage with you very vociferously. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Lyttle:** They did indeed.

**Mrs Foster:** They are good advocates for their cause, and we will continue to engage with them.

**Mr Lyttle:** Historical institutional abuse has been covered, so I will try to focus my remarks. Can OFMDFM give any commitment to equity for victims of clerical abuse in mother-and-baby homes? If the working groups recommend inquiries, can they be given the same level of equity as the ongoing historical institutional abuse inquiry?

**Mrs Foster:** There are an awful lot of "ifs" in that question, Chris.

**Mr Lyttle:** There are.

**Mrs Foster:** We have to wait. That is not a phrase that people like, but we need to give people the space to do the work and bring it back to us.

**Mr M McGuinness:** We will then consider carefully how we take it forward.

**Mr Lyttle:** OK.

You mentioned social investment in your responses. As a member of the steering group, I know that people raised concerns about access to information. Will the First Minister and deputy First Minister give assurances that all appropriate governance and economic appraisal processes are being followed and that funding allocations are being made purely on the basis of the quality of projects and their ability to deliver outcomes?

**Mrs Foster:** Absolutely. Some of them have taken a little longer because we had to keep going back to get economic appraisals and bring them to the economists. That has caused a great deal of frustration, and the Committee has been critical of the speed at which the money has been able to get out. However, if we do not comply with proper governance and accountability, there are consequences, and our officials are very much aware of that. It is frustrating, and the process has been slow, but it is starting to make a difference. I can see that in my region as well as across Northern Ireland.

**Mr Lyttle:** Do you see there being significant rapid progress in the next mandate, given the delays to date?

**Mrs Foster:** At the end of February, the amount attributed to programmes and capital funds was around £61 million. That should rise to at least £70 million by the end of March. There will then be a delivery process, and we hope that that will happen very quickly.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** If I read the latest briefing from the Department correctly, the £80 million will be spent by the financial year 2019-2020.

**Mr M McGuinness:** No. We expect to have the £80 million allocated to SIF committed by the end of the summer 2016.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** The question was about spend not money allocated.

**Mrs Foster:** Yes.

**Mr M McGuinness:** That will be down to the ability to process all that, consistent with the priorities that the advisory groups pose.

We all have to recognise that this is a new and innovative scheme that will make a huge difference to communities all over the North. Given that we accept that there were unfortunate delays with a view to getting things right and ensuring that the money was being properly spent and not going awry, we can learn lessons from this first experiment and, if we agree that the process should continue, apply them to future schemes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Your briefing states:

*"SIF will be extended beyond the current Programme for Government period. All projects are expected to be operational by 2019/2020".*

**Mrs Foster:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** So the money will be on the ground.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Absolutely.

**Mrs Foster:** As you know, when programmes start, there is usually not a big spend in year 1. In year 2, there is usually a bigger spend, and, after that, the amount spent goes down again. It will be on the ground by 2019-2020.

**Mr Lyttle:** I have only a few more questions. This may technically come under the remit of Fresh Start rather than OFMDFM, but is it possible to provide an update on a strategy for tackling all manifestations of paramilitarism in our society?

**Mrs Foster:** Yes. We had a good engagement with the panel recently. We, or whoever is in this office, hope to have its report by the end of May. The panel is engaging widely and gathering information. I have every confidence that it will deliver the report in that time.

**Mr M McGuinness:** We met the panel. It is a good panel, and it is focused on what needs to be done. They are people with a wide range of experience of the situation in the North. I am impressed not only by the way they presented their initial work to us but by the wide range of people and stakeholders they are engaging with.

**Mr Lyttle:** Will it be a priority for the Executive Office in the next mandate to ask for new resource?

**Mr M McGuinness:** It has to be a priority for all of us. The only reason why these institutions stayed together over the last mandate and for several years previously, particularly since the killing of the two soldiers in 2009 in Antrim, was the ability of all political parties in the Executive to stay together and send a clear message to those on the extremes of wherever that we will not tolerate, under any circumstances, the bringing down of these institutions or the continuing criminal activity that they have been involved in over that period.

**Mr Lyttle:** That will be welcomed by the vast majority of people.

There are a number of current negotiation processes. There are plans to establish a flags commission. Is it possible to provide an update on that? The flags protocol has, I think, been under review for some years. Do you see a robust system coming forward to allow us to deal with the removal of paramilitary flags and a protocol or regulation for unofficial displays of flags?

**Mrs Foster:** We advertised for independent members and received 135 applications. That process has now closed. We wrote to the political parties for their nominees, and I understand that we received two. I think that we are still awaiting the SDLP's nomination. That is progressing well, and we hope to have that flags commission in place in the appropriate time.

**Mr Lyttle:** We are where we are with ministerial attendance and engagement with the Committee on this occasion. I wrote to the office to ask whether it thought that quarterly attendance by Ministers would be possible given that, as far as I am aware, there are quarterly senior civil servant updates on the Programme for Government. The Committee discussed what it thought would be a more constructive frequency of attendance and engagement. Do you have your own ideas of what is a fair

expectation in a Committee session? Is it quarterly, or is it once a session? That is a genuine question.

**Mrs Foster:** That is a matter for the new First Minister and deputy First Minister. I would welcome the opportunity to come as regularly as is efficient and effective. There is no point in our coming to the Committee for the sake of it. At the same time, if there are genuine questions and genuine information needs to be imparted, I have no difficulty, if I am in that office, with coming to the Committee regularly.

**Mr M McGuinness:** We can have a discussion about that. I hold the same view as the First Minister in that I have no difficulty whatsoever coming here at whatever regularity people require.

**Mrs Foster:** We should get into a more regular pace in the new mandate and start off as we mean to go on.

**Mr M McGuinness:** All that is in the hands of the electorate, folks.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** It certainly is.

**Mr Lyttle:** It is, indeed. Hopefully, we displayed to you today that there are substantive issues on which we want to engage with you. As you say, it will be for the next Committee and the next set of Ministers to continue that, but, hopefully, we have set the tone for the next mandate.

**Mr Hazzard:** Thanks, Ministers, for the answers thus far. Will you update us on the gender equality strategy, specifically on issues relating to the past and legacy issues? At this Committee in recent months, officials from the VSS remarked that they probably did not pay enough deference to gender analysis and a gender lens in dealing with the past. To what extent will legacy issues be part of the gender equality strategy?

**Mrs Foster:** It is good that you ask that, because, just this morning, the commissioner referred to gender issues in dealing with the past. Obviously, it is on the agenda for the commission and the victims' forum, which have started to think about those issues as well. We should give consideration to that in the gender strategy. Jennifer, do you know precisely where we are?

**Ms J McCann:** As you know, a draft gender equality strategy has been published, and consultation comments are now coming back. I was at a meeting of the gender advisory panel in Cookstown about two or three weeks ago, which was attended by more than just the panel members. There was a sense of engagement, and officials are engaging robustly with the sector. When it comes to the gender principles, a group has been set up in the wake of criticism about dealing with the past with a specific gender lens. Women were impacted because most of the people who were killed during the conflict were men, so, obviously, there were partners, mothers and sisters. The group felt that that needed to be looked at. There have been a number of meetings; I attended one meeting, and most of the negotiators who were involved in dealing with the past were there. They were looking to take that forward and hoped that all parties would take on board the pamphlet that they published on the gender principles and dealing with the legacy of the past. People had also factored that in with officials, and it is part of the engagement process. They met those people as well. Whatever is coming out of those engagements is being looked at as part of taking the final strategy forward.

**Mr M McGuinness:** There was a very important book launch in Derry the other night, which was organised by Creggan Enterprises. The book contains the stories of women who lost loved ones as a result of the conflict and how that had impacted on them and their families. The book is from the perspective of women. It is free of charge, I am told, so it is an important book to read for everybody who is concerned about gender equality and how that impacted on legacy issues.

**Mr Hazzard:** What success have we had in achieving more diversity in public appointments over the last four or five years? I am thinking of transgender issues. How do we make sure that our public appointments process ensures more diversity?

**Mr M McGuinness:** There is an acceptance that there is not enough diversity. Yesterday, Arlene and I met Judena Leslie, the new public appointments commissioner. Within a very short period of taking over that office, she made an important speech that identified how poor we are at the representation of diverse communities in our public appointments. We take that very seriously indeed. It is absolutely crucial that we get proper representation right across society on public boards.

We have lessons to learn in the Assembly as well, and the Speaker, Mitchel McLaughlin, introduced a good initiative yesterday to establish a women's caucus here. We were privileged to be at the launch of the caucus last night. Caitríona Ruane is the chair of the caucus, and Paula Bradley is the vice-chair. It is one of the best Assembly initiatives to begin a discussion on equality for women and how we can get more women into the Assembly. In the aftermath of the Assembly elections, the hope is that more women will be represented on the Benches. There is a big job of work to be done, and we have the right person in Judena Leslie. She is very focused on what she needs to do, and she will absolutely do it with our full support.

**Mrs Foster:** It is interesting. I went along to the Speaker's lunch today for current and past female Members. It was good to see colleagues from the past. An interesting statistic was read out that there are no females here from the first mandate and that, from the 2003 mandate, there are only three females, whilst the men have stayed on for longer and have progressed more into leadership and ministerial positions. The three females who were here in 2003 and are still here are Caitríona Ruane, Dolores Kelly and me. That gives you an indication that not only do we need to bring more women into Stormont but we need to sustain them in Stormont so that they stay and continue to move ahead. That is important.

**Mr Hazzard:** Finally, Chair, the Education Minister appeared before the Education Committee this morning. We talked about budgets and the Programme for Government and so on. As we discussed earlier, it is a very difficult economic situation. There will be public spending limits, as there always have been over the last few years. Even to stand still, the Department of Health requires an uplift of about 6% in its budget, and the Department of Education could do with about 3%. At different points today, you mentioned the need to be innovative and to work not only with the community and private sector but with the social sector. What innovative thinking do you have in mind? The Executive succeeded in breaking their targets for the drawdown of European funding over the last five years. Where is the potential to do this so that we can afford to give Education and Health that sort of uplift so that we can have the services that we need?

**Mrs Foster:** It is about doing things differently. The first thing that we are doing differently is setting the Programme for Government on an outcomes basis, and that will mean, as I said in my opening remarks, that education does not just belong to the Education Minister. It will belong across government, as will health. The Health Minister is working on reform by trying to get buy-in from everybody, and I think that that is the way forward. We will be interested to see what comes out of that work. It is about collaborating, being more innovative and using resources in a different way. That is a challenge. I accept that because, naturally, people do not like change. They like to keep going in the way that they are going, but, if they can see that it gives them a better outcome, they will buy into it, and that is what we need to do.

**Mr Frew:** Thank you very much for your attendance. You have been here for a long time, which I really appreciate because you are all very busy people. I promise that I will be brief.

At the end of my first full mandate in this place, I can say that there are frustrations about the pace of change and cogs turning slowly, and some Ministers are not making hard decisions when such decisions should be made. In my time as Chairman of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, I saw at first hand, First Minister, your work at DETI, working alongside the Agriculture Minister to produce the Going for Growth strategy. To me, that is very successful work, and the Executive published their response in 2014. With that comes hope. The Fresh Start Agreement comes with hope, and we have already managed a reduction in Ministries, which, hopefully, will go some way to making government more streamlined. What are your hopes, Minister, for the future? Now that you are in the position that you are in and with all your experience of ministerial life, what are your hopes for the new mandate as First Minister?

**Mrs Foster:** I said at the beginning that, if we were to engage better with the community that we serve, we had to recognise that we are public servants and are here because of the will of the people. Therefore, we have to listen to what they want us to do in government office. We will have to take hard decisions that not everyone will agree with, and it is important that we take those decisions so that, whilst people may not understand why, they at least respect the fact that we had to take those tough decisions. My hopes for the next mandate are that we continue on the path that we have now set out in 'A Fresh Start'; that we have Budget sustainability; that we deal with the issues of the past, including returning to the very difficult legacy issues; and that we have in place the structures and resources to deal with the residue of paramilitaries and criminality so that the young people whom we

see when we visit schools, who have no knowledge of what happened in the past — thank goodness — can be as hopeful about and proud of this place as I am.

**Mr M McGuinness:** The Fresh Start Agreement is critical for all of us moving forward. It really has to be a fresh start. We have got off to a good start and are utterly determined to keep that going, because it is the only thing that works for us. If we are divided and cannot find consensus on major issues, such as how to develop our economy, how to get our education system right and how to ensure a proper health service for our people, it comes back to us because it is our responsibility. We all accept that we have just come out of a pretty bad two or three years, but we are in a far better place at the moment.

You mentioned the Going for Growth strategy. I talked earlier about the fact that there were more people in manufacturing now than there were in 2008. Going for Growth is absolutely critical to getting even more people into manufacturing and increasing our exports. We have quality products. Of course, the ETI and Agriculture Ministers have projected thousands of new jobs in the agrifood industry by 2020. We need to recognise that, in the next mandate, we have a wonderful opportunity to move forward decisively and tackle all the vital issues that our people depend on their politicians to take decisions on and to improve their lives in a way that gives them and their children the best prospect of reaching their full potential.

**Mr Frew:** The mindset of individual MLAs is still that they must fight for their constituents and their constituency, whether it be North Antrim, Fermanagh or wherever, but we see clearly that you reduce poverty by creating jobs. You do not need an anti-poverty strategy to create jobs and reduce poverty. Tourism in North Antrim, for example, can be increased by opening the Gobbins path in East Antrim. Some MLAs and maybe even Ministers still think in silos. Do you see evidence of that breaking down as we mature as an institution? Does that bring hope for the future as well?

**Mr M McGuinness:** We have all agreed that the Programme for Government for the next mandate will be agreed against the backdrop of none of the parties knowing which Department they will have under their control. Therefore, the scene is set prior to the running of d'Hondt and parties taking up their ministerial positions. I absolutely think that the more we break out of the silo mentality, the better it is for all of us, and the more we recognise that, the more we can contribute to improving the lives of our people in a very dynamic way.

MLAs will always fight their constituents' corner, which is only right — that is what they are expected to do. However, in the grand scheme of things, when Ministers have their departmental responsibilities, the fact that they will have a Programme for Government that is based on outcomes and has been set before they take up their ministerial position goes a long way towards breaking down that silo mentality.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I have three points, if I may, to finish. The first is just for clarification, First Minister. I think that you said that you wanted the sexual orientation strategy released by the end of the mandate.

**Mrs Foster:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is that for consultation?

**Mrs Foster:** Has it not been consulted on?

**Ms J McCann:** There has been a consultation period.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is there is a second consultation?

**Ms J McCann:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Will it be out?

**Mrs Foster:** Yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Secondly, the briefing says:

*"There is no current agreement on MLK. Ministers continue to discuss a way forward."*

Is there anything that you can say publicly?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Yes. We continue to discuss a way forward, but, to be totally frank, I do not think that there will be a public exposition of that on this side of the Assembly election. I am much more optimistic about that happening on the other side of the election.

**Mrs Foster:** We want to see the economic development of that huge site, but you, Chair, in particular, will be aware of the political sensitivities, as are we. We must and will continue to bear those in mind, whether that is before or after the election, because we want to ensure that everyone is respected in what happens on that site.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Finally, this question may be more for the Department for Social Development, but is there any intention to bring the Crumlin Road Courthouse back into public ownership and link it with the fantastic development on the far side of the road?

**Mrs Foster:** There have been discussions with the Department for Social Development. I am not sure where those discussions are at present. You are right that the fabulous development across the road makes it difficult to look at that old courthouse, which I appeared in — I know that I look too young, but there you go — just before it closed.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Did you get off? *[Laughter.]*

**Mrs Foster:** I would very much like the matter to be dealt with, but you are right that it is a question for the Department for Social Development.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I think, though, that all of us accept that, if it is possible to bring that under public as opposed to private control, there could be a linkage with the prison and its phenomenal success in attracting visitors. Huge numbers of tourists go there, and a huge number of events are held there. The ability to walk through the underground tunnel, come up on the other side in the courthouse and stand in the dock to take photographs would, as somebody said to me when we visited, be a North American tourist's dream. I think that the building could be put to much more use than that, but that could also be accommodated.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Once again, on behalf of the Committee, thank you very much for giving us over two hours. We appreciate your time.