



Official Report (Hansard)

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Wednesday 3 August 2022

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (The Acting Speaker in the Chair).

Assembly Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Before we proceed with today's business, I wish to advise the Assembly that the Speaker has received correspondence from Mr Roy Beggs advising of his resignation as Deputy Speaker with effect from 1 June 2022. I think that the House will join me in placing on record our appreciation for Mr Beggs's service in that position.

I also wish to clarify a number of matters in respect of today's sitting. Members will be aware that, initially, the Speaker summoned the Assembly to meet on 26 July in the Senate Chamber to discuss today's business, but he subsequently postponed the sitting to allow arrangements to be made to pay our tributes to Lord Trimble of Lisnagarvey in the Assembly Chamber yesterday. As a result, we are able to hold today's proceedings in the Chamber. I remind Members that Standing Orders make temporary provision for proxy voting arrangements in hybrid proceedings until the end of July 2022. As a result, proxy voting arrangements and remote participation are not in place either today or for future sittings unless that is otherwise agreed by the Assembly at a later date. If that is clear, let us move on.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. Arising from your announcement of the resignation of Mr Roy Beggs — I salute his service to the House — has any other Member who was not returned as a Member of the House resigned from offices that they continued to hold, for example, on the Commission? If they continue to hold those offices, are they continuing to be paid?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): As Acting Speaker, my responsibility is limited to overseeing the election of a Speaker today. Points of order that relate to any other matters should be raised with the Speaker through the Speaker's Office.

Having been given notice by not fewer than 30 Members under Standing Order 11, the Speaker has summoned the Assembly to meet today for the purpose of conducting the items of business that appear in the Order Paper.

Election of Speaker and Deputy Speakers

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Section 39(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides:

"Each Assembly shall as its first business elect from among its members a Presiding Officer and deputies."

Therefore, the Assembly cannot conduct any further business until a Speaker and at least two Deputy Speakers have been elected. Members should be clear: without the election of a Speaker and two Deputy Speakers, no further business can proceed. I advise Members that the election of the Speaker will be conducted under the procedures set out in Standing Order 4. Further to Standing Order 4(8), I am the Acting Speaker today for the purpose of electing a Speaker.

I will begin by asking for nominations. Any Member may rise to propose that another Member be elected as Speaker. I will then ask for the proposal to be seconded by another Member, as required by Standing Order 14. I will then verify that the Member seconded is willing to accept the nomination. I will then ask for further proposals and follow the same procedure for each. When it appears that there are no further proposals, I will make it clear that the time for proposals has passed. If Members indicate that they wish to speak, a debate relevant to the election may then take place during which Members will have up to five minutes to speak.

At the conclusion of the debate or the conclusion of the nominations, if there are no requests to speak, I shall put the Question that the Member first proposed shall be Speaker of the Assembly. The vote will be on a cross-

community basis. If the proposal is not carried, I shall put the Question in relation to the next nominee and so on until all nominations are exhausted. Once a Speaker is elected, all other nominations will fall automatically.

Do I have proposals for the office of Speaker of the Assembly?

Mr Beattie: I nominate the Member for Strangford, Mike Nesbitt MLA.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Thank you. Do we have a seconder for that nomination?

Mr Butler: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Does Mr Nesbitt accept the nomination?

Mr Nesbitt: I do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Thank you. Do we have any other proposals?

Mr O'Toole: I nominate Mr Patsy McGlone MLA for the post of Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Thank you. Do we have a seconder for Mr McGlone?

Ms McLaughlin: I second that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Mr McGlone, do you accept the nomination?

Mr McGlone: Glacaim leis, a Cheann Comhairle. [*Translation: I accept, Mr Speaker.*] I accept.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Are there any other proposals?

The time for proposals has expired.

A number of Members have indicated that they wish to speak. I remind Members that they may speak only once in the debate. Members have up to five minutes in which to speak.

Mrs O'Neill: Today marks 90 days since the Assembly election was held, where the public voted for change and gave all the parties represented in the Chamber a mandate to form a Government and to set a Budget to give workers and families a break. The DUP, through its continued boycott of the institutions and its failure to accept the democratic outcome

of the election, is denying the public the representation to which they are entitled and that they deserve. It is wholly unacceptable, it is untenable and it cannot continue. The Good Friday Agreement is the governing constitutional framework under which this part of the world operates. It is the rule book, if you like. It must therefore be fully applied and upheld. This is a test of power-sharing and equality for the DUP.

The majority of newly elected MLAs and Assembly parties want to come together and want to make politics work so that we can deliver for all the people across the community. We need to elect a Speaker and restore the Assembly. We need to form a Government, and we need to set a Budget to deliver public services. We need to provide financial support to households, fund our health service and cut waiting lists, which, at this moment, leave tens of thousands of people crippled in pain as they await treatment and surgery. Those essential public services are being constantly undermined and severely hampered because of the actions of the DUP.

I listened to Jeffrey Donaldson on the radio this morning talk about how things are all fine and dandy, everything is great in Departments and they have budgets with which to do the business. That is not true. The fact is that budgets are becoming increasingly untenable. Departments face increasing financial pressure in delivering public services as a result of the significant rise in energy costs, coupled with the need to respond to the cost-of-living crisis that faces households and businesses.

The DUP is the only party — the only party — that is blocking and preventing the Executive being formed and meeting, which would allow us to distribute money to help workers and families, so let me say this to you, even at this late hour: workers need help, families need help and businesses need help, and you continue to punish the public whom we are elected to serve by your continued refusal to govern with the rest of us. All your actions will not wash away the protocol. The British Government legislating to renounce the protocol will not wash away the international rule of law. The reckless approach of the DUP and of the Tories in London is all about themselves and themselves only — their own selfish interests and to hell with the ordinary people, to hell with the people who are struggling to put a roof over their head, keep a roof over their head, heat their homes and deal with the pressures that they face in their everyday life. You do not appear to care. I encourage you to care and to join the rest of us and form a Government, because your actions

and the actions of the Tory Government are damaging to ordinary people, damaging to politics and damaging to our economy.

It is unforgivable — I think that most people think that it is unforgivable — that, as they suffer as a result of all the rises in the cost of living, people are worried about the months ahead and particularly, as we move through the autumn, about the winter months. They are worried because they do not know how they will get through that period. I am sure that there are plenty of people on your Benches who are not worried about being able to put food on their table over the autumn and winter, but these are your constituents; they are all our constituents. We need to work together to do what we need to do to support them at this time.

People want us to fix our health service. People want us to work together to fix our health service. We said that we would invest an extra £1 billion over the next three years to reduce waiting lists and to start to fix our health service. We want to be in the Executive now, and we want to deliver for people now. We stand ready to form an Executive now. We want to work together with all of you — everybody in the Chamber. We want to work together to put money in people's pockets now, because that is what they need from us.

It should be noted that, under the new legislation that extends the period for appointing a First Minister and deputy First Minister to 24 weeks, unless those positions are filled in 14 short weeks, the British Secretary of State will be required to call a second election. A winter election during a cost-of-living crisis, when people cannot heat their homes, is not what people want; it is really not what people want. They want you to do your jobs like they are doing theirs. They want parties to work together to form an Executive. They want us to be accountable to them. They need our help. Families need our help. I say this again to the DUP, who continue to block an Executive being formed: join the rest of us; work with the rest of us; help to deliver for people; let us get people through the cost-of-living crisis in the best way that we can; stop denying people the change that they voted for; and discharge your political responsibilities.

I genuinely believe that, by working together, we can make a real difference for people. I stand ready to jointly work with others and to lead an Executive to help make politics work for everyone, to demonstrate that real change is possible and to help people to get through what will be an excruciating time in the winter months ahead.

Mr Kingston: I commence by expressing my deepest sympathy to the family and friends of our dear colleague Councillor John Finlay, who sadly passed away on Monday morning and whose funeral will take place this afternoon. John was a man of great faith, and, whilst our hearts are heavy today, we know that he faced death with great hope in his Saviour, and that is of great comfort to us.

Turning to the matter before us, which is the recall of the Assembly due to a petition signed by pro-protocol parties, I have to say that this is stunt politics. These proceedings are not a genuine attempt by the parties opposite to restore the political institutions; rather, they demonstrate a wilful disregard for the views of unionists and for the principle of power-sharing in Northern Ireland. It is astonishing when one hears the parties opposite falsely claim that the Belfast Agreement and St Andrews Agreement provide grounds for an Irish Sea border, yet they now want to do away with cross-community consent, which is fundamental to those agreements. Let us be clear: the Northern Ireland protocol has caused a deep fracture in our politics. That fracture will continue to grow unless it is dealt with now through arrangements that command cross-community consent. It impacts negatively on our supply chains, on our constitutional positions and on the cost of living.

The DUP is a pro-devolution party. We want to see stability and sustainability in our political institutions. That is what we are working hard to deliver, in keeping with the consent principle enshrined in the Belfast and St Andrews agreements. The coalition of chaos in front of us [*Laughter*] — across from us — insisted on the protocol without local consent. They pressed for its rigorous implementation. For the past two years, they have insulted the unionist community and others who hold genuine concerns about the protocol's impact.

12.15 pm

Our party leader warned last September that time was running out to preserve the institutions. By February of this year, in the absence of action to remove the Irish Sea border, further steps were needed to bring matters to a head. The DUP acted to bring about that focus of attention, as we said that we would, before the election. The publication and progression of legislation in the House of Commons is welcome recognition of the destructive impact of the protocol on political, constitutional and economic life in Northern Ireland. However, only with its passage undiminished can our institutions be freed from

the dark shadow of the protocol. That point has not yet been reached, and we will assess the views of any future new Prime Minister before taking any further action. We are democrats. We will appoint a deputy First Minister when those issues are addressed. However, at present, such action would be premature. Less than three months ago, DUP MLAs received a clear mandate to resolve the problems created by the Northern Ireland protocol. We are resolutely committed to that. The views of the unionist community must be respected.

This party made sure that responsible and operable arrangements were in place to allow routine decisions to continue in the absence of a First Minister and deputy First Minister or Speaker. Ministers are in place. Money continues to flow to key services such as health, education and our roads.

Mr O'Toole: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kingston: No, I have nearly finished.

We will continue to be condition-led, not calendar-led. Those conditions are not just stipulated by this party or by political unionism; they are contained in the Belfast and St Andrews agreements, which enshrine the need for consensus and mutual respect between traditions.

Mr Brown: I rise today in support of electing a Speaker. As we have done on both previous occasions, Alliance will support both nominations.

Despite these being my first comments in the Chamber, I cannot help but feel a profound sense of déjà vu. We are back here, yet again, with unguarded pessimism regarding any positive outcome from today's debate. Indeed, it is beginning to feel a bit like Groundhog Day, with recriminations across the Chamber this afternoon, reflecting the limited progress that we have had since the May election, despite the overwhelming mandate given to us by the people of Northern Ireland to form an Assembly and set up a new Executive.

Every day now, I encounter situations in my constituency where people are losing out as a result of there not being a Government in Northern Ireland. We cannot go on like that. My preference is to get Stormont restored. In Northern Ireland today, four out of five political parties have said, without preconditions, that we will form an Executive. Only one of the five parties — the DUP — is refusing to go into government. It is wrong in a democracy that

one party representing maybe 25% of the people is able to veto the establishment of a Government. That is not democracy, and it has to change.

I confess that those last few sentences are not actually my words. They were, in fact, the words of DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, on 'Question Time' in March 2019. The only change that I made was swapping the words "Sinn Féin" for "the DUP". I ask the party to my right what has changed since March 2019. The DUP leader is, of course, right: it is undemocratic for any party to hold a veto. That is why our party has outlined proposals to put an end to ransom politics, reform our institutions and deliver a functioning Government for the people of Northern Ireland. If the do-nothing DUP does not like that, it can voice its disagreement from the Opposition Benches.

We can start by reforming how we elect a Speaker. The current system, whereby 71% of Members can vote in support of a Speaker only to be met with DUP deadlock, is no longer tenable. We must move to a system that allows weighted majority voting not just for the Speaker but for any Executive veto and the use of petitions of concern. We must also reform how we appoint a First Minister and deputy First Minister, allowing any party unwilling to hold either of those positions to pass it on to the next largest party. That is why, in case today's motion were to have been debated, Alliance tabled an amendment focusing on political reform. Until this place can operate in a mature and democratic fashion, our ability to deal with situations like the cost-of-living crisis will be curtailed.

It is not just a crisis; it is a scandal. The term "crisis" is reflective of the impact of external macroeconomic factors, whether that be disrupted supply chains due to war, the pandemic or Brexit, loose monetary policy or energy insecurity. We are somewhat limited in what we can do, as a devolved Administration, to address the causes of the crisis. The scandal, however, comes from our inability to make the strategic and financial decisions necessary to help those suffering as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. The blame for that scandal rests solely on the shoulders of the DUP.

On previous occasions in the Chamber, the DUP complained about how the protocol had increased prices in M&S. Well, my constituents are not concerned about the prices in M&S. Far too many of them are instead worried about relying on food banks and choosing between

heating and eating, real people suffering as a result of narrow and selfish politics. I urge my colleagues in the DUP to do the right thing today: elect a Speaker and allow us to get an Assembly up and running so that we can get to work and do what we were elected to do.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for taking the Chair again today in these unusual circumstances: third time lucky or not, as the case may be. The DUP appears again to be set on blocking the outcome of the election from taking hold and a Government from being formed. Today, I am proud to once again nominate Patsy McGlone — clearly and demonstrably the most able and qualified candidate — to be Speaker.

Three months ago, we all sought election to this place. Why did we seek election? We sought election on the basis of putting in place policies to make better the lives of the people we serve. Today, the leader of the DUP, Jeffrey Donaldson, accused the SDLP of stunt politics. His message was reinforced today by Mr Kingston from North Belfast. There are three specific reasons why the SDLP recalled the Assembly today, and I am grateful that we had the support of Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party for that. The DUP said that it would veto the operation of our institutions until it had progress on the protocol. The protocol Bill, which we object to and which a majority of the parties in the Assembly and, indeed, it appears from all available evidence, most people in Northern Ireland object to, has progressed through the House of Commons. Jeffrey Donaldson told us that the party would take a graduated response to the passage of that Bill. Well, it has passed the House of Commons, I am afraid to say. What now? How long do people in Northern Ireland have to wait? How long do they have to wait, struggling to put food on the table and to afford the cost of school uniforms and apprehensive about the winter? The DUP said that the protocol Bill's passage would lead to a graduated response. It has passed the Commons. What now? Explain to us. Are we to wait, as Mr Kingston said, for the verdict of Tory Party members in order to get a Government in Northern Ireland, a vote for the leader of the Conservative Party in which, I think I am right in saying, less than 0.03% of the population of this place has a vote? What a preposterous position to be in.

The cost-of-living-crisis has got worse since the last time we met. Inflation is nearly in double digits. It is at 9.4% in the UK. We know that there are projections out there that energy costs for families could be £500 a month — £500 a month — which is unprecedented in the

lifetimes of many people not just in the Chamber but across Northern Ireland. Is the DUP seriously saying that we do not need a Government, that hundreds of millions of pounds can sit unspent at Stormont and that people can go without support while the cost-of-living crisis bites? That is frankly unconscionable.

Is the Education Minister, who apparently will cut teachers' pay if they go on strike, unwilling to get back into government and spend money to help families with the cost of school uniforms? Is that seriously the position that the DUP are taking? If it is, it is frankly unconscionable. They talk about the protocol, and I have talked about the protocol Bill. The protocol was no one's first choice in the Chamber or anywhere in Northern Ireland, but it was necessary because of the hard Brexit. The hard Brexit that the Tories pushed through with the support and cheerleading of the Democratic Unionist Party

Mr Buckley: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Toole: I will not give way, because your colleague did not give way to me and I need to make some progress. I am afraid that I have very little time in the Chamber because your party will not allow us to do our jobs.

According to the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), a UK economic forecaster, the protocol is one of the reasons why Northern Ireland is outperforming the rest of the UK economically. The Economy Minister shakes his head at me. He will know, because his officials can tell him, that the protocol is a benefit to our exporters rather than a hindrance. Are there issues around —

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Toole: I will not give way to his party because —.

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Toole: It is interesting that the Member wants to debate. If he wants to debate properly, allow us to appoint a Speaker and debate properly. Otherwise, he can make remarks after I have finished.

It is a preposterous position to seek a vote from people and then, for three months, in the middle of the worst cost-of-living crisis in most people's lifetimes, sit on your hands while money goes unspent. It is unacceptable and unconscionable. They do not have a good

explanation for it. As the protocol Bill passes through Parliament, which, they said, hinted and implied, might lead us to at least appoint a Speaker so that we could hold to account caretaker Ministers, like the Economy, Agriculture and Education Ministers, who take decisions at the minute without any accountability. However, they will not do that. Three months on — *[Interruption.]*

Mr O'Toole: You have the opportunity to speak afterwards. Three months after the election, we, the SDLP and others, want to do our jobs. We are a constructive Opposition who want to get back to this place and do our jobs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr O'Toole: Finally, DUP, will you do your jobs?

Mr Allister: There is a straightforward reason why, after three months, the net product of the Assembly is nugatory and today is just another stunt sitting. That straightforward reason is the protocol, something that most in the House do not want to face up to. The very same people who yesterday and in recent days were effusive in respect of Lord David Trimble consciously and deliberately ignore the very telling finding of Lord Trimble about the protocol. He said that the protocol has ripped the heart out of the Belfast Agreement. Why is that? The Belfast Agreement was proclaimed to be the establishment of an equilibrium between east-west and North/South. Then along comes a protocol that operates on the basis that, because we remain in the single market of the EU, Great Britain is to be regarded as a third or foreign country and its goods that come here must be subject to customs and checks. That is what it means to drive a coach and horses through the Belfast Agreement and upset the North-South, east-west equilibrium. Too many in the House do not want to face that reality and the political reality that, because GB is now regarded in trading terms as a foreign country, that has constitutional implications that no unionist can come to terms with. That means that the very basis of our Union has been corrupted by the protocol and, in consequence, no unionist can accept implementing that very protocol. The price of this Stormont now is to implement those checks and implement that protocol. If the protocol — as it is — is wholly incompatible with our constitutional position as an integral part of the United Kingdom, it follows that no unionist can be a party to that. The failure and refusal — the stubborn refusal — of

the protocol fanatics in the House to face up to that is the reason that we are in this position.

12.30 pm

Those who are playing with fire, as far as the future of these institutions is concerned, are those who are unbending in their support for the protocol. They are the ones who are putting in jeopardy these very institutions. Of course, they aspire to be Members of a legislative Assembly that would not be able to legislate on many issues because of the protocol. There are people in the House who preen themselves about their anti-colonial credentials, whether republicans, nationalists or crypto-nationalists. They all preen themselves about their anti-colonial credentials, and, yet, they are the new colonialists. They are the people who want to live under foreign rule and foreign laws that they cannot change or even rubber-stamp. What an ultimate irony and what a fundamental reason why no one — never mind a self-respecting unionist — who is a self-respecting democratic can come to terms with a protocol that says, "You are not good enough to make the laws that govern your country. Your laws will be made in a foreign place. They will be handed down to you. They will be changed as a foreign place sees fit. You will have no say whatever in how you manufacture your goods, the standards that you manufacture them to or how you sell them or trade them".

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member bring his remarks to an end?

Mr Allister: All of that is the product of the protocol. That is what those who continue to howl at the moon about Brexit and continue to insist on the protocol seek to put upon Northern Ireland.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: That is the very reason why it is they who are putting the institutions in total jeopardy.

Ms Armstrong: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I want to raise the point that, in the House and through the code of conduct, we are all supposed to respect each other. Mr Allister has just tried to denigrate members of my party, who are designated as "Others" under the rules of the Good Friday Agreement, by calling us another name. I would like a ruling from the Speaker's Office on whether Members should respect each other's designations, whether

"Unionist", "Nationalist" or "Other" and use that accordingly when speaking.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I thank the Member for that. Her position is on the record.

Mr Carroll: Once again, the DUP have shown themselves to be completely and utterly self-serving in their approach to politics here by their actions today. At a time when a cost-of-living crisis is driving people into destitution, their cynical phrase-mongering around the protocol simply does not wash. The reality is that they are wilfully ignoring the plight of the vast majority of people who are struggling to keep their heads above water due to spiralling costs and political inaction. They have abdicated from their responsibility for tackling the current crisis and have done so to suit their own narrow political interests.

While the DUP refuse to do business in the Chamber, they also refuse to do business outside it. We have only to look at the sitting DUP Economy Minister, Mr Lyons, who has sat on his hands while energy companies have made record profits. He has not even opened his mouth. Just today, we see that oil giants BP and Shell's profits, between April and June this year, have outstripped the entire budget for the North for the year. Those costs are being passed on to our constituents by the very companies that the Minister and his department are supposed to regulate and keep in check. He has utterly failed to do so. That the Minister has refused to implement energy price caps and reductions is a scandal, but people are becoming increasingly aware that the hardships they face are directly linked to the profiteering of a grotesque and ultra-rich minority. They are also aware that the political Establishment in this Chamber has refused to lift a finger to challenge this.

Worse still, the DUP has used its ministerial platforms to launch direct attacks on working-class people who have the temerity to fight for better wages.

This week, the Education Minister disgracefully backed plans to cut the salaries of striking teachers who are taking action to defend their basic right to have a decent wage. That is disgusting and straight out of the Tory playbook.

The DUP is not alone in presiding over that approach of kicking working-class people in the teeth. Previously, the Health Minister, endorsed by Executive colleagues, decided to offer health

workers a below-inflation pay offer. The Assembly may not be fully functioning, but Ministers can still make important decisions. The problem is that the ones that they make are not in the interests of ordinary working-class people. We also have a Sinn Féin Communities Minister who has done nowhere near enough to get money into the pockets of those who need it most. A recent study by the University of York suggested that over half of UK households will be in fuel poverty by January 2023. I suspect that that will be higher here. The effect that that will have, come winter, will be catastrophic, but the Minister has shown no urgency to address the problem. We have an 11-year-old outdated fuel poverty strategy, while people will freeze in their homes this winter. That fact alone is a glaring indictment of the record of successive Communities Ministers.

Although it must be said that we in People Before Profit believe that the DUP should end its boycott of the Assembly, we do not believe that the restoration of the institutions will be the silver bullet to solve the multitude of problems that we face. As far back as December 2021, when we had a working Executive, I submitted a call for parties to suspend the winter recess to deal with the cost-of-living crisis. Back then, that, too, was branded a stunt. The same parties voted against our proposal to cut and freeze rents for private renters, who are being increasingly squeezed by greedy landlords. Given the number of landlords in the Chamber, that might not come as a surprise. The cost-of-living crisis raged for months, and the Stormont Executive simply looked on. The same politicians presided over a decade of austerity, reduced the pay of workers, implemented cuts to public services, introduced the cruel welfare reform measures — the list goes on and on. If the institutions ever return, it will be up to ordinary people to pressure any incoming Executive and Government into action, because, left to their own actions, they simply will not work and have not worked for the benefit of the majority of people here.

In recent months, striking workers and the trade union movement more generally have led the fightback against employers who have attempted to suppress wages for their own greedy ends. I salute the brave decision of BT workers, Openreach workers and postal workers, who have either gone on strike or are due to strike over pay and other issues. Similarly, the RMT rail workers are leading the fight for better wages. Despite the propaganda against them —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion, please?

Mr Carroll: — they should be saluted and supported. Wealthy employers and their —

Mr Lyons: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: Sure. Yes.

Mr Lyons: The Member's time is coming to an end, so I wanted to take the opportunity to address some of the points that he made about me personally. The Member has never asked me for a meeting to discuss any of those issues, so I offer him the opportunity to have a briefing from me and my officials so that he can understand a little bit about how the energy system in Northern Ireland works. His comments demonstrate that he does not have a clue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Mr Carroll has an extra minute.

Mr Carroll: I thank the Minister for his intervention, which has given me an extra minute, and for his kind offer. I will be delighted to meet him as soon as possible. I have a list of ideas that you should implement and look to implement. You should say something about the fact that BP and Shell are making record profits. Your silence is deafening. Saying something would be of benefit to people in our communities, so I advise you say something. I will take you up on your offer of a meeting.

Wealthy employers and their allies in the Assembly, maybe including the Minister, need to hear loud and clear that workers will no longer stand for poverty wages and rotten profiteering.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): The Member's time is up.

Mr Carroll: Striking workers deserve support.

Mrs Little-Pengelly: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. The Member for West Belfast said on the record in the House something that is factually untrue: that the Minister of Education has backed a reduction in pay for teachers. I ask you, Mr Acting Speaker, to require the Member for West Belfast to retract that comment or to produce evidence otherwise, because my clear understanding is that that is entirely factually incorrect.

Mr Carroll: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I refer the Member to yesterday's 'Belfast Telegraph'. Look at the Assembly question that the Minister responded to. *[Interruption.]* I am still speaking. Look at the Assembly question that the Minister responded to indicating her support for reducing the pay of striking workers. I refer the Member to the article and the question, whichever one she desires, so go ahead.

Mrs Little-Pengelly: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. There is no response to a point of order from a Member. I asked the Acting Speaker to make a ruling on that comment. It is factually untrue. To leave the comment on the record would be to mislead the House and the people of Northern Ireland. The Minister of Education has not backed any reduction in pay for teachers who are striking or otherwise.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I thank the Members for their points of order. Their positions are on the record.

Mr Kearney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Chomhairle agus tabharfadh mé seans do na Comhaltaí a gcluasáin aistirúcháin a chur ar a gcloigeann.

Le linn na diospóireachta deiridh anseo, thuar mé dá fhad a leanfadh an DUP leis an chur chuige méarganta seo is ea is mó damáiste eacnamaíochta agus polaitíochta a dhéanfaí. Agus is amhlaidh mar atá cúrsaí á léiriú anois. Tá boilsciú ag dul in airde ag luas nach bhfacthas le breis agus daichead bliain — agus leoga, tá níos measa le teacht. San am i láthair, tá oibrithe agus teaghlaigh ag fulaingt agus ag streachailt lena gcuid billí a íoc. Tá laghdú 3-7% ar an mheán ar thuarastal oibrithe ó mhí na Bealtaine. Tá gach cuma ar an scéal go bhfuil an ghéarchéim costais maireachtála seo ag dul i dtreo cúlú eacnamaíochta. Tá níos mó bruanna ar na seirbhísí poiblí s'againn, toisc nach bhfuil buiséid inbhuanaithe ar fáil dóibh.

Chuir mé dhá cheist shuntasacha ar Chomhaltaí an DUP an t-am deireanach sin. An bhfuil siad dáiríre faoi chomhroinnt cumhachta leis na páirtithe eile sa tionól; agus an bhfuil siad fíorthiománta do chur i gcrích Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta ina iomlán? Tá freagraí ar na ceisteanna sin á nochtadh anois de réir a chéile. Is léir do chách gur cuma sa tsioc leis an DUP faoin ghnáthdhuine. Deich mí ó shin, bhain an DUP an bonn den Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas. Sé mhí ó shin, tharraing an DUP anuas an Feidhmneannas comhroinnte cumhachta é féin. Agus, an mhí seo a chuaigh thart, theip ar Airí an DUP

freastal ar Chomhairle na Breataine-na hÉireann.

Is é bun agus barr an scéil nach bhfuil an DUP i bhfách leis an chomhroinnt chumachta, mura bhfuil an DUP féin ag dul a bheith ar thús cadhnaíochta go huile is go hiomlán. Agus is mar gheall ar sin, a Cheann Chomhairle, atá an DUP agus a gcairde sna Tóraithe ag déanamh a seacht ndícheall bonnchlocha Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta a scrios. Níl baint ar bith ag an neamhord polaitíochta seo le heasaontas ar an Phrótacal, is amhlaidh a bhaineann sé go hiomlán le cailiúint chumacht agus thionchar an DUP mar pháirtí. Dá mba rud é gur mhiste leis an DUP ar chor ar bith, ba cheart go mbeadh a fhios acu nach bhfuil ciall dá laghad leis an chur chuige seo. Tá ag teip ar Chomhaltaí an DUP ina bhfeagracht don phobal i gcoitinne.

Níl an dara rogha ach Feidhmeannas nua a chur ar bhun agus freastal ar riachtanais ár bpobal. Tá Sinn Féin tiománta oibriú ar son gach saoránaigh; agus an cheannaireacht atá de dhíth a sholáthar. Déanfaidh muid amhlaidh le páirtithe eile atá ag iarraidh sochaí fhorásach a chruthú. Cibé rud a tharlóidh san am atá romhainn – ní mór duine, muidne atá tiománta do phróiseas na síochana, seasamh le chéile agus an fód a sheasamh ar son leas an phobail sna Sé Chontae. Tá barraíocht ama curtha amú. Ní mór deireadh a chur leis na leithscéalta gan bhunús, agus na bréaga atá á rá. Tá sé in am anois Ceann Comhairle, agus Céad agus Leas-Chéad Airí a ainmniú agus an Tionól seo a chur ag obair arís – sin atá de dhíth ar ár ndaoine – chan a thuilleadh cleasaíocht náireach ón DUP.

[Translation: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I invite Members to put on the interpretation headphones.

During the last debate here, I predicted that, the longer the DUP's reckless stance lasted, the more economic and political damage would be done, and that is clearly playing out now. Inflation is rising at a rate not seen in more than 40 years – and, indeed, the worst is yet to come. At present, workers and families are suffering and struggling to pay their bills. Workers' wages have decreased by 3.7% on average from May. There is every indication that the cost-of-living crisis is heading in the direction of a recession. Our public services are coming under increased pressure, because there are not sustainable budgets for them.

I asked the DUP Members two clear questions at the last sitting: are they serious about power-sharing with other parties in this Assembly; and

are they truly committed to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in its entirety? The answers to those questions are gradually becoming clearer. It is clear to everyone that the DUP does not care about ordinary people. Ten months ago, the DUP undermined the North/South Ministerial Council. Six months ago, the DUP collapsed the power-sharing Executive itself. Just last week, DUP Ministers failed to attend the British-Irish Council.

Really, Mr Acting Speaker, the DUP is not in favour of power-sharing, unless it is the DUP that are going to dominate. It is for that reason that the DUP and their allies in the Tory party are doing their utmost to undermine the foundations of the Good Friday Agreement. This political disorder has nothing to do with the protocol and everything to do with the DUP's losing power and influence as a party. If the DUP cared at all, they would know that this approach is completely senseless. DUP Members are failing in their responsibilities to the general public.

We have no alternative but to re-establish a new Executive and to serve the needs of our communities. Sinn Féin is committed to working for each and every citizen and providing the necessary leadership. We will do this with other parties who want to create a progressive society. Whatever happens in the future – we, who are committed to the peace process, must stand together with our communities in the Six Counties. Too much time has already been lost. It is time to end the lame excuses and the falsehoods. It is high time to nominate a Speaker, as well as a First and deputy First Minister and get this Assembly working again. That is what our people want – instead of more shameful stunts from the DUP.]

12.45 pm

Ms Nicholl: The Alliance Party will support both nominations for Speaker today, because we need the Assembly up and running urgently.

When we talk about the difficulties that people face, it is easy to look at them in abstraction. I wanted to share an account with you that I received from Action for Children that highlights why we need a Speaker and why we need a Speaker today. A family that they support through their young carer's service is living in private rented accommodation. The family face a £230 shortfall each month for their rent, and they have been waiting two and a half years for adapted housing. They rely on support from Action for Children and local churches to get by, but each month they are constantly worried

about how they will cover rent and pay for food and fuel costs. Those young carers are 13 and 15 years old. They cook the meals, clean, budget and help their parent get dressed. They are experiencing high levels of anxiety, with one on medication for anxiety and depression. It is a single-parent household where the children help care for their parent, who has physical disabilities and is receiving treatment for cancer. They can no longer manage with all the increases in the household bills, and their benefit entitlements do not match the rise in the cost of living.

The lack of certainty about what is ahead hurts families like that in Northern Ireland. Action for Children's crisis support service can only help so far. More food banks are not the solution, and one-off payments are not the solution. What they need is an Assembly. They need political certainty and a functioning Executive ready to work together towards long-term anti-poverty solutions.

That is just one example of one family and what they are going through right now, and they are watching. One in four children here lives in poverty. Most of those live in a household with at least one working parent. Those children are watching as they grow up with little hope for the future. Their parents do not have access to affordable, flexible childcare, and, as they struggle, they are watching — women in particular — with the burden of impossible choices. The health service is broken. The sick and their families are watching as they languish on ever-growing waiting lists. Staff are watching as they struggle to cope, under pressure and underpaid. Our climate and nature are in crisis. Our young people are watching as we squander a future generation's birthright. Our society labours under the weight of racism and sectarianism, and those who suffer discrimination are watching as they worry for their welfare every day. What are they watching? They are watching us, an Assembly of elected representatives who were put here to do a job, people who can make a difference to the issues that they face daily. What did they get? They got an Assembly paralysed by the DUP, who are prioritising party over people.

I understand that there are issues with the Northern Ireland protocol. I acknowledge that, for some unionists, it represents a real threat to their identity. I do not wish to downplay that. Setting aside the well-rehearsed point that it is the result of Brexit and setting aside the fact that the DUP championed Brexit, the truth remains that any negotiation and any changes to the Northern Ireland protocol can be done only between Westminster and the EU. It does

not make any sense. The DUP may claim to be putting pressure on Westminster and the EU, but what they are, in fact, doing is putting pressure on people such as those 13- and 15-year-old carers, the people whom they are meant to represent.

The Assembly cannot negotiate changes to the Northern Ireland protocol; what we can do is legislate. We can legislate on community, on childcare and on climate. We stood for election to do a job. We need to be able to get on with the work. We also need to ensure that we are not put in this position ever again. Reform of the structures is now essential not only so that we can break this deadlock but so that no other party can ever put us in this position. If you do not want to do the work of government, do not stop the rest of us from doing so.

Ms McLaughlin: Once more, the Assembly has been recalled so that the majority of us can attempt to do what we promised voters we would do, which is to get back to work and help people who are struggling. SDLP Members are here today to roll up our sleeves, nominate a Speaker and get on with the jobs that we were sent here to do. In putting forward my colleague Patsy McGlone, we nominate someone with a lifetime of political service to his community. The time has now come for the Assembly to elect him as Speaker and start delivering for people, because the truth is that no one can afford for us to wait any longer to do so.

Since we last met here, the crisis faced by the people who put us in the Chamber has only got worse. More families are struggling than before. Almost half the people whom we represent now struggle with fuel poverty. Inflation is now over 9%, and it is rising. The crisis does not affect everyone equally. Low wages and high deprivation mean that people in my constituency are some of the worst affected.

Something else has changed in the time since we met here last. Since then, the protocol Bill has, regrettably, made its way through the House of Commons. The DUP has run out of excuses. When it comes to making this place work and electing a Speaker today, it has run out of road. There are those who have had the nerve to accuse us of stunt politics by recalling the Assembly today to elect a Speaker. To those people I say this: what could be a bigger stunt than going through six weeks of an election campaign, coming into the Chamber, signing up for your wages and walking out that door? That is a stunt, and the people of Northern Ireland know that it is a stunt.

On the basis of everything that you have heard from Members across the House, I implore you to support our nomination for Speaker. If you do not, I simply do not know how you can look your constituents in the eye: people who are choosing whether to heat their homes or put food on the table; parents who struggle to afford their children's school uniforms; pensioners who will sit in freezing cold homes this winter; and people who have been languishing for years on hospital waiting lists. People in my constituency have suffered the impact of devastating floods and have seen their livelihoods destroyed. They need a Government to be on their side and legislate to support them into their futures. I say this to the DUP: if you really think that the protocol Bill's full passage through Parliament should be your priority, I invite the MP for Lagan Valley to come to Derry, look my constituents in the eye and tell that to the people who have lost their home, their business and their savings.

Every one of us should put our shoulder to the wheel and work the common ground to find solutions to the issues that face the people whom we represent. That is our job. If the DUP continues to block democracy, the people of the North will conclude that our commitment to this place is entirely hollow. Simply put, people will not buy it any more; instead, they will understand that you have abandoned people in their hour of need, leaving their fate to the whims of a Tory Minister. Shame on you. Absolute shame on you.

In closing, I say this to the DUP on behalf of the people of Derry: every day that you refuse to support the nomination of a Speaker is another insult to the people whom you are supposed to serve. Get back into your offices, and let us all get back to work.

Mr McCrossan: I support the nomination of my friend and colleague Patsy McGlone. There is no greater MLA in the Assembly who would fit that role well and in impartial fashion. He is also very approachable. He has my full support.

It is frustrating that, even prior to the debate, the DUP leader had already briefed that there was no likelihood of the election of a Speaker or of a time frame for the return of the institutions. That is a depressing reflection of where this place is, particularly, almost 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement, on the day that we mark John Hume's second anniversary and in the week that we buried Lord Trimble. Has the DUP learned nothing from the past?

It is clear to say, "Be careful what you wish for". The DUP championed Brexit and sold it to its electorate as a great silver bullet that would

transform this society, change life, offer opportunities, fund the NHS and every other possible imaginative dream that the DUP could pipe up at that time. The protocol is a direct consequence of your Brexit, so stop trying to mislead the public. You put yourself on this hook, you are trying to get off it, and you are getting deeper and deeper into a hole.

The problem here, folks, is not any of us in the Chamber. I have said on every occasion that we have found ourselves in this position that the challenges in our society are much greater than the differences that we face in the Chamber. Each of us has constituents, and each of us serves them every day in our offices. We try to resolve the problems that they bring to us, but those problems are worsening every day, because many people cannot pay their rent, are getting deeper into arrears and are making decisions about heating or eating. There are people out there struggling with mental health who cannot get access to the support and services that they need. Addiction services are largely non-existent and are not there to support those who need them most — those with drug addiction, alcohol addiction and severe problems. They need support. We can find solutions to those things.

What about workers across the entirety of the North, who are rising up and calling for greater pay and conditions in the face of a cost-of-living crisis that is spiralling out of control? We hear this from people in the House: "There is little we can do about it". Why did you stand for election if you do not want to find solutions to the problems that our electorate faces? Ask yourselves that question. In this place that we call "Northern Ireland" or the "North of Ireland" — whatever people want to define it as — our constituents have all these problems in common to one degree or another, and we are tasked with solving those problems. Standing or not standing or coming to the House or not coming to the House was not something that you were given a mandate for. We have overcome much more insurmountable problems than the one that we now face.

The reality is, as you well know, that we have no control over the negotiation around the protocol. You have got your legislation. What more do you want? How much more suffering will the DUP inflict on ordinary, decent working people and vulnerable people in our society? That is what is happening, and well you know it. If we can go outside that door and have friendly handshakes and chats about the various challenges that our constituents face, why are you preventing the rest of the people in the House from carrying out their democratic right

to echo the concerns of their constituents in the democratically elected Chamber that we stand in? Why? If you really do not want to play a part in this, why are you still in the Executive and not being held to account? The reality is that you could elect a Speaker and could go on with business, and, if the British Government do not give you what you want, you could walk away. You are punishing people, and the situation will get very bad coming into the winter.

I heard the real leader of the DUP in the corner pontificate about how outrageous and preposterous it is to be under foreign rule. My God, it has only taken you 100 years. Relationships in this place have been damaged and have worsened as a consequence of the bad behaviour of the DUP, which is putting its own selfish political interests before the interests of ordinary, decent people in our society. We represent every one of them collectively. You have no mandate and no right to veto our right to represent our constituents, and it is high time —

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): Will the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion?

Mr McCrossan: — that you realised that you should get back into government, let us do our jobs in the Assembly and put the interests of our people first, because the situation will get very difficult for a lot of families.

Mr McGrath: I support the nomination of my colleague Patsy McGlone for the role of Speaker. He would take that role seriously, provide great expertise and be a great person to shepherd the House in the work that it does.

We meet today on the second anniversary of the passing of John Hume and in the week that we have buried David Trimble, and I wonder what those architects of the Good Friday Agreement would think of the actions of the party opposite. Politics is supposed to be the art of the possible. It is supposed to be about a willingness to trust one another and to work together for the common good, yet we have a society that is falling apart at the seams. We have all been told about this for a long time, and we know what is coming down the tracks with the cost-of-living emergency. We know what we can do to mitigate it and to provide support and help for families in their moment of need.

We know that they are battling with rising food costs in an effort to put meals on the table and that they are trying to save money as we get towards the winter so that they will be able to

heat their homes and survive. That is what the people whom we represent face. It is an issue of survival, and we can do very little to mitigate it or to help them. It affects everybody in our community: families who work hard to provide for their loved ones but whose wages simply do not stretch far enough.

1.00 pm

We know that the protocol is an important matter. We know that Jeffrey Donaldson seems to think that we do not understand or appreciate that there is unionist frustration with it, but the protocol is here because of Brexit. The protocol is here because the DUP trusted a Tory Government, courted Boris Johnson and was supportive of his negotiated protocol as far back as October 2019. However, as with many times in history, the DUP's downfall is that it just cannot sell it.

I am the health spokesperson for the SDLP. Our health service is in a dangerous state. I commend the work of my fellow MLA Robin Swann. He has done good work in difficult circumstances, but our health service needs reform. It needs major financial investment, but it also needs political investment so that we can reduce waiting times, ensure appropriate diagnoses for people and try to save lives and help people to lead healthier lives. Currently, a forum of party representatives meets occasionally to discuss major health issues, but who keeps the minutes? Who takes the decisions? Who follows up on those decisions? Who is able to ask about those decisions? The Minister might be able to do his work, but we cannot hold him to account in order to find out exactly what he is doing. It is the same for every Minister: they may be doing the work, but we cannot hold them to account. Lord knows what they are doing. I am sure that we will find out at some stage what some Ministers have been up to, but we are not able to ask questions in the Chamber and hold them to account.

We know that the health service has been in a perilous state for some time, and it is the DUP that is preventing us from helping to sort it out today. The work is not being hindered by the professionals, the patients or the Minister; it is being hindered by the DUP. The DUP is preventing us from adequately reforming the health service. You should be ashamed to look your constituents in the eye: constituents who are in need; those who deserve to have a few quid left over at the end of the month; and those who will potentially die because they cannot get the right diagnosis or treatment. You should be ashamed to look those constituents in the eye,

because you are causing the problems that they face, and you are doing nothing to help them. Whilst you might shake your heads, that is the reality of your decisions.

Let the many thousands of our constituents on all sides have what they want. They want to see an Assembly, they want to see an Executive, they want to see us doing the job that we are being paid to do and they want to see a resolution to the problems that they face in their lives. That is why I want to see a Speaker elected today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): No other Members have indicated that they wish to speak.

Question put, That Mr Mike Nesbitt be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 18; Noes 21.

AYES

UNIONIST:

Dr Aiken, Mr Beattie, Mr Butler, Mr Nesbitt.

OTHER:

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Brown, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Mr Donnelly, Ms Eastwood, Mr Honeyford, Ms McAllister, Mr McReynolds, Mr Muir, Ms Nicholl, Mr Tennyson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Dr Aiken and Mr Butler.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Bradley, Mr Brett, Mr Brooks, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Dunne, Mrs Erskine, Ms Forsythe, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kingston, Mrs Little-Pengelly, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Bradley and Mr K Buchanan.

Total Votes 39 Total Ayes 18 [46.2%]

Nationalist Votes 0 Nationalist Ayes 0 [0.0%]

Unionist Votes 25 Unionist Ayes 4 [16.0%]

Other Votes 14 Other Ayes 14 [100.0%]

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr

Durkan, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Mr O'Toole.

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Question put, That Mr Patsy McGlone be Speaker of this Assembly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers): I have been advised by the party Whips, in accordance with Standing Order 27(1A)(b), that there is agreement that we can dispense with the three minutes and move straight to a Division.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 39; Noes 21.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Dr Archibald, Mr Boylan, Ms Brogan, Mr Delargy, Ms Dillon, Ms Dolan, Mr Durkan, Ms Ferguson, Ms Flynn, Ms Hargey, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mr McAleer, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McGuigan, Ms McLaughlin, Mr McNulty, Mrs Mason, Ms Á Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr O'Toole.

OTHER:

Ms Armstrong, Mr Blair, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Brown, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Mr Donnelly, Ms Eastwood, Mr Honeyford, Ms McAllister, Mr McReynolds, Mr Muir, Ms Nicholl, Mr Tennyson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Durkan and Mr McGrath.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr Allister, Mr Bradley, Mr Brett, Mr Brooks, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Mr Buckley, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Dunne, Mrs Erskine, Ms Forsythe, Mr Givan, Mr Harvey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kingston, Mrs Little-Pengelly, Mr Lyons, Miss McIlveen, Mr Middleton, Mr Poots.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Bradley and Mr K Buchanan.

Total Votes 60 Total Ayes 39 [65.0%]

Nationalist Votes 25 Nationalist Ayes 25 [100.0%]

Unionist Votes 21 Unionist Ayes 0 [0.0%]

Other Votes 14 Other Ayes 14 [100.0%]

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Mr O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I note that both Questions on the election of a Speaker have fallen. I also note that DUP Ministers on the Front Bench and some of their colleagues were quick to give explanations for and defences of decisions that they have or have not made in office. Will the Speaker's Office consider what steps can be taken to offer MLAs in the Chamber the opportunity to hold serving caretaker Ministers to account for decisions that are being made? As it stands, there is no further sitting day in the Business Diary and, therefore, no opportunity for anybody to ask Assembly questions. I ask that the Speaker's Office look at that so that we can have further detail on how Members can hold caretaker Ministers to account. It is clear that some of the caretaker Ministers are happy to give answers when they are pressed. How do we press them?

The Acting Speaker (Mr Chambers):

Members, as Acting Speaker today, my responsibility is limited, as you will understand, to overseeing the election of a Speaker. Points of order on any other matters should be raised, as you said, directly with the Speaker through the Speaker's Office.

The Assembly has been unable to elect a Speaker today and has therefore been unable to conduct its first business. Therefore, we can proceed no further. Any further sittings of the Assembly can be held only to first elect a Speaker and Deputy Speakers. Under section 39(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the current Speaker remains in office until a successor is elected. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to adjourn the sitting until a future date, the details of which will be communicated to Members in due course. I thank you all for your attendance today and for your cooperation.

Adjourned at 1.29 pm.