



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Official Report (Hansard)

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Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)  
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)  
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)  
Hanna, Ms Claire (South Belfast)  
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McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)  
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Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)  
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)  
Weir, Peter (North Down)  
Wells, Jim (South Down)

# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 6 June 2016

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

### Standing Order 20(1)

**Mr Speaker:** Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

*Resolved:*

*That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 6 June 2016. — [Mr Clarke.]*

## Ministerial Statement

### Waiting Times

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister of Health wishes to make a statement on waiting times.

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement to the Assembly today on a hugely important matter for the health service: the excessive waiting times for treatment currently experienced by patients across the North. I attach such importance to this matter that it is the first area of my responsibilities that I have chosen to speak to the Assembly about since taking up office as Minister. It is, of course, one of a number of challenging issues, but it is probably the one that causes most concern to patients, and I am determined to turn that position round. That said, to do so will require the continuing support of my Executive colleagues.

The root causes of the problem here are representative of the wider challenges to the provision of world-class health and social care: increasing demand; financial constraints; and a slowness to bring about radical change and reform.

The reality is that the way we deliver services has led to a situation where our hospitals are struggling to meet the ever-increasing demand

for elective care. The specific issues are the increasing complexity of conditions requiring treatment, our ageing population, greater specialisation in the workforce and spreading our resources too thinly across the region.

My energy will be fully directed at reducing waiting times and delivering the change needed to build a sustainable health service for this and future generations. The problems that we face are not unique to the North but are shared with health economies across Europe and beyond.

The work of the expert panel and the organisational reform of health and social care that was started by my Department earlier this year hold the prospect for us to become the pathfinder in finding new, innovative ways to deliver improvement. My approach to securing these improvements will require short-term and longer-term action.

I was proud to be a member of the Executive that, following the Fresh Start Agreement last year, committed £40 million to begin tackling excessive waiting times and invest in front-line services. While this was a short-term measure, it has resulted in over 80,000 patients benefiting directly as a result of the additional funding that was allocated in November 2015. Those patients were previously on waiting lists for assessments, treatments, diagnostics and a range of other services — some for a very long time — and would not yet have been seen or treated had it not been for this investment. In particular, the number of patients waiting longer than nine weeks for a first outpatient appointment, which had been steadily increasing for over a year, reduced sharply from December 2015 to March 2016.

Had the trend over the first nine months of 2015-16 continued, it is estimated that the position at the end of March 2016 would have been much worse, with around 189,000 outpatients waiting longer than nine weeks and around 39,000 patients waiting longer than 13 weeks for treatment. The additional activity reduced this forecast position by some 53,000

outpatients and some 6,000 patients waiting longer than 13 weeks for treatment.

I want to pay tribute to our staff in the health service who delivered this activity within a relatively short timescale. Our staff are the health service's greatest asset, and their dedication to delivering high-quality care to patients is the hallmark of the service that we all can recognise.

Through the recent injection of funding, we have clearly demonstrated that we can deliver tangible short-term improvements in waiting times. While I would not dispute the views of those who criticise such short-term action as failing to tackle the underlying issues that contribute to excessive waiting times, my policy will be to adopt a balanced approach to taking further short-term action combined with longer-term change.

My Department will therefore bid for additional resources in June monitoring. If we are successful with this bid, the Executive will be able to build on the progress that has been made over the past few months in tackling waiting times by ensuring that the current demand for elective care is met at broadly the current capacity levels in the health service. However, pursuing short-term initiatives alone will not be good enough for me. I am determined to maintain the momentum that was started by my predecessor Simon Hamilton to transform the way in which we deliver health and social care services. I want to get to a position where excessive waiting times will be in the past and sustainable high-quality services, underpinned by a stable budget, will be the reality and the future going forward.

Part of that transformation must be about primary and secondary care working better together. Integrated care partnerships (ICPs) have already helped to drive new forms of collaboration. Working through ICPs, general practitioners have been reviewing waiting lists in a small number of areas and, drawing on advice from experts in hospitals, have ensured that only those who need to be on a waiting list remain on a waiting list.

There are particular opportunities to undertake this work in specialties such as dermatology, gynaecology, urology, rheumatology and general surgery. A pilot that was undertaken in Belfast during 2015-16 contributed to patients reviewed being removed from the waiting list. My Department has therefore committed £800,000 to expand this work in 2016-17.

This approach means investing in skills and knowledge in primary care. Initiatives such as Project Echo, which uses videoconferencing technology to help transfer expertise from secondary specialists to generalists in primary care, will therefore play an important role.

Against the backdrop of the progress made in recent months, we are developing an elective-care plan to arrest waiting times over the medium to longer term. As well as maximising the number of patients who can be treated in the community, the plan will ensure that existing funded capacity in the health service is fully maximised and targets new recurrent investment to expand the health service's capacity to meet patient demand. However, I will require significant additional funding to deliver that.

I referred earlier to the root causes of the waiting-times problem: increasing demand, financial constraints and a slowness to bring about radical change and reform. While the elective-care plan that I referred to should make a significant impact on reducing current waiting times, providing that additional funding is made available by the Executive, these root causes will be tackled only by securing significant further additional investment to transform the way in which we deliver health and social care.

I will therefore discuss with my Executive colleagues at the earliest opportunity the additional funding for the elective care plan and the need for additional investment to transform the delivery of services. I will also update the Assembly on our approach to delivering the proposed investment.

I referred earlier to the work of the expert panel, led by Professor Bengoa, as holding the prospect for the North to become the pathfinder in finding new, innovative ways to deliver improvement by taking longer-term action to build a vibrant, successful, sustainable health service that delivers better outcomes for patients. Part of that success will be to achieve a stable long-term financial position for the health service, where it is no longer viewed as taking up ever increasing amounts of limited public expenditure in order to respond to short-term budget pressures. I believe that my proposal for significant transformational funding will be money well invested if we can use it to attain the prize of stable finances and sustainable services.

The demand for health services is growing and will continue to grow, driven by demography, an increase in chronic conditions, the emergence of new technologies and changing practice in

healthcare. Currently in the North, 49% of people have a long-standing health condition, 60% of people are overweight, 37% are obese and 23% of the population are in receipt of disability living allowance. The population is getting older and, rightly, people have higher expectations for their health service. These factors are creating pressures across the system and are putting increasing demands on an already stretched system. Change is needed and is inevitable. Therefore, we need new ways of working in health and social care to deliver better health outcomes for our population, reformed organisations that positively promote innovation and enable change to happen quickly and better use of our limited resources to deliver the maximum benefit for patients.

I eagerly await the panel's report at the end of June. My Executive colleagues and I will give it full and detailed consideration, and the Department will publicly consult on our proposals to implement its recommendations.

The political summit, which the panel held on 17 February and was attended by the five main political parties in the Assembly, signalled a sea change in an attempt to build consensus and a willingness across the political spectrum about the key issues that we need to tackle in health and social care and to develop a shared agenda to deliver improvement. I hope that this willingness to work together can be taken forward under the new mandate. I will be meeting Professor Bengoa and his colleagues next week for an update on their emerging findings and proposals and I am grateful to them for their endeavours and commitment to the task at hand.

The Health Minister in the South has said that he will establish a special committee to look at a 10-year plan for the health service there to provide a singular vision over the next 10 years. I believe that we share common issues in building sustainable health services across the island. The opportunity to share best practice and build upon the collaborative service developments that we have already started will, therefore, be part of my agenda to transform health and social care.

To conclude, tackling excessive waiting times is high on my agenda for delivering improvement in the health service and services that are safe and effective for the patients they serve. I assure the Assembly, patients and their families that long waiting times are completely unacceptable to me. However, I will need time, new investment and radical change in how we deliver services to create the conditions for a

sustainable health service and the better outcomes that we all want to see.

I commend the statement to the Assembly.

**Mrs Dobson:** I thank the Health Minister for her statement. We have called for this issue to be the Executive's number one priority and I am pleased that you are addressing it in your first statement. It is also timely, given our party motion tomorrow on this issue. I note the Minister's wish, on the bottom of page two of her statement, to attain stable finances and sustainable services. Does she agree that funding the health service through short-term monitoring rounds must become a thing of the past, and will she provide an update on the additional £30 million announced by her predecessor on 6 March? I note that that is not mentioned in the statement.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I thank the Member for her comments and her question. Going forward, I want to be in a position where we put the health service on a footing that allows us to be sustainable and give the first-class service that our healthcare workers provide. The only way we are going to be able to, realistically, reach that potential and position is if we are serious about transforming healthcare. I think that, perhaps, Professor Bengoa's report is going to be key and critical in allowing us to chart our way forward. I welcome the fact that, previous to the election, there were a lot of soundings from all political parties that they want to show political leadership, that we need to remove the politics from health and that we need to work together. I look forward to that approach from everybody in the time ahead. I think that Professor Bengoa's report is going to allow us to chart the direction in getting to the position where we will have a sustainable health service. That is a vision that we all can clearly sign up to.

In terms of the additional funding allocated to address the waiting lists — initially it was anticipated that the funding would reach about 65,000 to 70,000 patients and allow them to receive their first appointment — I am delighted to say that we actually exceeded the target and reached 80,000 people. I think that it has been money well spent in trying to get those people access to the health service. We are still working our way through all of that, and I will be working with the trusts. Obviously, when it comes to dealing with end of year finances, we can see properly and explain further how that money has been spent and how we have been able to make a difference. I think the fact that we have been able to reach 80,000 patients is quite significant.

12.15 pm

**Ms P Bradley (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health):** I thank the Minister for her first statement to the House and wish her well in her new role.

I will follow on from the previous question, and I understand that, as Chair, I get a little bit of latitude, Mr Speaker. The Minister talked about the summit that was held with Professor Bengoa and the expert panel. There was consensus around the room that we wanted politics to be taken out of health and for it to move forward. He is due to report in a few weeks' time. Does the Minister have any more information on the level of detail that will be in the report? I understand that we do not currently measure review appointment waiting times — they are measured in the rest of the UK — so I do not believe that we have a full picture of waiting times. Is the Minister willing to look into that?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I will take the questions in reverse order. I know that the Health Committee previously did some work on the referral-to-treatment target. It is a better way to measure performance, so we should work towards that position. We have to be able to deliver on it, so we need to do more work on transforming the health service to allow us to be able to implement it.

The board is working on a five-year plan on how we deal with elective surgery and waiting lists, and we should work towards that key measure. I look forward to talking to the Chair and the Committee more about that.

As for Professor Bengoa's report, there is collective agreement that the panel brings together significant expertise and an international perspective to look at how we deliver health services. As you are aware, the report and the panel's work is very much about how we can deliver services and what is best for patients and service users. As you said, he will hopefully report towards the end of June, and I will be able to share that with others. It will really help us to chart our way forward.

I intend to meet Professor Bengoa when he comes here next week. One suggestion is that he will also meet all the political parties, which will be key in order for everybody to be up to speed on where he is and where the panel has got to.

Everybody is aware of the terms of reference for Professor Bengoa's work. They are about setting out the principles to underpin the

reconfiguration of the health service. The body of work has been well worth doing, and I look forward to meeting him next week and engaging with the Committee on how we move forward.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. It is very welcome that this is the first issue that she has brought to the Floor as Minister. She said that we need a health service that is innovative and sustainable. I hope that we take the politics out of the issue because it is critical for many families across the North. The Minister is right: we need positive change. One change before the Department at the moment is the closure of the Health and Social Care Board. Will the Minister update us on that process?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I thank the Member for his question. Following public consultation earlier this year, work has commenced on the design of the new structures. Over the coming weeks, I will take some time to consider the proposals emerging from that work, and I will then make a decision about the way forward, based on what I believe to be the optimum model for efficient and effective planning, commissioning and performance management of HSC services to supply the delivery of better outcomes for all our people.

It is important that we take the time to get the new structures right because we do not want to rush into something and then find that they are not fit for purpose a year down the line. I want to take my time and make sure that I look at all the evidence. We will need legislative change to take that forward through the next 12 to 18 months, with implementation happening thereafter. There is an ongoing large body of work, and I look forward to sharing that with the Assembly in due course.

**Mr McGrath:** I thank the Minister for her statement and wish her well in her work in the Department in the time ahead.

What assurances can the Minister give us that any additional resources secured in the June monitoring round will be used in an equitable manner across the full health network to include places such as the Downe Hospital in Downpatrick and the South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen, which are ideally placed to alleviate pressures in the major centres?

**Mrs O'Neill:** When assessing patients, you decide the order based on clinical need. There is a medical consideration, so money spent will

be based on that. I intend to use any additional funding that we get to make sure that we prioritise the patients who are most in need. That is the most equitable thing that we can do, based on the medical evidence and assessment of those professionals.

**Ms Bradshaw:** The Minister's statement refers to:

*"maximising the number of patients who can be treated in the community".*

What resources will she allocate in this financial year to build the capacity, infrastructure and human resources? To date, there has been very little evidence of that through Transforming Your Care. I want some reassurance that that money will flow down through there.

**Mrs O'Neill:** When we look at new and innovative ways to help patients, a lot more focus needs to be on community care and helping people in their own home. Whilst Transforming Your Care has made some positive changes, we have not gone far enough, and maybe the pace of change has not been quick enough. For me, the medium- to longer-term vision is that we will have more community service and use more areas such as the integrated care partnerships so that all the professionals work together to provide services for people at home. That is where we want to be, but we have a way to go to get there. There are some really good examples that we can build on, but, for me, it has to be about shifting the focus from the acute end of the hospitals and making sure that we treat people before that so that they do not have to go to hospital.

**Mr Clarke:** Like others, I thank the Minister for her statement. It is timely given that many of us hear about waiting times. I also believe, as others do, that the issue should not be politicised. The Minister's statement said that the direction from December to March was that the times reduced. Can she identify any one thing that contributed to that? I welcome anything that decreases the number of people on waiting lists.

**Mrs O'Neill:** The fact that the Executive were able to provide the additional funding allowed us to focus that money towards trusts and allowed them to reach the 80,000 people we reached over that period. It shows that, whilst there is a capacity issue in the health service, we were able to address waiting lists. We have an awful lot further to go. The length of time that some people are waiting for treatment is ridiculous. We want to take that progress even

further. Whilst there have been some positive outcomes, we need to build on that, and the way to build on that is by starting to deal with the structural issues in the health service. That will allow us to reconfigure how we deliver services and allow us to reach more patients.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá ceist agam faoi chomhoibriú idir an dá rialtas ar an oileán seo. My question is about cooperation between the two Departments on the island, as the Minister's statement refers to. Can the Minister assure me that cooperation between her and Minister Harris, which is aimed at addressing a whole range of issues, including waiting times, will be a priority for her in the time ahead? Is there perhaps an early opportunity for the North/South Ministerial Council to meet in health sectoral format?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I thank the Member for his question. I absolutely agree: there are areas in which we can build on the cooperation that already exists. The recent announcement on children's cardiac services shows that we have been able to work with Belfast and Dublin on delivery. There is a lot more scope and potential for us to be able to look at new areas in which to work together, and I have requested a meeting with Minister Harris to see how we can chart our way forward with that. When you look at some of the cooperation, working together and work that has already been taken forward in the health service, you can clearly see the benefits. We are a small island with two healthcare systems, so it is important that we get economies of scale, work together and provide better services for all on this island.

**Mr Storey:** I, too, welcome the Minister's statement on what is a very pressing issue at the moment for many of our constituents. Her statement refers to bringing about:

*"radical change and reform."*

Will the Minister give an assurance that, when she is looking at that radical change and reform, local hospitals such as the Causeway, which has been under some pressure in the past but clearly has a very good track record on delivery, will play a crucial and central role in the elective care plan, so that an invaluable facility in my constituency will be utilised to the maximum in the delivery of health as we ensure improving health for all our constituents? I believe that Professor Bengoa was very impressed when he recently visited the hospital.



**Mrs O'Neill:** When we talk about radical change, we are talking about change in how we deliver services. It is not about hospitals or closing hospitals. Professor Bengoa has not been involved in that body of work. He has been looking at how it is done now and how it can be done better. There are opportunities to use all our hospitals in different ways. There could be different specialisms.

So there are opportunities to use all our hospitals in different ways. There could be different specialisms in different hospitals. Accident and emergency services are provided at all the sites in whatever capacity they provide them, so it is really about restructuring and how we deliver services. It is not about closures. We should all embrace the work that Professor Bengoa is taking forward. To date, all parties have signed up to the principles and terms of reference, and I look forward to engaging a lot more about that.

**Mr Butler:** I thank the Minister for her first statement in this role. I am glad to see that the crisis in our waiting times is the very first issue to be discussed in the Assembly. I look forward to further debate on this issue tomorrow. The delays across our hospitals are frightening; I am sure that you would agree. Does the Minister then agree that patients have been coming to harm as a result of the delays and will continue to come to harm until we address this fully?

**Mrs O'Neill:** When a person is referred from their GP to a hospital for their first appointment, they are still under the care of their GP, so they should not be at harm. If that GP assesses at any time from when they referred the person that they think that their condition is worse, it is their obligation to inform whoever they referred them to, for example a consultant in a trust.

I wanted to discuss waiting times today because it is a crucial issue and something that we need to address in the short, medium and longer term. I have set out my stall in terms of how I think we can do it in the longer term. In the immediate term, we have to just try to get people in, get them seen and assessed, and get their treatment and pathway set out.

Just to reiterate: people are under the care of their GP when first referred, so I do not think that it is fair to say that people are at harm.

**Mr Dunne:** I, too, thank the Minister for her statement. Does the Minister agree that there are real issues with missed appointments by the public, in many cases without any notice, and the high level of cancellations by hospital

trusts of consultants, doctors etc, often at very short notice?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I agree that there is a problem with that. Obviously, we regret any cancellation of appointments where patients have been inconvenienced and may have to wait longer. For that reason, a target has been set to reduce the number of hospital-cancelled consultant-led appointments by 20% by March 2017. I acknowledge that that performance is not where it should be or needs to be, so it is an issue that I will be examining further with the HSC Board and trusts to make sure that they continue to focus on it. We cannot keep giving off and criticising the public if the hospital services are also doing it, so it is an issue that we need to tackle. We have a target now, but I intend to discuss that further with trusts.

**Mr McNulty:** I thank the Minister for her statement. I also wish the Minister well in her new and challenging role. Has any assessment been done by her Department on delays in the provision of beds for treatments due to lack of carers in the community who could facilitate the efficient discharge of patients from hospital?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I do not have any departmental assessment. I can certainly look into that, but I agree that it is a factor in my constituency role when dealing with patients and people who cannot be discharged from hospital because there is no care package. That is a real issue. It is particularly an issue in rural areas, where it is difficult to recruit carers. There is large scope for work to be done around why you cannot recruit carers. These people are usually the lowest paid. Quite often, if they work for the independent sector, they do not get mileage costs, so there is a big issue that I want to focus on and give attention to because we do want people to be cared for at home; we want that to be more and more the emerging picture. The only way to do that is if we have proper workforce planning and we work to make sure that we can recruit carers. As I said, there are particular challenges in rural areas.

**Mr Lyttle:** I welcome the fact that the Minister has recognised that waiting times in our health service are totally unacceptable. It is my understanding that despite additional funds, urgent heart consultations at the Ulster Hospital, for example, are running at up to six months, and autism assessments in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust are almost two years. That is a crisis by any estimation. The Minister says that the root cause of this problem is slowness to deliver on radical reform. Can I ask the Minister, therefore, what specific radical

reform she plans to deliver that her predecessor did not?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I referred to Professor Bengoa's report. There have been a number of reports over the last number of years: the Maurice Hayes report at the start of 2001, the Donaldson review, and Transforming Your Care. So, we have had a number of steps forward and all those brought some positive change. One of the things that the Donaldson report recognised was that the pace of change was not quick enough, so that is what we need to move forward with. I want to take the body of work that Professor Bengoa has been involved with and seriously transform our health service. Otherwise, we will be having this debate and this conversation time and time again. If we do not get to the situation where we have the health service on a sustainable footing, we cannot invest in new technologies and new drugs, and we cannot help patients more.

**12.30 pm**

I want to set out a vision where the endgame will be that we put more resources into preventative work to tackle health inequalities and the reasons why people get sick in the first place. The only way that we will get that is if we have real pace of change and real meaningful change that actually reconfigures how we deliver services. That is my priority in the time ahead, and that is the legacy that I want to leave in this Department.

**Mr McGlone:** Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. Regarding treatments in what is referred to as the independent sector or, as we know it, the private sector, has the Minister had any evaluation done of the number of cases where, upon arrival for treatment in that sector, persons have been told that their procedure cannot go ahead due to inappropriate or inadequate screening of the patient having been done on what is loosely described as the NHS side? That appears to be a recurring issue now too.

**Mrs O'Neill:** That issue has not been brought to my attention, but if the Member wants to write to me or drop me an email, I will be happy to examine it further. As I said, it has not been on my desk yet, but I am happy to look at it.

**Mr Allister:** Interestingly, the statement makes no mention of the use of the private sector in the health service. Is that because its use has been abandoned under the Minister or is it because the Minister has abandoned her

ideological opposition to the use of the private sector?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I will never abandon my principles, I can assure you of that. I can tell you that I want to see a position where we do not need to use the independent sector. I want to be in a position where we create a health service that is on a sustainable footing that can deliver first-class services, and I think that the only way that we can do that is if we transform the whole healthcare system and how we deliver it. That is why I have set out the vision about how I want to move forward, and, as I said earlier, we are going to continually come back to this conversation around capacity issues in the health service, waiting lists and all of those things if we do not seriously transform the healthcare sector.

That having been said, I will not allow patients to be very much in need. For me, the use of the independent sector is a short-term measure to allow people to be treated and to receive the care that they need. Whenever independent sector provision is used in the health service, it is only because there has been a real body of work done around the capacity of the health service to deliver and on what the short-term capacity is. For me, the overriding concern is ensuring that patients receive their treatment in a timely manner. That, for me, is the key. Obviously, I want to get to the point where we have the capacity in the health service to deliver.

## Opposition Business

### Manufacturing Strategy for Northern Ireland

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose it and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

I call on Mr Stevie Aiken to move the motion. As this is Mr Aiken's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption. However, if it becomes overly controversial, he may not be granted that privilege.

**Mr Aiken:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister for the Economy to commission a manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland.*

Thank you, Mr Speaker, and, just for the record and so that my mother will not be upset about it, it is Mr Stephen Aiken. I do not think that I have been called Stevie for a very long time.

In moving the motion in this Assembly calling on the Minister for the Economy to commission a manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland, the first thing that I would like to say is that this is a historic occasion, because we believe that this is the first official Opposition debate in this Chamber since 1972.

Overall, we welcome the Minister's appointment, and we, as the Opposition, will offer constructive and supportive scrutiny to help build an effective strategy for our manufacturing sector. What we want is to see how we can grow it from its present level over the next 10 years. As you are well aware, manufacturing generates annual sales approaching £20 billion, directly employs 85,000, supports production and the employment of over 214,000 in the wider supply chain and creates well-paid jobs and strong communities in every constituency across Northern Ireland. We will provide constructive support for the Minister, providing that policies are put in place to create a shift from a public-sector-led to a strong, stable and flexible private sector economy that has Northern Ireland manufacturing at its core.

It is good to see that a Department for the Economy has been created — a long-standing objective of our party — a Department that should be the driving force for Northern Ireland going forward. The need has never been greater, with our economy growing at a less than impressive gross value added (GVA) level over the years from 2010 to 2014 of 10.2%, when the UK average was 16%. Indeed, Northern Ireland has the lowest GVA growth of any UK region, and it is considerably less than the Republic of Ireland. If we look further back, to 2009, we find that, while the UK's GDP as a whole has increased by 13.9%, that of Northern Ireland has grown by only 3.1%, which, as I am sure the Minister would agree, is a very poor outcome.

What are we going to do about it? We cannot just rely on the current structure, which has not shown the innovation, adaptability and agility that has been shown in other regions of the

United Kingdom — for instance, in the Northern Powerhouse around Manchester — or even in the Republic of Ireland.

It is disappointing that, in the draft Programme for Government framework, which has three outcomes, 10 indicators and 11 measures all about the economy, there are no real specific ideas for building this new economy. It is also concerning, after we have fought hard to achieve the introduction of a lower rate of corporation tax at 12.5%, that this central idea is not even mentioned in outcome 1, where the draft Programme for Government talks about how we can prosper through a:

*"strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy".*

We, the Opposition, as do Northern Ireland businesses, as represented by the CBI, Manufacturing Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and the Institute of Directors, Unite and other unions — above all by the companies themselves — need to see a proper, joined-up manufacturing strategy that puts backs towards our prosperity and future.

We should be setting targets. We should be making 20% of our GDP from manufacturing, rather than the current level of 14%. This should be a hard, measurable target. We should benchmark the success or failure of our manufacturing strategy against other UK regions, such as Scotland, which is, of course, where the Programme for Government framework is sourced from, Wales and the Northern Powerhouse and against the Republic of Ireland. Maybe this could form the basis of an annual health check on all our Departments that would allow the people of Northern Ireland to see how our Government are over- or underperforming.

We would also welcome from the Minister a robust championing and defence of a series of pro-manufacturing approaches that would be transformative of our economy, especially around taxation, keeping business rates low, energy costs, maintaining security of supply, extended enterprise zones, improving infrastructure and urgently addressing the shortage of skills that our innovative companies are facing. We suggest that we need a couple of specific measures, in particular, a coherent and stable tax structure built around the 12.5% rate of corporation tax and delivered on time. We should retain the 30% cap rate on business rates, for not just the short but the long term. We should also use enterprise zone facilities, which I know the First Minister was not happy with. We need those in areas where Northern

Ireland is particularly challenged, and we need to grow in those in what we need to do.

We also need to do something about our rather paltry research and development. We currently put only about a third of the UK total of research and development into what we do as we go forward. We need to increase that to the average UK level, and what we are going to call for is a fund of approximately £1 billion over the next 20 years, which needs to be linked to business, universities and industry. However, we are very conscious of making unrealistic demands on an already taut budget. What we can do is closely examine how some of the money is spent on the underperforming quangos around them, of which there is a plethora. We need to divert funds from those and other areas so that we can support a proper Northern Ireland regional development fund, and Europe could be critical in doing this and helping us as we go forward.

All of this needs to be backed up by some more practical things. We need to address the high cost of energy for our manufacturing and agribusiness companies. But we must also rate that our energy sector requires considerable investment, with an aging grid that is not capable of dealing with the demands of low-carbon generation. It needs functioning North/South and east-west interconnectors to connect us to the growing all-island energy market and a regulator that delivers energy on a median all-island cost. We have some of the highest energy costs in Europe, but we need to be able to match others. Most of all, we need to match the energy costs in the Republic of Ireland, which are, in some places, for the major manufacturing companies, 16% to 17% less than ours. We must question how, in an all-island energy market, our Utility Regulation mechanism appears to deliver very little. There are some fundamental questions there that need to be asked.

We also need to address the skills shortage and investment in higher education and further education, but we need to do it by listening to what our businesses need as well as by promoting our previously mentioned research and development in what we are trying to do. We also need to deal with other business costs, such as sea and air transport, and ask why it is five times more expensive to cross the North Channel than it is to cross the English Channel. It is ridiculous to note that, over a period of 25 years, it would probably be cheaper to build a tunnel under the North Channel than it would be to continue with these high costs.

Equally, air passenger duty (APD) is a tax on business and should be addressed urgently. Infrastructure needs to be improved — roads infrastructure, in particular. Broadband has, in some parts of Northern Ireland, become a joke and needs to be sorted out. Again, we mentioned a smart grid, and if we are to have a much more flexible and innovative economy, we need to make sure that the fundamentals of that are available. We need proper road links to our major logistical hubs, and we need to do something about the other levels of infrastructure that we have.

Penultimately, we need to change the mindset: manufacturing is not in a sunset period. Our 3,820 manufacturers, at any scale, can drive our future. Achieving a 20% manufacturing sector and generating an additional 100,000 jobs is achievable, but only if we put it at the centre of making Northern Ireland work. For that, we need vision, strategy and willingness from us all. To make that happen — it is too important to be delivered just by our government Departments — we would welcome the Minister creating a fully inclusive Northern Ireland strategic manufacturing board, as happens in other areas of the United Kingdom and Europe, to bring together all of the key partners to make it work and to work with our stakeholders to rally to make Northern Ireland one of the best places for manufacturing jobs as we go forward.

Before I ask the Minister to respond to our calls for commissioning a proper manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland, I think we need to address what is probably the biggest single issue affecting the future of business in Northern Ireland. We are currently planning to have a referendum in the United Kingdom on our future membership of the EU. Listening to the clarion calls from the business community and from many of our business-led organisations, one of the most important things that we see at the moment is a lack of certainty — there is fear about the future; there are concerns about North/South and east-west trade in particular; and there are concerns about what our companies will face in the future. I think it is remarkable that if we look at the parties in the Chamber, the majority of them will support the United Kingdom remaining within the EU, and I would like the Minister to make a statement on behalf of the Government, which includes his party and another party, about that support. We should be going to the people of Northern Ireland and saying that we should remain in the EU because that is indeed the best place for us in the future and the best place for us to deliver a proper manufacturing strategy.

**Mr Lyons:** I beg to move

*Leave out all after "Economy" and insert*

*"to include the development of the manufacturing sector in the Executive's new economic strategy."*

First, I congratulate the Member for South Antrim on his maiden speech; I look forward to working with him on the Economy Committee and on these issues as we go forward. I also congratulate the Minister on his appointment. We are very pleased that he is in post, very pleased that we have the Department for the Economy, and we want to wish him well for the future. I also want to note that I think it is important that this debate has been on the issue of manufacturing.

I welcome that focus. It is important that we are bringing these issues to the fore, debating them, talking about them and sending the message that they are issues that we are concerned about and that need to be addressed.

**12.45 pm**

We have tabled an amendment to the motion. Although we welcome the focus on manufacturing, we are seeking the approval of the House to amend the motion. Before I come on to that, it would be useful for us to have a look at manufacturing in Northern Ireland and at the current state of play.

There is no doubt that there have been an awful lot of difficulties for manufacturing over the last number of years. That has had impact on our constituents. In my constituency, many people worked in Ballymena — and I am thinking of Michelin, JTI and the job losses that have taken place. It is important that we recognise that we are not just talking about figures; these are real people who have lost their jobs and find themselves in a very difficult situation. We should be doing all in our power to sustain the jobs that we have in Northern Ireland and create more.

There is no doubt that there are many challenges that the manufacturing sector is facing. However, it is not an insignificant sector or an insignificant part of our economy. As Mr Aiken, the Member for South Antrim, said, it is responsible for 85,000 jobs directly and supports over 100,000 more. It is responsible for £213 million in export sales and hundreds of millions of pounds of foreign direct investment. Manufacturing is also responsible for some of

our best paid and most highly skilled jobs in Northern Ireland and, although there have been challenges and difficult times, we should welcome the fact that there has been growth in the sector over recent years. Indeed, we have seen thousands of extra jobs added in the manufacturing sector since the downturn. As well as having growth, we are growing at a faster rate than the rest of the UK despite having a larger than average manufacturing sector in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom. So although the picture for manufacturing is challenging, it is not a bleak picture or one without hope.

We have tabled the amendment because we are committed, as a party, to creating more and better jobs in Northern Ireland. We welcome that we will have the opportunity to have another debate on the economy tomorrow and talk further about plans for an economic strategy. That will require work, not only in manufacturing but across the whole economy and whole sectors. As a result, we are focusing on a new and refocused economic strategy to deliver growth for the whole economy. Manufacturing should be at the centre of that, and we hope that it will be.

In the amendment, why are we asking for, instead of just a single manufacturing strategy,

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**Mr Frew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** I will give way on that point.

**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for giving way. He is right to talk about a holistic approach. I heard the previous speaker talking about infrastructure. Does the Member realise that infrastructure has been heavily damaged in Northern Ireland by cuts from the Tory party, a party that was wedded to the UUP for many years? Does the Member, like me, want to know where the UUP stands on the European Union and whether they are in or out? At the minute, we do not really know where they stand.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Lyons:** I look forward to Mr Swann winding up the debate. He will be able to answer those questions. Perhaps the Ulster Unionist Party is not united on the issue; perhaps, some people have seen the light and have realised that we would be better off out of the European Union. I will not speak for the Ulster Unionist Party —

**Mr Swann:** That makes a change. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Lyons:** I will let Mr Swann answer that question, and no doubt the Chamber will be full when he makes his remarks so that we can get some clarity on the issue.

We want to see growth in the whole economy and in manufacturing. Growth in the whole economy will help manufacturing as well. That is why we want to see an economic strategy for all of Northern Ireland and across all sectors. Of course, there is overlap between different sectors and different businesses within our economy. Some of the issues that people raise are rates, infrastructure, skills and education, energy, competitiveness and investment. All those issues come together. Although not all businesses or companies have issues with all the problems they face, together we need to address them all. As my colleague Mr Frew said, perhaps we need a more holistic approach. The best way in which we can deliver for Northern Ireland on those issues is through one strategy.

Of course, the challenges that face manufacturing are not unique to manufacturing. That does not mean that we will have an absence — I hope that we will not — of help, targets or actions for manufacturing. You will all be avid readers of the DUP manifesto for the 2016 Assembly election, which was endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland and in which we made it very clear that we want manufacturing to be put at the very heart of the economic strategy. It is also useful for us, as Back-Benchers and as opposition parties, to have that one strategy; we can hold the Government to account by saying, "Here's one single document. Here's what the Executive have said that they were going to do". It is useful to have that codified in one document.

I hope that I have been able to outline why we seek the support of the House for the amendment. As we move forward, there are steps that need to be taken. Mr Aiken rightly outlined some of the things that we want to happen. We hope that there will be a focus on issues such as skills. As we move forward, it is hugely important that we have our people trained, educated and with the right skills for the jobs that are coming along, especially in light of the devolution of corporation tax powers, which will be hugely important for Northern Ireland. There is the potential to create thousands of jobs. I know that not everybody agrees with what we have done about the devolution of corporation tax; I think that, a few years ago, the Ulster Unionist Party said that it was time to move on from the issue, and it was time for plan B. I am glad that we stuck to plan A and have the devolution of corporation tax. We not only

have the power devolved but have set a date and a rate. That is very important.

We also need to focus on energy, which is a massive issue not only for those in manufacturing but for those in other businesses. We need to look at that to see how we can have cheaper energy than what we have at the minute and how we can provide help to industry and businesses. Infrastructure has been mentioned, as has the need for a proper infrastructure to be in place.

I hope that I have been able to outline to the House the reasons for our amendment. We look forward to working with other parties in the Assembly to bring forward an economic strategy that can deliver real tangible results for the people of Northern Ireland and create a more prosperous future for us all.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy):** I am delighted, as Chairperson of the Economy Committee, to participate in the debate, which was tabled by the Deputy Chair. While I am speaking as the Chair of the Committee, Members will be aware that we have met only once, so we have not had the opportunity to discuss a potential manufacturing strategy for the North or what such a strategy should look like. However, speaking on behalf of the Committee, I assure the House that we will debate fully and will not be found wanting when it comes to listening to stakeholders, discussing among ourselves and providing ideas to the Minister for such a strategy to be brought forward. It might have been better if we had had some of that discussion before today's debate, but, that said, I am sure that today's contributions will feed into the Committee's discussion. We will proactively look at providing a pathway that not only supports our existing manufacturing industries but seeks to develop new industries.

I do not think that anyone here is naive enough to assume that we can develop a strategy for the North that ignores the realities of the global economy and the balances and links between our economy and that of the South, Britain and the EU. However, we as Members, particularly those whose constituencies were affected, are aware of the announcements of large-scale job losses at the likes of Michelin, Gallaher's, Bombardier, Seagate and others, and, of course, everyone shares the view that we cannot afford to lose those types of skilled jobs.

I will advocate that the Committee take a measured view of the potential benefits of a dedicated manufacturing strategy for the North and what it might contain. Should there be

consensus on such a strategy, the Committee will want to ensure that it is the right fit for us here and not simply imported from elsewhere. I suggest that the Committee will want to look at what disadvantages or additional cost burdens — Members who spoke previously mentioned some of those — we face that competitors in other regions do not and how those might be best offset through the work of a strategy and indeed the Executive. The Committee will have to consider whether our job promotion model facilitates the development of manufacturing jobs here. Additionally, we must consider whether jobs in manufacturing may be more secure in the long term than jobs in, for instance, high-tech or creative industries and whether we are promoting jobs strategically over a range of sectors.

At the Committee's first meeting last week, the issue of energy costs was raised, and, as I said, it has been mentioned by the Members who spoke previously here. Clearly, there is a particular concern for 20 or 30 of our largest manufacturers. We must also consider, as mentioned, how the proposed lowering of our corporation tax rate in 2018 will impact the situation for manufacturers. The development of a specific manufacturing strategy for the North may require a fundamental redesign of Invest NI. These are all questions that must be considered. The Committee would obviously be a key player in any process of developing such a strategy, and I know from listening to Committee members last Wednesday that we will not be backward about bringing ideas to the table.

It would be unwise to engage in a hastily developed strategy simply to respond to the large-scale job losses that we have had. However, quite clearly, as the amendment suggests, any such manufacturing strategy — listening to the contribution of the Member who moved the motion, I think that he would probably accept this — must be located firmly in an economic strategy that is located firmly in the broader Programme for Government and that that is aligned with a Budget that can deliver on such a strategy. I think that that is the logical way to go forward.

Speaking on my own behalf, a Cheann Comhairle, I want any strategy that promotes, supports and encourages new manufacturing industries to be one that is regionally balanced as well. The need for regional balance across the Six Counties is referred to in the Programme for Government framework document that has gone out. Clearly, developing such a strategy is not simply a matter for us here but, given the way in which

the Programme for Government itself has been designed — it will be rolled out over the autumn — this is a matter on which we need engagement with all stakeholders. People in the manufacturing industries and the manufacturing trade unions, who are at the coalface of these industries, need to be part of developing such a strategy. It should be done only on the basis of feedback from across all those sectors and consideration of the bigger issues facing manufacturing that discourage investment and job creation. It may be within our gift to try to assist in a greater spread of job creation across the manufacturing industries. Taking all those matters into account —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Mr Murphy:** — I believe that we can come up with a strategy that is located in the economic strategy and backed by a Budget through the Programme for Government.

**Mr Speaker:** As this is Sinead Bradley's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that the speech is made without interruption. I remind the Member that that may be forfeited, of course, if she becomes ultra-controversial.

**Mrs S Bradley:** I will attempt not to, Mr Speaker. Thank you very much. As you said, it is my maiden speech to the House. I would like to direct my first comments to thanking the people of South Down, who have given me the privilege of being here and representing them. It is a great honour for me to add my name to the list of SDLP representatives who have served the people of South Down, namely, the late Eddie McGrady; my father, PJ Bradley; Eamonn O'Neill; Margaret Ritchie MP; and, in the last mandate, Karen McKeivitt and Seán Rogers. Like each of those former Members, I will endeavour to make sure that South Down is very well represented in the House, and I look forward to working with others for the betterment of the people of Northern Ireland.

**1.00 pm**

However, I share with you openly my hope that this chapter of politics in Northern Ireland will be remembered in South Down as the time when the Narrow Water bridge was finally delivered. Nothing short of that would bring satisfactory closure to the lifetime's political work that my father, P J Bradley, put into that project.

I move to the business in front of us. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on

the need to develop a manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland. Many base factors are essential for a balanced growth of all sectors across our economy. Those include things that have already been mentioned, such as access to a healthy and skilled workforce, the development of reliable and competitive sources of energy, and infrastructure etc. No doubt there will be plenty of opportunities to discuss in detail many of those issues in an overarching economic agenda delivered for Northern Ireland.

This motion, however, presents us with an opportunity to pay particular focus on one sector in that economic offering: manufacturing. It is well documented that the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland has suffered a number of blows during the past 12 months. Some Members have already mentioned the loss of more than 1,000 jobs from Bombardier, and there have been similar cuts with Michelin, JTI Gallaher and, lately, Seagate.

Manufacturing NI recently warned that more than 6,000 jobs could be lost across the sector over the next decade, due to advances in technology. Despite that, manufacturing continues to play a significant role in our overall economy. Many headline statistics can be found to illustrate just how significant it is. In my constituency, South Down, major employers such as Bradfor Limited, MJM Group and B/E Aerospace are but a few of the key manufacturing businesses supporting the economy. In Northern Ireland, manufacturing represents 13% to 14% of GDP. The SDLP shares the manufacturing sector's belief that it is possible and necessary for the Executive to work with the sector to increase that contribution to 20% of GDP. Manufacturing NI says that this would be possible with, and I quote:

*"the implementation of a manufacturing strategy, the establishment of a target on competitive energy prices, continued stability on rates and a raising of ambition".*

The amendment sadly does not fill me with confidence that ambition has been raised. Make no mistake: this debate has the potential to represent a pivotal moment in the future direction of manufacturing in Northern Ireland. We see an opportunity to create a focused strategy that has the potential to navigate specific barriers to growth in the sector and help realise that desirable 20% of GDP. At a time when Europe openly seeks to reindustrialise, Members have yet to grasp the significance of needing a specific manufacturing strategy. I

find it regrettable that, through my maiden speech, I have to try to convince others that a real need for a dedicated manufacturing strategy exists. I would have much preferred my contribution to have focused on the ambitions of that strategy.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

**Mrs S Bradley:** The Northern Ireland Executive must formulate and implement a manufacturing strategy, for which the industry has been calling for more than a year.

**Dr Farry:** I congratulate Sinead Bradley on her maiden speech. I have no doubt that she will follow in the footsteps of her predecessors in giving a very passionate voice to the people of South Down. I also pass on my congratulations to Mr Aiken on his maiden speech, the Minister on his appointment and, obviously, you, Mr Speaker, on your appointment as well. *[Laughter.]* That is the protocol out of the way.

In any discussion on manufacturing, we must bear in mind that we meet with the referendum barely weeks ahead of us. That colours anything that is said in the Chamber about manufacturing.

It is clearly in the interest of Northern Ireland that we remain part of the European Union, particularly for the manufacturing sector, which already depends very much on exports and access to international markets for its current level of activity. If we are to follow through on the laudable objectives of increasing the share of our economy for manufacturing, it is only through exports that that will be realised. Being part of Europe is absolutely fundamental to the future of manufacturing here.

It is also worth taking a moment to think about exactly what we will be doing in terms of manufacturing. It is important that this does not become an issue of the precise architecture of how strategies fit together but is more about the commitments that people will be making to turn those into reality. I also pass on my congratulations to the Ulster Unionist Party on its new-found appreciation of the value of strategies. As someone who listened in the past mandate to them bemoaning yet another strategy and demanding action, I note that finally they have recognised that a strategy is useful for crystallising visions, aims and objectives and for setting out the action points that will be taken and, crucially, the resourcing that will be set aside against those.



Indeed, while Mr Aiken read out a very important list of initiatives that could be taken to improve manufacturing, it is important that we are also mindful of the resources required to turn that into a reality. The only commitment that I heard to new resources was some minor tinkering with quangos. Even the abolition of quangos does not produce a huge amount of additional resource, because the functions of quangos still have to be addressed elsewhere in the system. It is important that, when we talk about the steps that are required, we put in place the resources to ensure that they come forward. If we are talking today about this historic moment of opposition and even constructive opposition, that is not just about being an Opposition with a nice smile; it is about having a clear alternative and ensuring that it is feasible and can be properly resourced.

I recognise that manufacturing in Northern Ireland is going through challenging times. There have been a lot of negative headlines and bad news stories in particular over the past 12 months. At the same time, it is important that we recognise that, while there is serious scope for growth, we have a healthy situation and employment in manufacturing is at a level exceeding the figures as far back as 2008. We have many strengths, and we are seeing an evolution of our manufacturing sector or sectors in a move to more high-value-added jobs. That involves some bad news at the same time as we are having good news about new jobs being created.

In terms of the architecture itself, I see the choice between the motion and the amendment as being a false binary choice. It is important that we recognise that manufacturing must be central to any new or refreshed economic strategy, but there may well be scope for doing additional and more detailed work outside the very particular confines of the economic strategy. That strategy will make references to other strategies — for example, the current skills strategy or the STEM strategy. There are a lot of particular issues around skills. When we look to manufacturing, we see a range of interventions in particular subsections of manufacturing, whether it is life sciences or IT. Indeed, Invest NI has a number of initiatives in that regard already.

It is also important that we recognise that manufacturing is very diverse. It ranges from things like life sciences through to plastics and heavy engineering. There is also an ongoing debate as to whether agrifood is part of manufacturing: some people count it as part of manufacturing, and some do not. Of course,

we already have a separate strategy there, Going for Growth. It is important that we have that proper, rounded discussion with the business community and particularly those in manufacturing as to how best we can serve their interests and keep an open mind as to what the best set of structures will be in that regard. I regard this as being a false choice, because I believe that there is scope for us to do something that is particularly focused on manufacturing in the broadest sense.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Dr Farry:** I accept that we have to recognise that there will be particular substrategies plus the overarching economic strategy.

**Mr Storey:** Regrettably, I cannot stand here today and say that this is my maiden speech, as I have been here since 2003. However, after all those years, we still have in Northern Ireland much that we need to be proud of. It disappoints me that, when I come to the House — I have said this repeatedly in previous debates — it seems as though we always want to concentrate on the negatives. Of course, we now have a new Opposition; well, one of four, five, six or seven. I am not sure how many leaders of the Opposition there are now.

It is time that the Assembly — I advise, if they would be so kind to take the advice, the official Opposition or whoever is in that corner to do this — actually talked up Northern Ireland. Let us remember that, in our manufacturing, we have 214,000 direct and supported jobs. That is one in four of all jobs in the economy. We have £9.9 billion total GVA contribution to GDP, which is around 30% of the economy. Productivity is at £55,700, which is 38% higher than the Northern Ireland average with an advanced manufacturing contribution of 27% more. Those are the figures from Manufacturing Northern Ireland. Yet, when we come to the House, we find it is all about what more we need to do. Not one Member who has spoken today has paid tribute to the manufacturing base that we have or to the 214,000 direct and supported jobs for how they have contributed to the well-being of Northern Ireland.

It is not perfect; there is a huge amount of work still to be done. Coming from North Antrim, I know all too well the impact of job losses. We made reference to that, and I thank Members for the references to the closure of JTI and Michelin and to the pressures that there are, even on our manufacturing companies, such as

Wrightbus, as well as to the challenges they face on a day and daily basis to underwrite and secure the long-term future of those jobs. I pay tribute to companies such as Terex, which has recently come into Ballymoney in my constituency. It is a global organisation that needs to continue to be supported; indeed, I recently met with it. I agree with the issue that was raised by the Member and others about the cost of our energy. I have no doubt that my colleague the Minister — I pay tribute to him and wish him well in his new role — will make this an area of priority.

Let me come to an issue that was also raised by the Member. I am glad to be on the Economy Committee with him and look forward to working with him. I have no doubt that we will have our differences, and no doubt we will have our political spats; you would not expect anything else from politicians. However, he raised the coming referendum. I would like the Member to ask the companies in Northern Ireland that have been curtailed, restrained and in many respects set at a disadvantage because of our attachment to the European Union. The regulations are destroying and crippling the advantage that our companies could have in the way in which they provide their services. Indeed, I ask the Deputy Chair of the Committee and the proposer of the motion whether he could speak to his colleague Mr Swann and ask him his view of the issue, because, of course, we know, as has been alluded to, the Ulster Unionist Party, not for the first time on a number of issues, is divided on it. My party is very clear. If you heard my colleague Sammy Wilson on this morning, you would know that we should deal with facts, not fear. Let us deal with the reality of where we are. It is regrettable that our Chancellor came to Northern Ireland today and was about bringing fear to the debate as opposed to bringing the facts to it.

Mr Farry makes a very valid point that it is a diverse environment in which manufacturing operates, and we need to ensure that in our terminology, our policy, our strategy and in everything we do we have covered all the areas appropriately so that we —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Mr Storey:** — continue to build on the success and make Northern Ireland the economic powerhouse that, I believe, it can become.

**Mr T Buchanan:** I support the amendment before the House. At the outset, I congratulate

my colleague Simon Hamilton on his appointment as Minister for the Economy. I wish him every success in his new role, and it is one that I am confident he will use to lead this country forward to even greater success and prosperity. I wish him well.

Northern Ireland is no stranger to being a world leader on the manufacturing stage. This country has been built on a firm foundation of manufacturing, and this small but powerful nation has a rich history in manufacturing, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The foundation has stayed firm through the centuries, and Northern Ireland has thrived in spite of obstacles on a national and, more recently, international scale.

### 1.15 pm

It is fair to say that, in recent years, cuts to the manufacturing sector across Northern Ireland and a climate of instability led to some very challenging circumstances, at times, for the industry. However, I believe that it is now time and the opportunity is here within Northern Ireland for us to rise again to manufacturing excellence and show again our strength on a global scale. In Northern Ireland, we already have the right ingredients in place to ensure that this long-term vision for the future not only comes together but thrives on a global scale.

It is imperative that we as a Government come up with the long-term strategic policies that will empower Northern Ireland to believe in its own strength. Through the mix of all the ingredients, the manufacturing sector will have the tools to become more competitive, globally. It is only through close partnership with industry that we can create a highly skilled workforce that can deal with the dynamic nature of this rapidly changing sector.

However, that is only one strand of the partnership. There must be flexibility within government to bring leaders from across the manufacturing sector to share ideas to ensure that we move in the right direction. That type of collaboration between government, industry and education is the vehicle to steer us towards a more efficient and streamlined manufacturing sector as we move forward.

A vital ingredient in the future economic strategy, which includes manufacturing, is skills. If we are serious about improving the economic prosperity of our region, we need to build on the good work that was started in the former Department for Education and Learning.

Investment in science, technology, engineering and maths is crucial in empowering our young people with the skills that we need to build up the manufacturing sector in our country. In conjunction with empowering our young people with appropriate skills, research and development in industry is a fundamental force that will drive the economy forward. For manufacturing to be successful amongst many other sectors, research and development must be at the cutting edge of growth and preparation for the future. We already have two world-class universities with a wealth of knowledge, which is already informed by industry. Skills exchange and sharing between education and industry needs to be the hinge on which our strategy swings to improve and grow our sectors in Northern Ireland.

Foundation industries such as energy and investment by energy companies into long-term projects which meet manufacturing energy needs, are also essential. One of the big areas is broadband provision, which needs to be enhanced. There is very poor broadband provision in some areas of my West Tyrone constituency. That can have a devastating impact on companies, and it is a real factor for businesses that are trying to compete in the global market.

Even with such poor infrastructure, however, we have to say that manufacturing industry continues to strive. Precision engineering is a niche market in the west Tyrone area; it is thriving and growing. That is one example of where the skills and attitudes of businesses in the manufacturing industry can adapt and be —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr T Buchanan:** — world leaders, despite the difficulties across the sector.

Manufacturing excellence does not necessarily equate to business success. As a Government, we need to be smart and to think more like a business. We must provide strong links within a global market and make it much easier for companies to access those markets and do all in their power to ensure that that happens. I support the amendment.

**Mr McGlone:** The SDLP supports the motion and its objective. The Minister for the Economy should take the lead in developing a manufacturing strategy, in collaboration with his Executive colleagues. The relevance and importance of that is that it needs to be joined up in a multifaceted way. Economic

development is indeed heavily reliant not only on the skills base but on the infrastructural base, which includes roads, water and, as already referred to, the network grid and, crucially, broadband and all that goes with the attendant communications network that is so frequently used now by businesses to help develop and promote their companies.

The introduction of the current Executive's draft Programme for Government framework talks about finalising and agreeing the Programme for Government, the Budget, a refreshed economic strategy, a new investment strategy and a social strategy by the end of 2016. It does not talk about a manufacturing strategy. In fact, manufacturing is noticeable by its absence in the Executive's framework document whilst other sectors, such as tourism, get numerous mentions. This is a mistake. We have had reference to corporation tax, but key to its success or otherwise is of course stability. That stability includes our position within the EU. Earlier, Mr Storey referred to his colleague on 'The Nolan Show' this morning who referred to the likes of Sweden, Norway, France and Switzerland in the context of the preferred option for relationships within these islands and indeed with the EU. It might be helpful if he could place those things in the proper context and factual record and bring the cogency of that argument up to date, rather than talking about how he wished things could be and not how they are.

However, getting back to the key element of the manufacturing strategy, the recently announced job losses at Seagate in Derry, Sirocco Engineering and Michelin, the closure of the JTI plant in Ballymena and the Bombardier statement of intent to reduce its workforce demonstrate the difficulties that the manufacturing sector is facing. Workers' representatives and employers in the manufacturing sector have consistently called for a specific manufacturing strategy to be put in place by the Executive. They may differ on some of the details but they are united in seeking the development of a comprehensive Executive strategy to support and grow the manufacturing sector.

Unite has previously joined with the manufacturing employers' group, Manufacturing NI — I am sure that many of us have already dealt with both groups and worked with them closely in the past — to call on the Northern Ireland Executive to commit to a manufacturing strategy. In November last year, they called for urgent action to protect the manufacturing base and help create the conditions to allow manufacturers to grow. In April this year, the

general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Patricia King, called on the incoming Executive to put forward a comprehensive manufacturing strategy to tackle issues such as energy costs, skills development and support for investment, which have been referred to. In March this year, Manufacturing NI published a report by Oxford Economics on the economic contribution of manufacturing here and called on the Executive to raise ambitions and drive reindustrialisation of the economy. Just this week, Manufacturing NI and the Unite union once again joined together in support of the motion that we are debating today. I hope that serious support and deliberation will be given to it.

What is clear from the Oxford Economics report is that, despite the difficulties that I mentioned, the manufacturing sector outperforms every other part of the economy. It delivers 214,000 direct and supported jobs. That is a very positive message; it means one in four of all jobs in the economy. Eighty-five thousand people are directly employed in manufacturing. It is the largest single employment sector in my constituency of Mid Ulster. Manufacturing delivers a £9.9 billion total gross value added contribution to GDP, which is around 30% of the economy. Productivity, at 55,700, is 38% higher than Northern Ireland's average, with advanced manufacturing's contribution being 25% higher still than that. Manufacturing accounts for almost two thirds of all export sales, some £6 billion. Manufacturers invested £254 million —

**Mr Speaker:** The Member must conclude his remarks.

**Mr McGlone:** — in R&D in 2014 and the manufacturing sector attracted £900 million in foreign direct investment between 2010 and 2014. There is clearly room for improvement. I support the motion as it stands.

**Mr Allister:** Mr Speaker, I trust that you will rebuke the Member for North Belfast, the Chief Whip of Sinn Féin, for her flagrant breach of the protocols and courtesies of the House when she walked in front of the previous Member to speak and between you and him when he was speaking.

No economy can hope to succeed and grow without the engine house that is the manufacturing industry. The service industry and everything else have their place, but, without manufacturing providing the strong backbone that grows an economy, no economy will reach its potential. Manufacturing,

therefore, is central to the growth of our economy or any economy.

It is good to hear sound bites about prosperity in the manufacturing sector. I am not putting the manufacturing sector down in any way, but I have to be mindful, representing North Antrim, of the context in my constituency of two dire blows in the devastating losses at JTI and Michelin. It would be nice if the Minister had something positive to tell us today about the replacement of those jobs in North Antrim. It would be a timely occasion in the House, not outside it, to do that. We live in hope in that regard.

I will address a couple of the major shackles on our manufacturing. It is my hope that, come 23 June, some of those shackles will be cut because we will be liberated from the restraints of being in the European Union. It is a fact that, although only 17% of manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland export to the EU, every manufacturing business is subject to the same market restraints, regulations and Brussels restraints as apply across the market, as if they were all exporting when they are not. One of the consequences of leaving the EU would be to liberate instantly those businesses that have been subject to unnecessary EU regulation for 40 years, even though they never exported to the EU.

One of the follies of membership of the EU is that all businesses are subject to the regulations as if they exported, even though they do not. The greater bulk of our produce is sold either locally or to GB. In manufacturing export terms, only a quarter of our produce is exported to other EU countries, yet we are subject to the entirety of that burden and restraint.

For manufacturing, the second reason why I hope that the people of the United Kingdom have the good sense to leave the EU is that it will liberate us in terms of trade as a nation. The minority of our trade is with the EU. The growth in our trade is with the growth parts of the world outside the EU, yet, because we are in the EU, we are not permitted as a nation to make a single trade agreement with any of the countries with which our trade is growing. Our hands are tied behind our back as a consequence of growing our trade and because of our membership of the EU. Far from the scare stories, the scaremongering and the ludicrous things that the Prime Minister and people from the Chancellor down have been saying, 23 June presents a marvellous opportunity for manufacturing, industry and this

society to liberate themselves from the dead hand of Brussels to free ourselves —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Mr Allister:** — from that moribund part of the world — the EU — and to follow the growth that is outside. If we do that, our manufacturing has a prosperous future rather than one hindered by the present regulations of Brussels.

**1.30 pm**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to apologise for walking past Patsy McGlone and ask Patsy to accept my apology for walking in front of him. I do not think that there is any need to conduct a whole investigation into a protocol, if you would not mind just accepting my apologies. Thank you very much.

**Mr Speaker:** Apologies noted. I draw all Members' attention to the fact that, when a Member is on his or her feet, you ought not to walk in front of him or her. It is early days, but let us adhere to the procedure.

**Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):** I welcome the opportunity to respond to today's debate. I congratulate Members, including the mover of the motion, on their maiden speeches and thank Members for their kind words about my appointment. I am very glad that the first debate in the new Assembly is focused on the economy, and I think that it shows the centrality of my new Department in taking Northern Ireland forward.

There is something of a perception that Northern Ireland's manufacturing sector is in the doldrums. I understand that, and perhaps it is because of the demise of many of our traditional heavy industries over the last number of decades. Industries such as shipbuilding and textiles have either gone completely or are a shadow of their former selves. The decisions by JTI and Michelin, which were referred to several times today, to close their plants in Ballymena, along with the news of 1,000 job losses at Bombardier and, more recently, job losses at Seagate in Londonderry, are not only devastating to those who are directly affected but exacerbate the belief that manufacturing in Northern Ireland is in poor shape. That perception does not tally with careful analysis of the performance of the sector.

Whether it is jobs, sales, exports or output, our manufacturing sector is performing very well.

Figures for 2015 show that employment in the sector is now at 80,000. This is the first time since 2008 that the sector has had 80,000 jobs. Sales by manufacturing firms in 2014 stood at £18.1 billion, which is an increase of 1.7% on the previous year. Manufacturing exports in 2015 were £6.3 billion, which is up £350 million on 2014. Manufacturing output was up 2.4% in the last year. Northern Ireland's manufacturing sector has been outperforming the rest of the UK, with output since 2009 up by 19% compared with 6.9% across the whole of the United Kingdom. If manufacturing were indeed in decline, none of those statistics would show the improvements that they do. I would not for a second suggest that the sector is not challenged, but it is not in the crisis that some suggest.

I, for one, am proud of the many achievements and successes of our manufacturing companies, including the fact that one in three of London's red buses are made at Wrightbus in Ballymena; that 40% of the world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is made in Northern Ireland; that over 30% of the world's airline seats are manufactured at B/E Aerospace in Killeel; that one in 10 cholesterol tests worldwide are made by Randox; and that a quarter of all computer read/write heads are made at the aforementioned Seagate.

I want to make it clear that, as Minister for the Economy, and as encouraged by Mr Storey in his contribution, I will always be a champion and a cheerleader for local industry. I will not stick my head in the sand and deny that there are difficulties, but neither will I talk down any sector and seek to suggest that a crisis exists when it does not. Manufacturing is and will remain a crucial and central part of our local economy. It accounts for 11% of all Northern Ireland's jobs and contributes 16% to the total economic output. While there has been some bad news of job losses, there has also been good news in the manufacturing sector, with, for example, 110 jobs announced at CDE Global in Cookstown in March. It is encouraging that the Economic Policy Centre at Ulster University forecasts that employment growth in manufacturing will account for around 10% of the 40,000 additional jobs in the local economy over the period to 2025.

There are many who will call upon my Department to provide support for the manufacturing sector, so it might be useful if I sketch out some of the assistance given in recent years. In the last Programme for Government period, from 2011 to 2016, Invest NI provided £270 million of assistance to manufacturing businesses, which, in turn,

unlocked £1.9 billion of total investment and created over 13,000 new jobs.

To compete in the global economy, it is vital that Northern Ireland has in place a strong and efficient route for the delivery of high-level professional and technical skills — a point made by my predecessor as skills Minister that will, I am sure, repeatedly be made. My Department is in the process of implementing major reforms initiated in the last term of Northern Ireland's professional and technical education and training landscape through a new system of apprenticeships and youth training.

Another way in which we have been supporting manufacturing is through the competence centre programme. This helps to facilitate and encourage knowledge exchange between industry and academia in collaborative programmes in connected health, sustainable energy, advanced engineering and agrifoods. This work will support the development and commercialisation of new technologies. Invest NI has committed £5 million of funding per centre over five years. Currently, 85 companies are participating across the four competence centres, and 43 collaborative projects have been initiated.

The Executive as a whole have continued to keep in place the policy of industrial derating, which provides businesses, including many manufacturing ones, with a 70% reduction in their rates bills. That policy has kept over £300 million in the pockets of local businesses in the last five years.

Business costs are an important aspect of Northern Ireland's competitiveness. Research has shown that, on balance, even when taking into account some areas where we have higher prices, we are a highly cost-competitive location compared with the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Overall, it has been estimated that business costs were typically about 84% of those in the whole of the UK and 95% of those in the Republic of Ireland, driven mainly by lower labour and property costs.

I am well aware that, for some of our larger companies, energy costs are a significant component of overall manufacturing costs, but we should remember that cost challenges for the sector do not relate solely to energy. I am grateful to the energy and manufacturing advisory group (EMAG) for its comprehensive report and recommendations on actions that might be taken to alleviate energy cost pressures on the sector. Energy markets are

complex, and actions taken in one area can have unintended consequences elsewhere. The group's report serves to illustrate those points with a diverse range of policy and operational recommendations. My Department and I are looking closely at the recommendations that have been put forward. It will be important to give careful consideration to the EMAG recommendations in the context of the wider strategic landscape and the Department's work to review and refocus the strategic energy framework.

The focus of the motion is the call for a manufacturing strategy. I am not convinced that a stand-alone manufacturing strategy is the right thing for Northern Ireland, and let me try to explain why. My Department is leading on the development of a refocused economic strategy that will accompany the final version of the Programme for Government. A key component of informing that refocus is a strong and robust evidence base. MATRIX, which is the Northern Ireland science industry panel, was created to provide advice and guidance on the high-tech business sectors and emerging market opportunities that we should exploit to make a major impact on economic growth in Northern Ireland. MATRIX has identified strategic subsectors in major global markets that we will look to further exploit. Those subsectors, which are mainly manufacturing-based, are in the broader global markets of telecoms and ICT; life and health sciences; agrifood; advanced materials; and advanced engineering. As a small region, Northern Ireland does not have the scale to compete in every aspect of those markets. That is why MATRIX drills down to identify areas of strength and opportunity. For example, in life and health sciences we will seek to exploit capability in key subsectors, such as precision medicine, clinical trials, diagnostics and health data analytics — all of which are, of course, areas with high-end manufacturing capabilities.

That level of attention to key subsectors has also ensured that we are well placed to know our technology strengths and market capabilities in the context of European smart specialisation. Indeed, it is widely considered that Northern Ireland has the most detailed understanding of its leading industries and, therefore, the key manufacturing subsectors of any UK region. That gives our economic policy in this area considerable focus, and we continue to build on this evidence base all the time.

MATRIX's work also reflects the fact that sectors are increasingly dependent on one another; in fact, some of the most important

emerging opportunities are in spaces where sectors overlap. We must not forget, for example, that services and manufacturing have become increasingly intertwined and we now have many professionals, such as software engineers, designers, accountants and scientists, working in the manufacturing sector. It is appropriate to look at all industries collectively while considering a strategy to grow the private sector.

Our manufacturing base is, because of our strong history of manufacturing, still very diverse. There are activities ranging from aerospace, automotive, electronics, pharmaceuticals and chemicals to heavy plant machinery, agritech equipment and construction products, to name but a few. You will appreciate that there is not a one-size-fits-all support solution. What will work for the small firm that is cutting, welding and making farm trailers is very different from what will work for the company manufacturing sophisticated composite components for the aerospace sector. It is important that that diversity is recognised, and I believe the best way that government can help is to create the environment that allows manufacturing companies to move forward with policies and support tailored in a way that maximises the benefit to the economy.

In essence, for those looking for a strategy, we already have one: it is called the economic strategy. It will be refreshed and refocused in line with the new PFG. I can assure the House that it will highlight the particular significance of manufacturing to the local economy and will set a clear direction for ensuring that the full gamut of appropriate policy instruments is in place to support the sector, namely a pipeline of talent to meet the skills needs of the sector now and in the future; investment in economic infrastructure; a support environment for innovation and knowledge exchange; business growth support measures; assistance with market development and exporting; and a regulatory environment that is good for business as well as protecting the interests of employees.

Before I close, I want to say that I am delighted that we now have a date and a rate for the devolution of corporation tax. A rate of 12.5%, effective from 2018, will provide a major stimulus for the economy and support for all sectors. I am confident that the ability to lower the rate of corporation tax will help to grow the entire private sector, including the manufacturing sector, as we seek to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy towards greater private-sector and value-added growth.

To summarise, while I recognise that manufacturing has experienced some recent setbacks, the sector remains at the very heart of business and industry in Northern Ireland. Our region's strong manufacturing heritage remains intact, with a higher percentage concentration of manufacturing businesses in Northern Ireland than in the UK as a whole. We can remain confident that it will continue to have a significant role to play in the Northern Ireland economy as we seek to meet the challenges of global competitiveness. The debate today has been informative, and I can support the amendment that calls for the development of the manufacturing sector to be fully considered and reflected in the Executive's refocused economic strategy.

**Mr Dunne:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the amendment, and I welcome the new Minister for the Economy, Simon Hamilton, to his post. I wish him well for his time in office, and I trust that he will remember the good people of North Down during that time.

I believe that the most productive way to go forward on this issue is, as the Minister has said, to include the development of manufacturing in the Executive's new economic strategy. That is why we tabled the amendment. Our manufacturing sector has been at the very backbone of our economy for many years. With our mixture of a very highly skilled and educated workforce and a rich industrial and enterprising heritage, we have a proud and able sector that we all want to see flourish in the future. While challenges continue to exist, we see our economy continuing to recover from the global recession, which naturally had an impact on our open economy. I am delighted that outcome number one in the draft Programme for Government is that we prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy. That puts the economy in its rightful place at number one, right at the heart of our priorities for this country in the future. The economy must continue to be the number one priority for our Executive and, indeed, for Invest NI.

Our manufacturing sector is vital in sustaining and growing our economy. We need to grow our private sector as we seek to rebalance our economy and make Northern Ireland the number one place to do business and to invest. Making the right conditions to improve our economic competitiveness and building on our export market are key to truly developing the sector. We must continue the preparatory work to get the conditions right on the ground for our new rate of corporation tax, and I welcome the statement today by the Minister on that. We

must ensure that we maximise the potential that that lever gives us for our manufacturing sector.

It is vital that we equip, train and skill our workforce to ensure that we can compete for sustainable foreign direct investment and continue, as we must, to give robust support to Invest NI.

**1.45 pm**

As I wind on the debate, I will summarise some of the points made by the various Members who spoke. I think that we would all commend Stephen Aiken for his maiden speech. He wants to see a change away from the public to the private sector. He registered his concern and the need for stronger economic growth. He also wants to see a joined-up manufacturing strategy, with targets and benchmarking. It is important that there are targets and benchmarking in place to monitor how we are doing. He made the point about the need for an uplift in R&D, something that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment looked at in detail.

My colleague Gordon Lyons made the point — it is a very good one — that we need to continue to sustain the jobs that already exist in our Province by making sure that proper funding is in place to stop the leakages and losses that happen. However, he also recognised the continuing growth: we are growing faster than other parts of the UK.

Conor Murphy, the Chairman of the new Economy Committee, made various points about the need for the support of a manufacturing strategy. To be fair, he recognised the need to engage with the Committee and all stakeholders to come up with an inclusive strategy.

I think that we would all commend Sinead Bradley for her maiden speech as well. It was very impressive. We recognise the work of her father in the Chamber and respect the work that he did over the years. I am sure that she will work well with other Members for South Down, including my colleague, Jim Wells. She made points about the need for strong support for the south Down area and for the local GDP, which is so important, and about setting targets for competitive energy prices, which is also very important.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Mr Dunne:** Unfortunately, I have little time. Stephen Farry, the former Employment and Learning Minister, made very good points in relation to the need to upgrade our skills and recognised the different views on whether life sciences, engineering and the agrifood sector be included.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Robin Swann to conclude and wind on the debate. The Member has 10 minutes.

**Mr Swann:** It is a pleasure to wind on the first Opposition debate of the new mandate in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I congratulate and thank my party colleague Steve Aiken for bringing it forward.

Some of the Members from the left tried to portray the debate and the motion as talking Northern Ireland down. It is far from it, and I want to make that clear from the outset. Mr Aiken even said that this was not about manufacturing being in a sunset in Northern Ireland. The ambition and drive were summed up by Ms Bradley when she said that the debate was about raising ambition for the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland.

The Minister quoted statistics, but I think, as Mr Aiken pointed out, 13% of our GDP comes from manufacturing at this time. We clearly should have a target of 20% of GDP from manufacturing in Northern Ireland. That is something that we should strive to attain, as is recognised by all the stakeholders in Northern Ireland and in the joint press release from Manufacturing NI and Unite the Union. Very rarely do we see joint press releases from employers and unions about good news. Unite the Union said about this motion:

*"Only a dedicated strategy will bring the focus and oversight necessary to ensure real action to meet the challenges facing our producers."*

Manufacturing NI said:

*"Employers and trade unions have a vital role to play in terms of developing and overseeing delivery of such a strategy — we stand ready to play that role."*

Both Manufacturing NI and Unite the Union asked every party in the Assembly to back this motion for a single manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland. It is something that they have been calling for for the past year and a half to two years. I do not have clarity on why the DUP and Sinn Féin have had a difficulty with a



stand-alone manufacturing strategy. The amendment wants to make it part of a "new economic strategy". Mr Lyons stated that he hoped to see manufacturing at the centre of the strategy. By proposing a stand-alone manufacturing strategy, we want to ensure that manufacturing is given the place that it duly deserves in the Northern Ireland economy.

I want to move on to some of the statistics raised in the Chamber today by the Minister on the great successes we have in manufacturing and the current numbers employed: over 80,000 at this time. Let us not forget that those figures include the large number of people in my constituency who still work for JTI Gallagher and who have not lost their jobs yet. There are blows and job losses coming to manufacturing and employers that have not been included in those statistics.

This motion is not about talking down Northern Ireland manufacturing or portraying it as being in a state of crisis; it is about giving a reality check to our new Government to ensure that manufacturing is given its rightful place, and I hope that it is not buried in an economic strategy but is given its rightful place. I ask all Members in the House today, no matter what they have committed to do, to actually listen to the stakeholders out there. I think it was a point that Mr Murphy made, as Chair of the Committee for the Economy, when he said that the Committee wanted to listen to all the stakeholders. Two of the major stakeholders in manufacturing have spoken — Manufacturing NI and Unite the Union — and they have made it clear that they want a stand-alone manufacturing strategy.

I will move on to some of the contributions and I want to come back to Mr Lyons. There were some sly comments made about the potential of my stance on Europe, but we should reflect on what Mr Dunne said in the Economy Committee the other week; he was concerned about what would happen in Northern Ireland when we left the European Union. Maybe the DUP needs to look among its own members rather than looking this way first. That may not be as clear —

**Mr Lyons:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Swann:** I will gladly give way.

**Mr Lyons:** I can assure the Member that, as far as the Democratic Unionist Party is concerned, it is united on this issue —

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr Lyons:** Perhaps the Member would like to outline his position on membership of the European Union.

**Mr Swann:** I would be happy if he asked Mr Dunne about his position, because we have it in the record — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to address his remarks through the Chair.

**Mr Swann:** My apologies, Chair, I was trying to address and allay fears.

I suppose one of the things that is different, possibly, about this party when compared to the rest of them is that, when our party executive passed its motion, which was actually taken by the executive of our party and was not made by a hierarchy that did not consult its members, that although, on balance, the Ulster Unionist Party feels that we are better within the European Union, members are allowed their own free thought.

**Mr Lyons:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Swann:** I have given way to the Member once, but I want to progress because —

**Mr Frew:** Will the Member give way? — *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Swann:** I will give way once.

**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for giving way. Of course, he is trying to make as good a job as he can of explaining the Ulster Unionists' position. He must have found it extremely difficult when he was canvassing in the Assembly elections to get that point across, when he made it clear so many times that he was for voting to leave, while his party is for voting to remain.

**Mr Swann:** Can I ask the Member where I canvassed to leave? I ask the Member if he has any proof of that? When I was asked the question on the doorstep, I told the truth at all times, maybe unlike some of the other candidates that were canvassing in North Antrim.

**Mr Frew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Swann:** No, I have given way once; I will move on.

I will go back to the motion, because I know that the Business Committee and the Commission

have taken legal advice that Europe is not to be debated in the House, although some, no more so than myself, would like it to be.

Moving on to some of the other contributions, Mr Farry, the previous Employment and Learning Minister, seemed to cast aspersions this way that I used to be critical of strategies that came out of the Department for Employment and Learning —

**Dr Farry:** Your leader was.

**Mr Swann:** Maybe I should point out that we were not just critical of the strategies coming out. It was the 13 strategies that the Department held that had 233 recommendations and the 14 implementation plans that the Department held that had 197 recommendations. So a Department, which actually had 430 recommendations, that was done away with maybe gives some weight, credence and some acknowledgement that other parties in the House have seen the very good and valuable work that came forward. When it comes to those strategies, maybe the economic inactivity strategy, if it is fully implemented and fully funded, would be a supporting mechanism to the manufacturing strategy that we have put forward today.

*(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker [Ms Ruane] in the Chair)*

I have made the case for why we see that a stand-alone manufacturing strategy should be brought forward as part of the Programme for Government. What concerns me is the talk that the Programme for Government is going out for consultation. The Chair of the Economy Committee said that stakeholders will be listened to, but when the Opposition tabled a motion asking that a manufacturing strategy be central to the Programme for Government, the main Government party tabled an amendment to demonstrate that that would not be the case and that it would be part of an economic strategy. So, as far as we are concerned, the Programme for Government consultation has finished and the programme has been decided. This place can be clear that a stand-alone manufacturing strategy will not be part of this Programme for Government because the amendment tabled by the DUP clearly demonstrates that.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 58; Noes 37.*

## AYES

*Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Ms Dillon, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Easton and Mr Robinson*

## NOES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Allister, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mrs S Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Long, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCrossan, Mr McGlone, Mr McGrath, Mr McKee, Mr McNulty, Mr McPhillips, Ms Mallon, Mr Mullan, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Aiken and Mr Swann*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister for the Economy to include the development of the manufacturing sector in the Executive's new economic strategy.*

## Assembly Business

### Standing Order 10(3A)

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before we move to the next item of business on the Order Paper, I have received notification from members of the Business Committee of a

motion to extend the sitting past 7.00 pm under Standing Order 10(3A).

*Resolved:*

*That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 6 June 2016 be extended to no later than 9.30 pm. — [Mr Swann.]*

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** As the motion has been carried, the House may sit until 9.30 pm this evening if necessary.

## Executive Committee Business

### Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to four hours for this debate. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister will have 40 minutes between proposing and winding up. All other Members who wish to speak will have seven minutes.

**Mrs Foster (The First Minister):** I beg to move

*That this Assembly takes note of the draft Programme for Government framework 2016-2021 as agreed by the Executive on 26 May 2016.*

Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy — or Mrs Principal Deputy Speaker, I should say. I apologise.

As today is the first full plenary sitting of the new mandate, it is fitting that we should consider the draft Programme for Government framework, which was agreed by the Executive at their very first meeting. Today is a day of firsts, and it is a time of change. There are many new faces around the Chamber, and I take the opportunity to congratulate all the Members on their election. I look forward to working with everyone in a spirit of cooperation as, together, we take on the serious responsibilities, expectations and challenges that go with being a Member of the Assembly.

We now have a more streamlined structure, with nine Departments where there were previously 12, and provision for an official Opposition. It is time to move Northern Ireland forward with a completely new way of doing politics. It is time for a new, better and

innovative approach. There will be no more working in silos; instead, our nine new Departments will work together to deliver the best possible outcomes for Northern Ireland.

Over the years we have faced many significant challenges. They have been wide-ranging and have encompassed many areas of life, including keeping pace with a rapidly changing global economy; improving the health of our citizens; giving our children the best possible start in life; and dealing, of course, with the hurt and pain caused by our past. If the solutions were easy, they would have been implemented long ago and we could all sit back and put our feet up, but the simple truth is that there are no easy solutions. That is why, when the parties to the Fresh Start Agreement met in autumn last year, we began to look at how we could do things better in the future, how we could make the breakthrough on the difficult issues, the solutions to which have eluded previous Administrations, and how we could meet the hopes and expectations of our people, who, too often, have felt let down by how our institutions have performed.

We agreed that a new approach should first identify desired societal outcomes and look at what should be done to achieve them. This outcomes-based approach is a widely recognised model that has been used with success in other jurisdictions, including parts of the United States, Finland and, nearer to home, Scotland. At its heart, an outcomes-based Programme for Government is designed, as the name suggests, to be focused on outcomes, not on inputs or processes. "Outcomes-focused" means being citizens-focused and evidence-based. It requires a collective approach, looking to draw in all the contributions in government and, importantly, beyond government to make the biggest and best difference possible. It makes a real statement of shared purpose at political, administrative and societal level.

Previous Programmes for Government tended to focus on the things over which the Executive could exercise control, and, for that reason, commitments were typically expressed in terms of amounts of money to be invested or the number of projects to be run; in other words, they were based on inputs and outputs that could be measured but with only limited scope to assess actual need and impact or, importantly, whether they were making any real difference.

The new Programme for Government (PFG) will be different, and represents a first for Northern Ireland. We have listened to the contributions

from the Carnegie UK Trust and its round table on well-being. We have been sensitive to the needs articulated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. We listened to those who represent our younger and older generations when they asked us to address their needs. By choosing to focus on outcomes, we direct attention onto things that define whether we are progressing as a society. It points us towards actions that will reduce poverty, address inequality, boost the economy and enliven our cultural heartbeat.

## 2.15 pm

The new programme has a relevance that stretches far beyond this new Assembly term. In addition to merely fulfilling our statutory obligations, we will in future be able to target those things that make real improvements to our quality of life. A key feature of the new programme is its dependence on collaborative working between organisations and groups across the public, voluntary and private sectors. It is also a programme in which individuals and communities can play an active part. The Executive will, therefore, work collectively to deliver this programme and to drive work across departmental and sectoral boundaries. Individual Ministers will play their part by overseeing their Departments' contribution and ensuring that it is part of a joined-up effort where the focus is on the outcome and not simply on their Department. As I said, no more working in silos.

I will now turn briefly to the draft Programme for Government framework itself. The Executive have identified 14 strategic outcomes which, if achieved, will bring about the societal well-being they want to see. To put it another way, it is what our lives feel like when, for example, good health, good education, good houses, good communities and good jobs are put together. These outcomes touch on every aspect of our government. Just to give some flavour, and quoting from a few of them, they envisage us prospering:

*"through a strong, competitive regionally balanced economy",*

enjoying "long, healthy ... lives", and having:

*"a safe community where we respect the law, and each other",*

where:

*"we care for others and we help those in need ... We give our children ... the best start in life",*

and we create:

*"a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest."*

I was elected on the basis of my five-point plan for Northern Ireland. It was about creating more and better jobs, having a better health system and investing £1 billion over the next five years. It was about raising standards in our education system and ensuring that no child is left behind. It was about making sure we have a good infrastructure, both physical and digital, across Northern Ireland, and it was about creating sustainable budgets for families. I believe the outcomes in the Programme for Government framework will deliver on this plan.

The 42 indicators in the Programme for Government framework will support the outcomes and are clear statements for change. Each indicator is accompanied by a measure, mostly derived from existing statistics, which will show how we are performing and where, if required, we need to take corrective action. These include things such as increasing healthy life expectancy, reducing education inequalities, improving the supply of suitable housing, increasing the proportion of people working in good jobs, reducing unemployment, reducing poverty, increasing environmental sustainability and increasing reconciliation. Again, those provide just a flavour.

In the next eight weeks, we will provide opportunities for people to have their say on the Programme for Government framework. A public consultation process has already started, and I encourage everyone to respond and make their voice heard. Work has already commenced in Departments to identify key stakeholders and partners and to put together the plans that will detail the specific programmes, projects, actions and legislative proposals needed to progress against the outcomes. The results of the initial consultation on the PFG framework will be analysed and reported to the Executive, together with any recommended changes, before the end of the summer. A further public consultation on the detailed actions will then be undertaken alongside the Budget during the autumn. The aim is to achieve Executive approval and Assembly endorsement of the full Programme for Government by the end of 2016.

There will, of course, be challenges along the way, not least in coordinating the Programme

for Government with the Budget process, recognising that budgetary constraints will continue to be an issue. The programme will also need to be conjoined with a refreshed economic strategy, a new investment strategy and a social policy strategy that will clearly set out how we will tackle poverty.

The Programme for Government framework agreed by the Executive provides a basis for transformational change in the things that really matter. It has all the ingredients to tackle our most intractable problems and make life better for all. I have said that this Executive will be one of delivery. I look forward to the development of the Programme for Government over the remainder of the year and to seeing its delivery over the course of this mandate. Most of all, I look forward to our Executive and, indeed, this Assembly working together to make a difference to do the things we could not do before and to move Northern Ireland forward.

I commend the Programme for Government framework, and I ask the Assembly to support the motion.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Principal Deputy Speaker, thank you very much, and I thank the First Minister for the introduction to this debate.

My colleague Steve Aiken made clear in opening the previous debate that this is an historic day. It is the first time in 44 years that the voice of official Opposition has been heard in this Building and in this Chamber. In opening the debate on manufacturing, Mr Aiken gave you a view of how positive we intend to be in bringing forward alternative ideas and strategies. What Steve was doing was not highlighting a sector in crisis; rather, he was highlighting a very important sector that could do better, and he was providing ways and suggestions for how that could be brought about.

Now we come to the point where we are not proposing something but are reacting to something else: a Programme for Government framework from our Executive. I will make it clear that what I would like the Ulster Unionists to be is constructive in their opposition. That means scrutiny. Let me put this on record: scrutiny is not synonymous with criticism. Scrutiny means simply taking a detailed look at what is being proposed, which in this case is a framework Programme for Government. Who knows, perhaps the Executive will produce something that is so good, so perfect, so well-fashioned and brilliantly communicated that we cannot say a word against it. If that is the case, be assured that, where praise is due, we will not be shy in offering it. But equally, when we

believe criticism is the right way to go, we will be critical.

So, what do we think of the Programme for Government framework? We were not involved in any of the workshops or processes that led to the publication of this document, so our reference point has to be found elsewhere. It is in another document: the so-called Fresh Start document. Paragraph 61, which I will now read into the official record, of that says:

*"After the Assembly meets following an election and before the FM-DFM are selected and the d'Hondt process runs, representatives of the parties who are entitled to take up places in the Executive and who confirm their intention to do so will meet to resolve the draft Programme for Government."*

That is the draft Programme for Government, not the draft Programme for Government framework.

Under "Next steps", which is also in paragraph 61, it says:

*"A Programme for Government framework adopting a more outcomes-based approach will be developed. Initial workshops will take place during the autumn with a view to having the framework prepared by the end of April 2016."*

How telling, Principal Deputy Speaker. It is clear the intention was always to have three iterations of the Programme for Government: first of all a framework; then a draft programme; then the solid-state Programme for Government. But it was also clear that this document — the framework — was to be prepared, finished and ready for parties thinking of entering government to start the work of a draft on 6 May, with the two weeks set aside for finishing that work and producing a draft Programme for Government, not this framework. This framework is document 1 of three. We are supposed to be at the second stage today. Perhaps in his concluding remarks the deputy First Minister can make clear why they did not follow the process that they spelt out in the Fresh Start document, which he and the First Minister think is the foundation for a different and better way of doing government here on the Stormont estate, because it is —

**Mrs Foster:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Nesbitt:** I will certainly give way to the First Minister.

**Mrs Foster:** I am very glad that the Member has raised this issue, because it seems to be his one big issue that he keeps mentioning time and again. The Member has to accept, given that he was not involved in the workshop processes, that the process developed during those workshops. That meant that, when he came in after the election, we were at the stage where we came in. So, the process evolved from the Fresh Start Agreement. Then we got to the position we were in after the election, and then he found himself in a position, after one meeting, of deciding that he was not going to become involved in the Programme for Government discussions. That is what happened. There is no mystery about the issue. During those workshops, it was very clear that this would be the process that would be developed, and that is how it happened.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member will have an extra minute.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the First Minister for that explanation. She has not explained why she thought that it would be possible to produce a draft Programme for Government before the First Minister and deputy First Minister were selected, but, as she says, we were not involved in the process.

We said that we would apply two tests, which would decide whether we were in or out of the Executive. Test one: was it a progressive Programme for Government? We found out at that first meeting that we would not be able to answer that because what was going to be produced at the end of the fortnight was this framework, not the draft Programme for Government. So, that was a fail. We also wanted to know whether Sinn Féin and the DUP really wanted the smaller parties around the table. It was quite clear that the answer to that was also no. So, we are very happy in our position, out of the Executive and taking up the position of official Opposition.

We have a framework going out to consultation, and we have 14 outcomes. I want to make a bet here. One of the outcomes is:

*"We have high quality public services".*

Another outcome is:

*"We have more people working in better jobs".*

Another is:

*"We enjoy long, healthy, active lives".*

I bet that, at the end of the consultation, nobody is going to suggest that we should have low-quality public services, that we should have fewer people working in better jobs or that we should enjoy shorter, less healthy and inactive lives. This is simply motherhood and apple pie.

I hear First Minister Foster say that this mandate has to be about delivery. Through you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, I remind First Minister Foster and First Minister McGuinness that that is exactly what First Minister Peter Robinson said about the 2011 mandate. In his words, 2007 to 2011 was about survival and about going full term as an Assembly and an Executive, but 2011 through to 2016 had to be about delivery. It is clear from what these two First Ministers are saying that the Executive did not deliver between 2011 and 2016. So, while I can welcome a focus on delivery, I have to say this: we have heard it before; we will not be fooled again.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** As this is Mr Christopher Stalford's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

**Mr Stalford:** I am delighted to speak in this debate on the Programme for Government framework — a document in which the Executive have outlined their priorities for moving Northern Ireland forward in the right direction. I believe that politics is about people. It is about doing what is best for people. It is about serving people and the communities that we come from. It is about using the tools at our disposal for the betterment of all the people. We in the Democratic Unionist Party are about the business of using those tools — the tools of government — to build a better future for the people of Northern Ireland. Others have elected to down tools. We heard some of that contribution earlier. Others have elected for the self-indulgence of opposition. In a democracy, I respect their right to do so, but I remind them that, at the end of the five years, there will not be one extra job nor one extra brick laid to develop the infrastructure of this country. There will not be one additional classroom assistant to their credit. It is the Government of Northern Ireland who are about the business of improving Northern Ireland.

**2.30 pm**

As this is a maiden speech, some customaries have to be abided by. First, I would like to place on record my thanks for the work that Mr Jimmy Spratt undertook as an Assembly Member in this place. He served his country not only as a MLA but as a policeman. The person whom I directly succeed is of course Mr Michael McGimpsey. He and I served together on Belfast City Council for nine years. He was a formidable opponent, but I can honestly say that I do not think that I ever had a cross word with him or doubted his commitment to the people he represented.

I am very proud to come from the constituency of South Belfast. It is the cultural and academic heart of Northern Ireland. Many of the leading institutions in our academic world, such as Queen's University of course, and in our cultural world, such as the Lyric Theatre and Grand Opera House, are based in my constituency. In many ways, this is a stereotype of what South Belfast is: the truth is that many people there do not conform to that stereotype. Many of the communities that I have been sent here to represent have not enjoyed the benefits of the recent economic recovery and growth. I think of communities like Taughmonagh, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and Annadale, where I was born. Those people need to see the benefits of government working on their behalf in an outcome-driven way as has been outlined by the First Minister today.

The Programme for Government contains no fewer than 42 indicators of success and 42 different measures. I am glad that they exist, that they are down in black and white and that we can be judged at the end of the five-year term on how we deliver on those measures. The content of the document has been mentioned. I actually think that it is a good idea not to have a document such as this cast, like the laws of the Medes and the Persians, in stone and unchangeable. Many of the key stakeholders in the process whom I have spoken to have welcomed the fact that the Government are actually listening, are prepared to take their views onboard and will, hopefully, reflect the changes that they want to see in the final draft of the Programme for Government when it is produced. That is what sensible Governments do: they listen to experts in the field and key stakeholders and then draw their plans together. I think, therefore, that some of the language that has been used around the Programme for Government framework is unnecessarily negative.

I believe that, under the leadership of the Executive, we have a unique chance to build a better Northern Ireland, making it the very best

part of the very best country in the world to live in. Some of the measures that have been set down have special resonance in my constituency. In particular, I think of the need to tackle health inequalities. One could get on a bus at the City Hall and get off in Sandy Row, where a person's average life expectancy is 10 years less than that of a person who lives at Finaghy crossroads. This is 2016, and that situation is entirely unacceptable to me as an elected representative for the people of South Belfast. The fact that there is a commitment in this document to tackling those issues is something that I think will be welcomed by my constituents.

I think of education. I am very privileged and fortunate to have passed the 11-plus and gone through Wellington College, Belfast. South Belfast has some of the finest schools in Northern Ireland. We must recognise the fact that too many young people from the working-class Protestant background that I come from have been failed by the system and left behind. I do not believe that that means that we should tear down that which works best.

I do not believe that we should destroy the grammar schools, but I do believe — I welcome the fact that it is in here — that there needs to be a concentrated focus on ending educational inequality. It cannot be right in this day and age that so many of our young people leave school without even the most basic educational attainment.

I am glad to support the motion. I am in politics to work for the people who sent me here, to secure the best outcomes for the constituency that I was born and reared in and to do my best, with all colleagues here, for the people of South Belfast.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy):** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I will speak primarily as the Chair of the Economy Committee and then on an individual basis.

The Economy Committee was briefed last Wednesday by the Department's permanent secretary, and, of course, the Programme for Government was one of the key topics raised. There has not been sufficient time for the Committee to take a collective view on this or on the process for the draft Programme for Government, so I am not in a position to comment on the Committee's position, but, as Chair, I can outline the approach that the Committee will take. There is huge responsibility on the Committee to ensure that the Economy Department's commitments and

contributions to the Programme for Government reflect the pivotal nature of the role that the Department has to play in the step change that is necessary to build the levels of prosperity and economy that are required to give all the people whom we represent the lives that we would wish for them.

The Committee has already asked the Department to set out how the actions for which it is responsible in the draft framework, either directly, indirectly or in partnership with others, will contribute to the strategic vision that the programme represents. The Committee looks forward to engaging closely with the Economy Minister and his Department to ensure that the levers and drivers available to him are fully utilised to support a Programme for Government that will provide the prosperity that we need in the North. The Committee will also engage closely with all the stakeholder groups within the Department's remit to ensure that their voices are heard in the consultation on the draft Programme for Government. One of the strengths of the new approach to the Programme for Government is the consultation that is built into it.

The Committee is clear in its view that the new configuration of Departments must end the silos that existed previously, where officials worked in isolation, making the joined-up, cooperative, partnership government that we need so much harder to achieve. The Committee heard from the permanent secretary that the new culture in government would disrespect boundaries and overcome budget rivalry. Obviously, we intend to hold him, his Department and the Minister to account to ensure that that proposition, which has been long promised, is eventually achieved through this new approach to doing government. The Economy Committee is up for the challenge of doing all of that, and members will be watching to ensure that the promises of a strategic, cooperative approach are realised. We will also perform our scrutiny and policy development roles to the best of our ability to ensure that the draft Programme for Government emerges from the consultation as a robust and collaborative blueprint for improving the economy and the lives of our people.

I will speak now as a party member. As I said, one of the key strengths of this new way of doing the Programme for Government is the consultation process that is built in to it. Previously, consultation was seen by many stakeholders as a tick-box exercise that was a legal requirement in a consultation period, and it went through with minimal change. It appears that some of those who criticised the

Programme for Government — I am keen to hear what others have to say — have offered no alternative except for those criticisms. In fairness to them, they were not involved in the origins of the process, but I wonder whether they simply want to go back to the old type Programme for Government, which was largely pre-cooked. It seems to be the expectation of the leader of the Opposition that we would get a largely pre-cooked Programme for Government that would go out for the normal statutory period of consultation and come back with minor amendments, as has been the case since 1998 under Executives that were led by the Member's party. We had a pre-cooked Programme for Government, minor amendments were put in place, and then there was a Budget, which was almost a separate process that did not align itself to that. For me, the great strength of this is that you have broad draft heads, and the people who are involved in the development of that know the process. I could take the criticism of the leader of the Opposition in that he was not involved; I find it a little strange that others who were involved in the process now criticise something that they did not object to throughout its formation. Rather, there was a broad heads of agreement, if you like.

The leader of the Opposition described that type of objective as "motherhood and apple pie". Having read some of the uncoded party manifestos presented in the run-up to the last election, I think that they would be a very strong judge of motherhood and apple pie. Nonetheless, this process allows those involved at grass-roots level — the people at the coalface of delivering the type of change that the Programme for Government wants to effect — to put the meat on the bones by coming forward with much greater assistance. In turn, we will align budgets to meet that expectation and the key delivery targets. For me, this is a new way of doing it. After five years, it may prove not to have been the best way, but I would like to hear from those who consider that it is not what they think would be best. Are they simply arguing to go back to the old process? Do they think that it was perfect, or do they have an alternative vision that they want to offer? I would be interested to hear that.

Another key point and very welcome development is, if you like, the balance in the document between economic well-being and societal well-being. The placing of societal well-being at the heart of the Executive and their Programme for Government is a very important step. We — particularly me, in my role as chair of the Economy Committee —



want to see economic growth. We want balanced regional economic growth, better jobs created and better employment opportunities for all our people, particularly our young people. However, an equally important area of the Executive's work that we want to see addressed is the societal well-being of the people who need our assistance. The vulnerable and those who depend on our services must also be at the heart of the Programme for Government.

With those two developments, we have an important new way of doing business. I look forward to hearing those who do not agree provide alternatives. Make no mistake about it: there is a programme to be done over the next five years. Others have left the responsibility for doing that largely to my party and the DUP, and we must go forward because the people who elected us to the positions that we are in expect us to deliver for them, for their interests and for the communities that we represent. That is the job of work that we have here.

**Mr Attwood:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you and all Members who are here today, especially the new Members and, in particular, those making their maiden speech. They include Mr Stalford, who made a fine speech — I expected no less — but, if I may make one comment on that speech, it is this: he is, of course, right to assert that opposition that is not about creating and constructing something different is self-indulgent. I agree with the Member in that regard; indeed, there was a time when the DUP might have been very much in the character of that. From our point of view, however, opposition is not about destroying, demolishing or degrading something; it is about creating and constructing something better in this place — a Government in Northern Ireland for all the people — and, at the same time, demanding the right to dissent because, as somebody said, there is much to dissent from. That includes the content of some of this document.

Perhaps today or later, we will hear more about the theme of borrowing from the experience of other jurisdictions, not least the model of the Scottish Government, to inform government in this jurisdiction. If the First Minister is completely genuine about what she says is a new, better, innovative approach, let us embrace all that is new, innovative and better from the Scottish system. Will we, on the far side of this Programme for Government, have a situation like the one in Scotland, in which people are seconded into government for particular Bills or particularly complex areas? In the next Government, will we have a process like the one in Scotland, whereby amendments

to Bills are invited into government very early in the legislative period in order to ensure that the external world — NGOs, business and the private sector — has an input in shaping the character of that legislation?

Are we going to have civil servants in Northern Ireland being told to have an open door to the external world when it comes to the shaping of government policy and practice? That is the paradigm shift that we are looking for.

2.45 pm

**Mrs Foster:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Attwood:** I will give way in a second. It is not just about wanting an outcomes-based approach, which is a better approach, but will we have the paradigm shift that sees government shaped in the image of something very different from the past and more shaped in the image of what happens in Scotland, which has served its people so well?

**Mrs Foster:** First of all, I welcome the fact that the Member has, given the previous contribution from Mr Murphy, recognised that the outcomes-based approach is absolutely the way that we should be moving forward. The second thing is that this is exactly the sort of debate that we want to engender around doing things differently. Officials who are here today will be taking a very clear note of everything that Members say, and we can then discuss how to move things forward. I very much welcome your speech on what is happening in Scotland because I find it very interesting.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Attwood:** It has been very interesting for the last 10 years and longer, but have Ministers, parties and Governments embraced all that which is different in order to demonstrate a paradigm shift? We will wait and see.

Of course I welcome an outcomes-based approach to government, but let us recognise what this document is: it is a hybrid document that is part outcomes-based and part upfront commitments. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister had to put in the foreword commitments already entered into arising from their commitment to Fresh Start because they realised, too late in the day to form an inclusive Government, that a Programme for Government that was outcomes-based would say to people that it lacked ambition and that is why you had to put in the upfront commitments

arising from Fresh Start in relation to the past, in relation to institutional abuse, and not least in relation to multiple flagship projects across the North. It is a hybrid document that is, on the one hand, outcomes-based but, on the other, about upfront commitments to our people. Why? Because our people wanted upfront commitments; they wanted to hear a message of ambition and leadership and scale and volume. They did not want an outcomes-based approach alone; they wanted something greater. That was the very argument that the SDLP made in the abortive Programme for Government negotiations. We asked for ambition, not just in relation to the flagship projects and much besides but in relation to poverty, regional imbalance and childcare. This document is characterised by warm words on much of that and not much else besides.

Listen to what it says about poverty. It says that the commitment will be to reduce the level of poverty. We have a catastrophic situation arising with child poverty. By 2020, it could possibly, in real and absolute terms, be over 30% and approaching 35%. What is the point in making a commitment to reducing poverty if you do not at least say what the scale of that ambition is? Reducing poverty without even using the word "significant" might mean very little in the real world of the people in all our constituencies who are suffering because of disadvantage and discrimination and so on and so forth.

The situation is similar with regional imbalance. A commitment, which is a good one, was entered into over the lifetime of this Government on the roll-out of money for the A5. That is good, but remember the background to that. There was a commitment in the last Programme for Government for 2011 to 2015 to deal with regional imbalance. At the end of that, five years later, how was regional imbalance dealt with? By more warm commitments on what might happen in the future. The measure of this Programme for Government, which is outcomes-based, should have been upfront commitments so that people in the west know that it will not just be nine miles of the A5 that will be built but that it will be the 50 or 60 miles needed to conclusively deal with regional imbalance.

Finally, Mr, I mean Madam, Speaker — I will eventually get used to the right phrasing; I apologise for that — there is the issue of victims. The word "victims" is not mentioned at all in relation to outcomes, indicators or measures. Can you imagine saying to the victims of the conflict and the victims of

institutional abuse that that word is not even mentioned? Not even mentioned.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Attwood:** I hope that this Programme for Government process measures up because it is very clear that it needs to.

**Mrs Long:** I welcome the opportunity to be able to speak on the Programme for Government framework, which is now out for public consultation. I want to focus my remarks on the process issues, without prejudice to our party's view of the content of the Programme for Government, which my colleague Stephen Farry will address in terms of the outcomes and indicators that have been proposed in the document.

I want to start, perhaps unusually from an opposition position, by endorsing the process that has been adopted by the Executive in developing the Programme for Government on this occasion. It is a process based on best practice and is, in our view, a more coherent and strategic means of planning for this mandate. Whilst others have sought to dismiss the outcomes framework as simply motherhood and apple pie, we recognise that a focus on outcomes rather than activity is actually a better place to start if we want to see the lives of those we represent measurably improved during this mandate.

It is possible to do much and achieve little. Activity and delivery are not the same thing. Deciding what actions you want to take before you have decided what you are trying to achieve, and then judging your performance solely by how many of those actions you are delivering, regardless of whether they are achieving real improvement for people, is a fruitless and pointless exercise. We therefore welcome the move from departmentally driven action-based planning towards a more strategic outcomes-based approach. Such an approach offers the opportunity for more cross-departmental and cross-sectoral working and better and more efficient use of resources, and, by focusing on outcomes, it puts measurable improvement for our constituents at the heart of the process. Whether that opportunity is fully realised by the current Executive is, of course, another matter entirely.

The UUP has criticised this programme for being too high level — as I take from Mr Attwood's remarks that he has also done — and lacking in detail. The same party — the UUP —

argued for, and claimed as a great achievement, the inclusion of two weeks' negotiations, which would lead to an approved Programme for Government. I know that they spent barely two minutes in those negotiations, but I would love to know exactly how much detail one would expect to be able to extract from a Programme for Government in a two-week period, even had the outcomes framework been agreed in advance. If they expected a detailed action plan and budget for each Department to be delivered in 14 days, they are either completely delusional about how coalition negotiation works — and, indeed, how government itself functions — or are simply being utterly disingenuous and opportunistic in their criticism of this process.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs Long:** No, I want to finish my point, and then I will.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Thank you.

**Mrs Long:** Anyone with an ounce of wit would have known that, at the end of two weeks, the Programme for Government draft would be high level and general. It was clear that detailed action plans for each Department, and the budgets attached, would have to be developed through public consultation, which would take time and would, therefore, only be realistically available around the end of this year.

I am happy to give way.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does she not accept that the Fresh Start Agreement says at paragraph 61 that, by the end of April, there would be this document — the framework — and, at the end of the two weeks' negotiations, there would be a draft Programme for Government — the thing you are saying could not be done? It is in the document.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mrs Long:** First of all, we did not endorse the Fresh Start Agreement, so that is an irrelevant question to ask me. Secondly, as I said, even had we had this framework agreed, you would still not have had anything other than a very high-level document in order to consult with the public at this point in time after two weeks.

I firmly believe that every party that agreed to an outcomes-led approach knew that that would be the case. No one should be ducking that

fact now to play cheap politics with the process. As a party, Alliance did feed into the very early stages of that preparatory process in good faith and without prejudice to any outcome of the elections at the end of the last Executive.

Indeed, we proposed for inclusion through our advisers some of the outcomes that are listed on that programme framework, including, for example, the outcome that:

*"We are a shared society that respects diversity"*

Clearly, we were not involved in the more detailed development after the election that produced the various indicators and measures. The SDLP also participated in that process. Its special adviser attended the meetings where the process was agreed and had the opportunity to feed into that framework. At no point did they raise issues with the process of how the programme would be developed or with the reality that the consultation would be on a document that was always going to be high level prior to the election.

Therefore, as a party, we in Alliance are not getting to our feet to rubbish this process. Rather, we are going to focus our criticism and, indeed, our support on what is and is not included, on the quality and efficacy of the indicators and measures that have been proposed and, in due course, on the detailed action plans that will be developed to deliver the outcomes. The litmus test for the new Executive and for this programme is what difficult, radical and even unpopular actions they are willing to take to achieve the outcomes. That is where the rubber hits the road in this process. That will be when it will be clear whether this is merely aspirational language but lacking in any substance or whether it is backed up with genuine will and commitment to deliver real change. That is when we will know whether the parties will genuinely share power and resources between Departments rather than divide it up between them, as was too often characteristic of previous Executives.

As a party, we have major doubts about that commitment, and we are being honest about that. Having tested the leaders of this Executive in the discussions that we had prior to the formation of the Executive, we specifically looked to those areas that would be crucial to delivering a more joined-up approach. On such issues as the abuse of the petition of concern, which continues to block progress and reform; the required investment in skills to grow our economy; a commitment to integrated

education, which has a transformative effect on reconciliation and community relations; urgent action on dealing with the past and its legacy, including specific actions to tackle paramilitarism; and addressing the financial and economic implications of living in a divided society, it was clear to us that genuine will and commitment to deliver real change was absent, as was meaningful cooperative working.

Furthermore, as Stephen Farry will set out in his remarks, the robustness of the indicators and measures is in some cases poor, not least on key issues around community relations and cohesion, sharing and integration. Those measures must be verifiable, measurable, evidence-based and meaningful, and we question whether that is the case in quite a few. However, above all, they need to reflect ambition for this society, and they are, in many cases, very much lacking in that regard. None of that bodes particularly well for this programme or for this Government; however, most importantly, it does not bode well for the people who we represent. Therefore, I hope that, despite our reservations with the content of the document at this point, through consultation, the concerns that we have will be addressed and that we will see the delivery of progress and change, which the people of Northern Ireland, quite rightly, are not just eager but now impatient to see.

**Mrs Cameron:** I rise as a member of the new Committee for the Executive Office to speak on the draft Programme for Government, and I welcome the opportunity to speak on what is, effectively, the ambition that our Executive have for our society as a whole. Let us face it, the big issues are the day-to-day and bread-and-butter issues that affect each and every one of us on the ground. It is important that those are looked at with a view to making life better for us all as a society. I welcome the recognition by the Executive that a different approach is needed and that this Government needs to work across boundaries, organisations, groups and communities for the common good. Engagement with local government, the private sector and not forgetting the voluntary and community sectors, which do so much, is vital if we are to make the improvements necessary.

There is much work to be done now, with the Executive focusing on seeking views from this draft Programme for Government framework, which is setting the direction of travel for this establishment in this five-year term. I believe that the approach of focusing on outcomes and using indicators to demonstrate the changes desired and the measures to let us know that we are succeeding is a good starting point to

deliver the changes that we would all like to see in Northern Ireland. The framework sets out the direction of travel to include providing the opportunity for people to have their say on the framework, engaging with the stakeholders about the actions needed to help to deliver on the indicators, the building of action plans, the coordination of the Programme for Government with the Budget process and, finally, the agreement of the Programme for Government along with the Budget and investment and social strategies by the end of 2016.

### 3.00 pm

There are 14 proposed outcomes and 42 indicators in this document. The very many issues listed as indicators include reduced crime, increased healthy life expectancy, improved quality of healthcare, improved support for adults with care needs, improved educational outcomes, reduced economic inactivity, reduced poverty, increased competitiveness of the economy, increased shared space, reduced reoffending, improved mental health and an improved supply of suitable housing. Those are just some of the indicators provided in the framework. All are of great importance in their own right, and I am sure that each of the 108 MLAs would acknowledge them as important to the vast majority of people who live in Northern Ireland.

I note that the consultation on the Programme for Government framework is open for eight weeks in total and that it closes on 22 July. I hope that interested parties, of which I am sure there are many, take the opportunity to make their voice heard. I also welcome the fact that an online survey is available, which should provide a simple and very quick way of responding to the framework.

I will leave my comments at that for now and look forward to the consultation responses and, indeed, the outworkings of this ambitious draft Programme for Government framework. I support the motion.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I start my remarks by putting the Programme for Government into context. We continue to be overruled by a Conservative Government that is wedded to austerity. I suspect that every party in this Chamber would want to have more ambitious spending plans than are available to the Executive currently. The Budget has been cut year on year over the last five years and will continue to be cut for at least the next three years. That is the context in which this Executive have to deliver their

priority public services, and we have to deliver our public services.

Each Minister is faced with the huge challenge of prioritising spending in their Department where it will make the most impact and change. That is where the Programme for Government framework comes into its own. It sets out a vision for the future; it sets out a pathway that we can follow; and it is asking, in the most democratic of ways, civic society — the community, trade unionists and others — to become involved in the debate and help us shape our society for generations to come, in the context of the financial realities in which we are working. There are parties in the Chamber that will claim to be more opposed to austerity than others and that they will do all sorts of things in the next five years. But what they have to ensure is that we change our society and create better outcomes for future generations.

I listened intently to Mr Nesbitt's contribution. For five minutes we got a history lesson on his view of the Fresh Start Agreement and the events that led to him and his party walking out of the talks. The foreword to the 'Draft Programme for Government Framework' sets out why Mr Nesbitt and others walked out of the talks. It says, in the second paragraph, that:

*"We believe a different approach is needed and so this new approach focuses on the impact on our people rather than the actions we take within Government." —*

and this is the most difficult part for some of the parties that were in the Executive to sign up to —

*"We recognise that for this to work effectively, we need a cohesive Executive working to deliver for all. We also need a system of Government that works across boundaries, organisations, groups and communities for the common good."*

That is, for this to work, we need a cohesive Executive. Opposition within the Executive was no longer acceptable. From their point of view, in my opinion, the parties that have chosen to walk into opposition have done the right thing. I am a strong advocate of the Good Friday Agreement.

I am a strong advocate of power sharing. I am proud to have played my part in power sharing with my unionist neighbours. That was an important step for this society and an important step for republicans and unionists to take, and I think that parties have an overriding obligation

to live by that principle. I think that the parties that have walked away have done public service a great favour, although not because I believe they will form a wonderful Opposition. The Opposition cannot agree with the Opposition, and we have noted that here today. The Ulster Unionist Party cannot agree with the Alliance Party and vice versa, and the SDLP cannot agree with anyone. We have not heard from the other parties yet, but I suspect it will be a mixture of all that. However, we have a cohesive document in front of us from the Executive, setting out a pathway for the success of this society. It will not all be a bed of roses. I go back to my opening remarks: the Executive will be dealing with a very difficult financial climate. Priority decisions will have to be made, and, when people respond to the consultation on the Programme for Government, we, as a society, will have to make choices. We will have to make decisions on whether it is money for potholes or pupils or whether it is money for the health service or hedgerows, because, folks, there is not enough money to go round.

In the last few minutes of my contribution, I want to recite a wee story that was told to me by the principal of a school when I was Education Minister. He was facing significant financial difficulties at his school, while, on the roads around his school, they were erecting brand new, shiny lamp posts and putting up new lanterns. They all looked very well. The principal said to me, "John, the most important lights that we need to turn on in our society are in our pupils' heads, and the money spent on those lamp posts and lanterns would have been much better spent in my classrooms". I could not argue with that. Those are the sorts of decisions that we will have to make going forward. What are the most important places for our Executive to invest in? It has to be health, it has to be education and it has to be the economy. We have to ensure that we deliver those core public services, and other things may have to be relinquished because of that. Folks, if we are going to create a new beginning for new generations, let us ensure that our Programme for Government turns a light on in pupils' heads: street lighting can keep.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Mr Phillip Logan, and as this will be his first opportunity to speak as a private Member I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

**Mr Logan:** I rise in the Chamber for my first time as, rightly said, a representative for the people of North Antrim. I am privileged to have

been given this opportunity by them, and I fully intend to do my best in this place to be an effective voice and an effective representative of our people. I thank the people of North Antrim for electing me and giving me this opportunity, and I will work hard to repay that. I also thank my predecessor, David McIlveen, for the work that was done in the North Antrim constituency, and I will work hard and continue to build on the foundation that he laid down over the past five years.

I am a member of the Executive Office Committee, so I stand on that basis as well, and I welcome this Programme for Government framework. We have something here that is good. It is forward-thinking, and it is something that we need to deliver on. We, in the DUP, stood on a five-point plan, and we need to deliver on that. People were very responsive to that; they trusted us on it and bought into that plan. I am delighted about that. I have a lot of confidence about the next five years that we have in government, and this Programme for Government sets it out very well. As Christopher rightly said, there are 42 key indicators in there as to where we need to be. Those can be measured very successfully, and the programme is laid out very well.

I would like to pick up on a few things from that. While I was on the campaign trail in North Antrim, I am sure you can imagine that, as I am from Ballymena, jobs were on people's lips. Ballymena and North Antrim have suffered some devastating blows over the last number of years, and I will continue to be a voice for those people and the job losses that we have suffered. The framework talks about jobs — it talks a lot about jobs — and one of the examples here is that we want to see more people working in better jobs. It is about ensuring that opportunities exist for people at all levels in our communities.

There is a mixture of people in the Chamber today. There are people who went through school and on to further education, and there are people who chose not to do that. I chose to leave school and go into the workplace. I did well and worked hard, which suited my course. My wife is slightly different: she went on to university and is a schoolteacher, so there is that difference. I want to make sure that there are opportunities for every person in education so that they can do as well as they can. I want people to be able to leave school and go on to further education, if that is what is right for them, or to go into the workplace. It is about ensuring that opportunities exist for people to leave school and go out to get skills or to go

into the workplace and learn good skills that will equip them for life.

I am delighted that my colleague Simon Hamilton has been announced as the Economy Minister. That is a welcome change. The people of North Antrim will be delighted, because for us in North Antrim the issue is jobs and delivery.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Mrs Jenny Palmer. As this is Mrs Jenny Palmer's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

**Mrs Palmer:** I am extremely proud to have been elected to the Assembly to represent Lagan Valley. I grew up there, raised my children there and am a proud resident of the area.

I served for 11 years on Lisburn City Council and the new Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. In my time as a councillor, I chaired committees on environmental services and economic development. I worked as the chair of Peace III and the chair of Comet INTERREG to deliver EU funding to communities and to business. I have seen excellent progress in the Lisburn and greater Lagan Valley area over the last 18 years, but it has also been the site of a number of shameful failures under previous Governments. As the Ulster Unionist spokesperson for infrastructure and a member of the official Opposition, I will ensure that the Government are held to account in this mandate. While I hope that we will see significant progress over the next five years, I am increasingly concerned that infrastructure will be a series of vanity projects and undelivered strategies.

A significant cause of concern for me is the lack of meaningful targets in the Programme for Government. While the PFG promises to connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure — an ideal we can all agree on — there is scarce detail on how that will be achieved. The PFG is so vague that the Minister could deliver only negligible improvement and still technically deliver what was promised. I look forward with interest and no small degree of trepidation to seeing what the Minister intends to deliver.

As a spokesperson for the Opposition, it is my role not only to critique but to suggest what we should do instead. In that vein, allow me to suggest a few key projects that I hope the Minister and the Executive can commit to.

The success of the Balmoral show is an inspiration to the rest of the country. The recent announcement that it is to open for four days in 2017 is welcome and is a source of immeasurable pride to my constituency. However, the chaos surrounding the roads into the show is also a source of shame. Year after year, we read the miserable reports of traffic jams, parking bedlam and wasted opportunities due in no small part to the disgraceful lack of progress at the Maze site. Simply put, the infrastructure for that world-beating show and venue must be improved. Better planning of roads and targeted improvements, such as an M1/Balmoral link road, could solve the issue. Additionally, any Members who travel via Sprucefield will be aware of the extremely poor connections to Belfast that inevitably result in long delays and tailbacks.

With no progress on the Sprucefield bypass, the Knockmore link road is also important to the development of the area, and I am pleased that Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council has taken important steps to invest in its delivery with the Department and developers. Those projects are important if we ever want to spread the success of the economy beyond the greater Belfast area. Our poor road infrastructure is discouraging investment in general, but it hits the outer parts of the country particularly hard.

### 3.15 pm

It is highly unlikely that all phases of the A5 will be completed within the time frame, so the budget will not be spent. Over £100 million will be surplus. We must ensure that all small projects are identified to improve our road, rail and river network. They do not have to be multibillion-pound, decade-long quagmires. With smart, targeted funding, we can drastically improve travel times. I hope that the Minister can agree that progress will not be delayed simply due to a lack of interest or political will. It is also vital that this Government leverage the expertise and knowledge of civic society as a whole.

In the Fresh Start Agreement, the two parties in government promised to deliver a compact civic advisory panel. It is utterly imperative that the forum contains experts from the world of business and infrastructure. In addition to being an excellent venue to encourage new faces into politics, the forum must be well placed to suggest infrastructure improvements and critique ministerial decisions. It must not become a talking shop for yes-men. I hope that the Executive demonstrate courage in appointing true experts who can not only advise on major projects such as the York Street

interchange and the A5/A6 but, crucially, suggest smaller, more targeted improvements that will make a major impact.

One of the improvements must be the decentralisation of government administration away from Belfast. The worrying trend in Northern Ireland of offices such as the DVLA being relocated to Wales must be reversed. I want to see all Departments, particularly the Department for Infrastructure, leading the way in spreading the administration across Northern Ireland plc. Improving Internet connectivity is another key indicator in the PFG document, but, again, we need to see what concrete, costed commitment the Executive will make. We do not need to reinvent the wheel for that, but I argue that we need a sea change from the approach of the previous Executive. The Minister need look no further than my constituency to recognise in the Resurgam Trust in Lisburn the model of how the Department can foster community-led improvements to infrastructure and support the third sector in sustainable business. That project and others must be allowed to develop in a sustainable way, so I also call for an end to the unnecessary and nerve-wracking process of annual bidding and the introduction of service-level agreements to sustain community partnerships.

In conclusion, I want to work in this mandate to be a constructive member of the Opposition. I do not intend to be easy on the Minister or the Department, but I hope to be a source of alternative options rather than of a simple critique. I do not intend to be Mrs No, but, as certain members of the party to my left can tell you, I do not bow easily. The Minister can expect the same tenacity in my role here.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** As this is Linda Dillon's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

**Ms Dillon (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. As this is my maiden speech, I will begin by thanking the people of Mid Ulster for electing me. As some will know, I took over the seat that was left vacant by our deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, so I have big shoes to fill. I certainly hope that I will give the people of Mid Ulster the same kind of representation as he did. They were very proud of him — rightly so — for the representation that he gave in the Assembly.

As Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, I have noted that there are three indicators that will fall to DAERA: indicator 29, which is to increase environmental sustainability; indicator 36, which is to increase household waste recycling; and indicator 37, which is to improve air quality. However, during a very brief discussion with the DAERA permanent secretary and his team at the Committee last week, I raised the fact that there are no specific indicators for the agriculture sector or rural communities. DAERA officials responded by saying that the agrifood sector makes a very significant contribution to the economy and will be a key driver in the economic indicators contained in the framework. They also said that, at a high level, the important outcomes such as jobs, health and the economy will impact rural dwellers as much as the urban dweller.

The Committee was also told that DAERA will work with other Departments in a coordinated, integrated way on the impact of these high-level indicators on rural dwellers and that, since the introduction of the Rural Needs Act, they now have the statutory basis to do so. However, the Act will not apply to central government until 1 June 2017 and to local authorities until 1 June 2018, so I am looking forward to hearing from the Department on a semi-regular basis over the next few years about how that is to happen. This new framework must be for all our people, be they urban or rural dwellers.

The Programme for Government is focused on outcomes. As it states:

*"these are things with which people can identify such as living longer and healthier lives or getting good jobs — which are designed to stay in place for a generation rather than a single Assembly term and define if we are progressing as a society".*

Each indicator also has a number of measures to see whether it is happening. These are largely derived from existing statistics. They will show how we are performing in relation to the outcomes and provide a basis to monitor progress and take appropriate corrective action. Some of the outcomes indicate that the measurement is available at NISRA at a geographical and urban/rural level. For example, indicator 16, which is about increasing the proportion of people in work, can be measured at urban and rural level. Ensuring that the opportunities for jobs and good-quality jobs are available to rural as well as urban dwellers is exactly what we want. However, some of the indicators cannot be measured at this level, such as indicator 21, which is about

increasing the competitiveness of the economy. It appears that it cannot be measured at urban/rural level, yet agrifood is to be one of the key drivers for the economy and is one of the few industries that can be, and is, spread throughout all geographical parts.

While the new Committee did not get into this level of detail with officials at our first meeting, I expect that we will do so in the near future. I hope to explore all those measures and find out in detail how they will be used to ensure that the outcomes and benefits of the framework are there for the farmer and rural communities. That is all that I wish to say as Chairperson of the AERA Committee.

As Sinn Féin spokesperson on agriculture, the environment and rural affairs, I believe that there needs to be a focus on outcome 13, which is:

*"We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure".*

It is vital to assist our businesses and communities. Rural broadband and telecommunications are causing inequalities for our rural dwellers and businesses as they face much higher costs for, very often, much poorer service provision. The proportion of premises with access to superfast broadband is 88% in urban areas and 37% in rural areas. That is a massive and unacceptable disparity. We are driving businesses into urban settings, which creates inequalities for rural dwellers in gaining employment. Therefore, the rural road network and access to good, affordable transport services are essential outcomes in the PFG.

In my previous role as chairperson of Mid-Ulster District Council, I witnessed at first hand the difficulties faced by businesses in rural areas in trying to access good broadband provision. It is a real challenge for us. I also witnessed the fact that our Ministers did not come forward to meet Mid-Ulster District Council. I hope that in this new and fresh start, with the Programme for Government as its basis, Ministers will be very open to meeting all 11 new super-councils because that is the grass roots and that is where our people are. Ministers need to take cognisance of what is happening in councils and of what councils are saying to them and what councils need.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** I welcome the draft Programme for Government and, in particular, the focus on outcomes and monitoring delivery, which represents a new and innovative methodology. I know that, when we speak about this, it sometimes sounds very much like



Civil Service or management speak. However, what this methodology does is focus on a number of key questions. First, what is it that your Government want to achieve for you and why? Secondly, how well are they doing it? That clarity is very welcome as a new approach.

The draft Programme for Government outlines some big issues facing the Northern Ireland Executive and, in fact, facing all of us in the Chamber: tackling poverty; reconciliation and social change; improving health and education; and growing our economy. These are indeed very significant issues. When I was thinking about the challenge facing the Northern Ireland Executive, what came into my mind was a quote from the late and great Muhammad Ali, who sadly passed away just a few days ago. That quote is:

*"It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out, it's the pebble in your shoe."*

I suppose that that could have relevance in people's personal lives and in communities, but I think it is also relevant when it comes to Governments and Departments. I want to echo the words of the First Minister about the high level of consensus that there seems to be about the challenges that face us in the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly. Despite the billions of pounds and the consensus on what those issues are — the consensus about what those mountains are that we want to climb — we do not see the progress necessarily that we all want to see.

So what are those pebbles? To me, those pebbles are, and can be, the way we do business. Shut in the old ways, the silos, we are inefficient and ineffective. I know that it is often said, and it has been said in this Chamber before, that if we always do what we have always done, we will always get what we have always got. That is why I warmly welcome this new, innovative change within the current Programme for Government.

The new approach was first trialled and tested within our Delivering Social Change framework within the Northern Ireland Executive. I pay tribute to the National Children's Bureau, which put in a huge amount of effort and work in putting together that innovative approach. It was very clear, when we looked at that agenda, that it was not just a methodology that was suited to delivering social change; it was a methodology suited to delivering change right across government. That is why I welcome the mainstreaming of that right across the key issues of the Programme for Government.

How we deliver is critical; it is absolutely essential to achieving what we want to deliver. Therefore, I warmly welcome the new and innovative approach to making real and positive progress in agreeing our vision and in achieving our vision of building a better and brighter future for all in Northern Ireland.

**Ms Hanna:** Madam Speaker, congratulations to you in your new role and to all those Members who have made very good maiden speeches. I was brought back briefly to Belfast City Council during Christopher's maiden speech and he will know that, coming from that Chamber and having small children, that is the first and last time for a while that he will speak for seven minutes without being interrupted.

I am glad, too, to have the opportunity to speak on the Programme for Government, which will be the guiding framework for Northern Ireland for the next five years and which, obviously, all of us want to work. There has been a lot of prickliness from the Executive parties about our decision to go into opposition, but I think we can be clear that we all live here. We use these public services, we raise our families here and we want this to work as well. We can be very clear that we are not going to be wreckers, outside the process in opposition. We do not have a big bogeyman out the door, or a hand that we are going to overplay for years. We are not going to spend the next five years taking free kicks, like the opposition parties do in the South.

We campaigned, in the run-up to the election, on the basis that we would use the new Fresh Start-created 14-day window to get some of our ideas in there, and we stuck to that as far as possible. It became very clear, very quickly, that there was to be no partnership and next to no detail. I see that the Alliance Party has taken some issue with our criticism of the process. Let me clarify: we did not vote for Fresh Start, so we are not bound by the process, but the very task of amending the primary legislation to provide for 14 days instead of the previous window gave a very clear indication that that was supposed to be a serious and substantial negotiation window. In good faith, we told third-sector organisations to get their ideas in because this was going to be a substantial negotiation window. As my colleague Alex Attwood has outlined, this is not just an outcomes-based document. You will see in all the PSs that have been added, post the discussion document from last week, that it now suddenly mentions: North/South institutions, regional imbalance and investment, victims and historical abuse. These are the things that, in the two weeks after the election,

we were saying needed to be there but were not.

The rash of private Member's Bills and no-day-named motions that have gone in in the opening days of the mandate show very clearly that even members of the parties in the Government know that a lot of these issues are not going to turn up in the programme. If the issues that we raised during the negotiation, and which the Executive have now tacked on, were sufficiently important, can they now help us understand why, when we asked for that detail, we were accused of prickliness and misunderstanding the process? We are not against the outcomes-based concept. Most people are not, and, in fact, we welcome it. It is just about the lack of detail coming on the back of such a poor record of delivery over the last couple of mandates.

### 3.30 pm

We also acknowledge that having a target does not always mean anything. The last Executive had a target, which they met, to produce a shared future strategy, and, right enough, a shared future did not magically appear because they were written down. Scotland also uses the framework, and it has worked well, but, with respect, this is not Scotland. That was a one-party Government that had made transparency and cross-cutting their political culture and which does not have the same silo mentality, political baggage and departmental fiefdoms that this Assembly has become known for.

We are certainly not against public consultation either, though you can understand that people are a little bit cynical. Less than six months ago, in Fresh Start, you reduced the statutory minimum consultation period from 12 weeks to eight weeks, and we have had no update since the Stormont House talks on the compact advisory panel that was to replace the Civic Forum model that was allowed to fall.

Of course, it is useful for coalface organisations to have their opportunity to shape and refine the Programme for Government, but there has to be something for them to respond to. No organisation is going to disagree with a single one of the fine aspirations in this document, but we do not know what methodology is going to be used to decide which of those ideas are going to be taken and whether that is going to bring any clarity, rather than just reflect the broad range of opinions that we know are out there. People are not sure whether this just an exercise in saying, "We asked your opinion, it is your Programme for Government" when there are any future problems.

It is also likely that, in a difficult funding climate, a lot of organisations are going to struggle to find the resources to put together a comprehensive response, but in the culture of this Executive, where much-needed social change money was siphoned off into the invite-only social investment fund, it is going to take a lot of courage for organisations to come out and say that, in fact, the emperor is not wearing any clothes and to point out the holes in your document.

In the last mandate, a lot of themes were not adequately progressed, and consultations and reports and workshops went into OFMDFM, the place where ideas went to die, and very little came out. The international strategy, the racial equality strategy and the sexual orientation strategy were all literally years late. Legislation passed as a result of the St Andrews Agreement in 2006 obliged the Executive to produce an anti-poverty strategy, but, last June, Justice Treacy found that you were in breach of that requirement, and still, there is nothing included in this document.

**Mr Stalford:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. In her contribution, she mentioned the social investment fund in a very critical way. Is she aware that, in our constituency, the social investment fund is creating the provision of an education and learning centre in Sandy Row and a day centre for children in Taughmonagh? Which of those projects does the Member think should be done away with?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Ms Hanna:** Yes, the Member does remember it, because miraculously it was announced, after no movement for four years, 10 minutes before the election. Suddenly, we announced that a tiny portion of that money was going to those places. We know that there is need out there, but we think that that should have been open to all the organisations that have ideas and skills for solving problems, not for special pet projects that get a wee tap on the shoulder, telling them that they are eligible to apply for it.

Looking at the last Programme for Government, as I said, we see that targets do not always mean that you are going to do anything. I understand that almost half of the 82 pledges were not met, despite the free year that was tacked on by the Secretary of State. Commitments to reduce child poverty, as I said, were not met, and no strategy exists. At least you have not done what they did in London, where, when they were not meeting their

targets, they changed the target halfway through. Hopefully, that will not happen. We missed the target to reduce serious crime; again, this document makes no mention of the elephant in the room of paramilitarism and organised crime. How, without agreeing to tackle that, are you going to move that forward?

You failed to develop the Maze prison site and Desertcreat and other major projects. On the environment, the Executive failed to meet their commitments to provide retrospective energy efficiency in public-sector housing. Indeed, while the housing target on building new build was met, we know that that has not met the need that is out there. On childcare, a section of society that is crying out for support, OFMDFM failed to implement a childcare strategy and handed back funds that any parents who are paying out possibly more than they are earning will absolutely wince at. If you want to talk about alternatives, we have produced very comprehensive proposals and you are more than welcome to use them.

We are with the Government on wanting a strong economy, a more equal society, longer lives, more fragrant flowers and tastier dinners. We are with you on all of those things. Previous contributors from Executive parties have asked us what our alternative is. What is your alternative? You have not produced any detail yet.

We have heard a lot, but we have 100 pages of rhetoric here. When we start to get some of the detail, we will give it a fair wind. The proposals that are good we will support, but there is nothing in here on how we prepare for corporation tax powers, nothing on how we enhance North/South cooperation, nothing on how we get more out of devolution and nothing on how we address the mess over selection —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

**Ms Hanna:** — for people. Issues of identity are also parked in the "too hard" pile. We look forward to seeing the detail.

**Mr McElduff (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education):** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I am pleased to follow on from the Member, who represented a party that was very much in the last Executive. Lots of Executive failings were listed, but the Member needs to be reminded that her party was very much part of the last Executive.

I want to speak mostly as Chair of the Education Committee. Obviously, given that Wednesday's meeting will be the second for our Committee, I am not in a position to articulate an agreed Committee position on the draft PFG. I welcome references in the draft Programme for Government to educational improvement, addressing the attainment gap, improving educational quality and, of course, early intervention designed to enhance life chances.

It is worth commenting on the things that were achieved in the last Executive Programme for Government. One of those was in the area of educational attainment and educational improvement. Very often in this society, that is measured by GCSE attainment, including in English and maths. There is a debate more generally about whether that is the best or most comprehensive way to assess the impact of an education system. I think everybody would agree that literacy and numeracy are key to educational progress and should always be used in some way to measure outcomes.

I emphasise that in the past decade we have seen a year-on-year improvement and percentage increase in the number of school leavers achieving five GCSEs at grades A\* to C or their equivalent. In 2014-15, when the last available figures are from, the figure was 81.1%. When you include GCSE English and maths, you find the figure is 66%. That represents a significant improvement on, for example, the 2009-2010 figure of 59% and gives a measure of the progress that is being made.

I take the opportunity to congratulate schools, teachers, pupils and parents, as well as — I will probably come into my Sinn Féin MLA mode now — the Sinn Féin Education Ministers, who successively were the deputy First Minister, the Principal Deputy Speaker and Mr O'Dowd. Ministers are often faulted for perceived failings, but I congratulate them on the year-on-year improvements in the areas I have mentioned.

Moving back to Committee Chair mode, I think that Members will generally welcome an increased focus in the new PFG on addressing the attainment gap. This is to include considerable emphasis on pupils who are entitled to free school meals. It is worth noting that improvements have coincided with the inception of the signature programme and increases in levels of free school meal entitlement in post-primary schools. Those were excellent initiatives that yielded good outcomes in education.

Other education-related outcomes in the draft Programme for Government include increasing the number of schools assessed as providing good or better learning provision, which is, of course, a logical conclusion of the Every School a Good School policy, and the outcomes that deal with early intervention, giving children the best possible start in life. I have in mind a scheme that shows the disproportionately positive effect of interventions, the Sure Start programme. Over this period of time, it would be worth exploring whether even more children and families could benefit from Sure Start provision. That will be difficult, because there was a recent increase in that respect. However, it would be worth looking at that afresh to see whether we can bring more people into the Sure Start tent.

I want to praise the process as well. Some people are suggesting that all of it should be in here, now, in detail. I think that this is a real exercise in participative democracy, and I will certainly encourage sectors and communities to engage thoroughly in the weeks and months ahead.

I heartily agree with my colleague, Linda Dillon. Linda referred to rural communities suffering from deprivation, not least in roads infrastructure. The condition of rural roads in many constituencies at this time is extremely bad. Poor broadband is blunting the effectiveness and competitiveness of rural businesses. In the recent past, a private satellite company was meant to fill the gaps for government in places where BT cannot reach. There has been a systematic failure across Tyrone, mid-Ulster and other places. People are angry at being without proper broadband for two and three weeks. It is dramatically affecting their businesses. There is a need for job creation in towns like Omagh and Strabane. I have, in my left hand, my priorities for the Assembly election. I will keep them close to hand, because they are measures that would improve the quality of life for people in the constituency of West Tyrone.

During the election campaign, I attended a Mencap hustings event and, more recently, a meeting with the western learning disability action group. Some things that need to find their way into the Programme for Government are absolute commitments for greater support and greater respite for families, ageing parents and carers of adults who have learning disabilities, not least in the Western Trust area, where underfunding of £8 million has been identified by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. These are big issues. I am sure that we will hear that from the sectors

and communities when they engage in a formal sense with the draft Programme for Government framework.

It is not often that I disagree with John O'Dowd. John gave the context of Tory cuts.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

**Mr McElduff:** Yes. I absolutely agree with that context-setting, but I disagree with John in one respect: I want my street lights, and I want the lights to go on in the heads of the children.

**Dr Farry:** Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, I was slightly alarmed at your cutting off Mr McElduff prematurely, because I wanted to hear a bit more about the split in Sinn Féin over this issue.

Before I get into detail, reference has been made to the social investment fund. At times, the opposition parties may well disagree on issues, and I will come to our approach to that shortly. To follow on from the comments made by Claire Hanna, I would say that it is worth referencing that nothing that has been done through the social investment fund could not have been achieved by Departments putting programmes in place on the ground. Sometimes, the issue seems to be who is getting the funding as opposed to the ability of Departments to spend that type of money.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** Will the Member give way?

**Dr Farry:** Yes.

**Mrs Little Pengelly:** Does the Member also accept that it is, maybe, a good opportunity to reflect on some inaccuracies in the previous Member's contribution about the SIF? The SIF came before Delivering Social Change. The social investment fund was established under the steering group, so all the groups and projects had an opportunity to put in their proposals. Most importantly, the First Minister and deputy First Minister had no role in the selection of the projects: all of the projects were decided at local level through a local steering group.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Dr Farry:** Thank you very much. Certainly, my view is that governance around decision-making in the social investment fund is poor

and is more prone to risk than would be the case in the normal processes that are run through Departments. Indeed, if there are concerns about the lack of attention to certain issues, that can be rectified.

I turn now to the motion and the framework. In common with my colleague Naomi Long, I stress that we believe that the concept is essentially sound but is clearly still under development. We are keeping an open mind at this stage and are withholding our final judgement until we see the detail over the autumn.

Clearly, as a party, we are comfortable with the general direction of travel. Given that we participated in the early stages of the process, up to the point of the election being called, we have certainly given our implicit endorsement of the process.

However, at no stage have we formally endorsed the content. The development of the content was accelerated in the final few weeks before the election by the Civil Service and also in discussions between those parties who were joining the Executive in the past couple of weeks.

### 3.45 pm

That said, the concept makes considerable sense. It is better than an arbitrary list of action points and targets thrown in by Departments, which may or may not be realised. Instead, we have a series of high-level set objectives. By definition, this will come across as motherhood and apple pie at this stage: that is the nature of the process. The real test will come in due course with the targets that are set, how challenging those will be and the policies, programmes and resources that will be allocated to turning those targets into reality.

There is a logic in developing the most rational policies and practices that will get us to the targets that have been set out most efficiently with regard to resources. While I can understand Members' frustrations that certain actions are not mentioned at this stage, if the process is respected to its logical conclusion, the Executive should come forward with proposals that will get us to the outcome most effectively. At times, however, we may disagree about what those may be — I suspect that there will be disagreement in the Executive parties as to what those may be — but I believe that the theory remains sound.

From our experience of the Executive, not only of being in the Executive but of being in opposition under previous mandates, we are sceptical about how genuine the situation will be with the Executive's adopting the most logical approach to achieving the objectives. Far too often, other considerations enter into the equation, which sometimes reflect political realities. That is fine: we are a political Assembly. However, when that happens, it portrays the true disingenuousness as to how those targets can be reached. The process can be compromised through too many political considerations coming from the different partners in government.

I have a concern about what has been said about health. There has been a lot of focus on the importance of setting objectives and following through in due course with policies to get that outcome, but the two parties in the Executive are both making a commitment to spending an additional £1 billion of revenue spending on health by 2021. That seems to run entirely counter to the approach that is being adopted. I am all for spending the right amount of money on health to achieve much better outcomes, but surely the most logical thing to do is to put in place the reform process and work out what we need to spend to achieve outcomes and to resource that transformation, rather than making an arbitrary commitment now that the round figure of an additional £1 billion will be spent by 2021. In particular, the realisation of that outcome in the absence of other efficiencies being found means that we are looking at very stringent cuts to other Departments if we are to achieve that £1 billion extra for health. That will undermine a lot of the draft framework's other worthy objectives. When I say "efficiencies", I mean more than simply tampering with the levels of rate exemptions, rate capping or abolishing a few quangos here and there. We are talking serious reform or, potentially, some form of revenue raising or addressing the cost of division.

I will spend the balance of my time focusing on some of the specifics that have been set out. Some of them are good and sound — for example, what we are doing on skills. I am pleased to see that there is recognition of gradation with skills, and we are not looking at a very flat indicator; that is positive. I am glad that economic inactivity is mentioned. The logic there is that we efficiently implement the existing strategy that was agreed by the previous Executive.

I have concerns about other areas. If we are talking about increasing reconciliation, the

theme seems to be about people respecting different cultural traditions in society, which may be one aspect of reconciliation. However, reconciliation is also about building friendships and overcoming divisions. It is possible that you could achieve that type of outcome through people tolerating activities better in different parts of the community rather than a genuine coming together, so we need to be careful as to exactly how that will be achieved.

Also, we need to have some concern about how far we go in focusing on the regional imbalance in our economy. We need to transform the Northern Ireland economy overall, and we need to recognise that there are imbalances and try to address those, but, if we become a slave to that, we might end up overly micromanaging investment decisions and neglecting the ability of greater Belfast to drive our economy — not just the areas around greater Belfast but all of Northern Ireland.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

**Dr Farry:** There are particular issues that we need to bottom through.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** As this is Mr Doug Beattie's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

**Mr Beattie:** Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. It is nice to stand up to get some blood flowing in my legs. I will start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Sam Gardiner MBE, a one-time Father of the House. His dedication to these institutions, to the people of Upper Bann and, indeed, to Lurgan is extremely well known. I wish him all the best for the future. He has handed that baton on to me, and I am very mindful that I am here to represent all the people of Upper Bann. I must take the opportunity to thank those people for putting their faith in me and voting me into the Assembly.

I believe that it is also important to show humility because, for all those who voted for me, there are many more who did not and did not give me a preference. I will represent them just as much as I will represent anybody else in my constituency, and I will use the core values and standards that have sustained me over my whole lifetime: integrity, respect for others, professionalism, selfless commitment, courage and, above all, loyalty. I am extremely proud to

be opening a fully functioning MLA constituency office in Portadown once again.

If I may, I will take a moment out to thank all Members for their kind words of support on the passing of my beautiful grandson Cameron, who died at the age of 15 months, the day before the election. Your kind words have sustained me. It remains a difficult time for me and a difficult time for my family, but knowing that there are people like you who gave me those kind words has helped me and will help me in the long term, as it will help my family.

As I move on, I have to start by saying that I am disappointed by this whimsical document on crisp white paper with no real value, intellectual currency or, in fact, shifting responsibilities. It sets an agenda for the next five years but does not give a long-term vision for Northern Ireland in the next 20 or 30 years. In fact, there may even be some in government who do not want Northern Ireland to have that long-term future.

Let us drill down into the document a little. No, let us just scratch the surface for a moment. At its heart is the Fresh Start Agreement, and, at the heart of the Fresh Start Agreement is tackling paramilitarism. Yet, there is absolutely no mention of paramilitarism until page 29, and, even then, it is fleeting with no measurable outcomes and no indicators. Let me just take a line from outcome 7, if I may:

*"A safe community is one where paramilitary groups and criminal gangs cannot exert influence".*

Where are the indicators to address that? In fact, the Executive — I have to say that the Ulster Unionist Party was part of the Executive and is not without blame — are sustaining paramilitarism in this country. Looking to the future, I can see us sustaining it for another five years. We have semi-autonomous paramilitary wings at Her Majesty's Prison in Maghaberry.

We allow that to happen. We sustain it. We give it credibility. We give it an identity. We are giving it structure. We are allowing them to direct terrorism, and, if anybody thinks that that is not true, you just have to look at the brutal murders of prison officer Ismay and prison officer Black. Where are the indicators to deal with that and to stop the segregation and treat those people as they are: criminals to be dealt with as criminals?

Look at it from a more basic level and at the illegal paramilitary parades on our streets. Indeed, in my area of Upper Bann, in Lurgan, there were men, women and children dressed

in paramilitary uniforms. I commend the Police Service of Northern Ireland for how it dealt with them during and after the parade, but the damage is already done because those paramilitary parades are influencing our children. Where is the indicator to deal with that? Before some of you people sitting here roll your eyes at me on this, let me remind you that paramilitarism affects far more of our outcomes, such as our international standing in outcome 10; an effective justice system in outcome 11; division and segregation in outcome 12; and effective and reliable public services in outcome 13. Those are all affected by paramilitarism, yet we have not, in this document, addressed it with any indicators whatsoever.

As a new MLA, I came in here expecting to see a Programme for Government that would handrail us to a brighter long-term future. I genuinely did, and I genuinely want that. What I got was an expensive doorstop holding closed the door to prosperity, social progress, cultural acceptance and the normalised society that our people deserve.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** I thank the Member for his maiden speech. I also want to put on record our deep commiseration — I am sure that I speak for all the House — on the loss of your beautiful grandchild. I am a mamó — a grandmother — myself, and the loss of a child is a dreadful thing. I just want to put on record our commiseration.

**Mr McAleer:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I note and welcome the draft Programme for Government with its 14 strategic outcomes and the indicators focused on societal outcomes. This is a collaborative approach, and it is very important to give people their say and a sense of ownership because it is their Programme for Government. I, along with others, will be encouraging people to have their say on this developing, rolling process by 22 July.

Speaking as the party's spokesperson on infrastructure, I welcome the fact that one of the strategic outcomes is dedicated to infrastructure. Indeed, as a representative from the west and the wider north-west, I welcome the fact that regional balance is also included as one of the strategic outcomes. Whilst those individually are very welcome, it is important to point out that very good infrastructure underpins all 14 outcomes and indeed underpins all the economic and social development that we have here.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr McGlone] in the Chair)*

I welcome the fact that the Programme for Government gives a commitment to deliver on the flagship projects announced in the Budget last August. Those have been identified in the new Programme for Government framework and include the Belfast transport hub, the stadia programme, the training facilities for emergency services and the new children's hospital. From a north-west perspective, I welcome the recommitment to the A5 and A6 in the programme. That is extremely important. It also recognises the importance of key strategic corridors like the A8, A1, M1, A4, A26 and A22. That is extremely important.

#### 4.00 pm

In the time ahead, it is important to recognise that these strategic corridors are extremely important, not just within the North but within the wider context of the island of Ireland. These roads do not stop at the border. Indeed, the A5 is connected to the N2 at Monaghan and the N14 at Donegal. The M1 becomes the A4, which leads on through the N16 on to Sligo and into the west. It is important that we continue to work with the Irish Government. One of the objectives of the Trans-European Network, which is under way, is to reduce these bottlenecks and linkages between different pieces of transport infrastructure. We will continue to play our part as a party with the 30 Members that we have in the Oireachtas in moving this ahead.

I welcome the fact that, in the document, in relation to transport and infrastructure, we see reference to the commitment to active travel and the bicycle strategy. Indeed, the Ulster canal is also mentioned. This is something that my colleague Seán Lynch is interested in and has been working at for a number of years. No doubt, we will keep this high on the agenda.

In conclusion, folks, I welcome this new PFG framework. As my colleague from West Tyrone Barry McElduff said earlier on, this is an example of participative democracy. It is a new approach, which will unfold and develop as the consultation takes place with stakeholders right across the different sectors. It sets out a direction of travel. I commend the draft Programme for Government and encourage everyone to have their say in the development of this process.

**Mr Durkan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Members will be relieved to hear that I am not going to dwell on

issues around process, our views on which have been accurately and eloquently proffered by my colleagues Alex Attwood and Claire Hanna.

Mr O'Dowd made a good contribution to today's debate. He spoke of the challenges facing the new Executive, the new Ministers and their new Departments. Certainly, there are huge challenges, but there are also huge opportunities to do things better and to make things better for people. This document, in our belief, does not grasp or even attempt to grasp those opportunities. Mr Stalford, in his maiden speech, said something along the lines that it is the business of government to improve the lives of people. He intimated that those of us who chose not to be in government, and those of us who did not have that choice, have no role to play in that. Well, we are making it our business in opposition to improve the performance of government.

We have seen — and people have felt and continue to feel — the failure by government to deliver on real issues. Nowhere has this failure been more pronounced than in my constituency. The fig leaf that has been used to cover at least one of these failures — for example, the expansion of Magee, and the economic and social benefits that that would undoubtedly bring — is that it was not in the Programme for Government. So please forgive our concerns at the lack of specifics in this document. We cannot argue with these desired outcomes — who could? — but we just want to ensure them. Last week, many Members attended an event in the Long Gallery. It was hosted by Autism NI and sponsored by Mrs Cameron. Participants described their frustrations and concerns at the lack of delivery by several Departments, and the lack of care. It was entitled "Broken promises". One would get the impression from this Programme for Government that the Executive are avoiding making promises just to avoid breaking more promises.

We need more detail. How are we going to reduce health inequality? How are we going to increase the supply of suitable housing, and how are we going to afford it? How will we improve the skills profile of the population, and, especially, how will we do so when we are voting through Budgets that reduce the skills budget? Plans to reduce poverty are admirable, but we have, as Ms Hanna said, seen strategies come and go. Some strategies we have just waited for, and are still waiting.

I would like to have seen, in particular, more detail in the document on how we intend to

improve environmental sustainability. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions will be extremely difficult in the context of trying to grow our economy, and I believe that this can only be achieved through the introduction of Northern Ireland-specific climate change legislation.

As my colleagues have outlined, it is our intention to work constructively inside the Chamber and outside it to help deliver all these outcomes and much more. We will continue to demand answers and demand actions to obtain tangible evidence that they are being delivered or on why they are not.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This is my first time speaking in the new mandate, and we are down to sit to 9.00 pm. I am disappointed about that, because I think that we are still failing the staff in the Building. It is an archaic way of doing business. It is not family-friendly, and it is not rural-friendly. I know that the Business Office and others will be looking at this, and I think that, as we start the business of the new Assembly, we need to get things right from the start. For the past five years, we have talked about the need to attract more women into the Assembly, and we have talked about the need for family-friendly hours. We are starting a new session, and we have not done anything about it. That should be on the record as something that needs addressed.

On the other hand, I am glad to see that the Executive will be doing business differently. This is a progressive framework, and it will help us to tackle the age-old problem of departmental silo mentality. It puts well-being at the heart of government. Health is at the forefront of the document. It talks about public health strategies, tackling health inequalities, active travel, which is a health issue in itself, childcare and mental health. Of course, all of those issues sit in different Departments, and that is why we need an outcome-focused Programme for Government, not a department-focused Programme for Government. It is only apt that we commend Carnegie and those involved in the Roundtable on their work over the past three years. I attended many meetings, and I know that the current Minister for the Economy did the same, as did junior Minister Fearon and David McIlveen. They no doubt contributed to the new progressive framework that we have in front of us, and it is a good thing that the public will have their say. It is a good thing that stakeholders and the community will have their say in the document to ensure that we get it right. The direction of



travel from the Executive clearly is the correct one.

I am disappointed that the Opposition have not done their homework. I was expecting great things from the much talked-about Opposition, the Opposition who cannot decide how they will be an Opposition — the two main parties, anyway. Today was an opportunity to land a few blows on the new Executive. It was an opportunity to outline the detail of their alternative Programme for Government framework, but there is no alternative before us. I say to the Members to the left that there is an opportunity to feed in those views, and we want detailed proposals, not just "We don't like this, and we don't like that". We need detailed proposals about what their alternative Programme for Government framework is. I hope that they will be a constructive Opposition, as they have outlined. All that I have heard today so far is complain, complain, complain. It was said over the election that they wanted to be a constructive Opposition, but we have yet to see that.

It is great that active travel has been included as one of the indicators. That represents the crossover between both health and transport and health and infrastructure. This needs to be looked at closely as part of the consultation. Coupling public transport with active transport could mean that a decrease in cycling and walking is masked by an increase in bus and train journeys. I will put that forward as part of our response. Active transport is much more important than that. We are in a very car-centric society, and there are a lot of car-centric civil servants. That should not be allowed to cloud aspects of the Programme for Government and its indicators.

There are issues, indicators and targets here that are very important to the rural community that I represent. Internet connectivity is one example. Travel times are an issue for rural commuters, as Declan McAleer outlined. Then there are big issues for the health of rural communities. Those are equally important.

I want to come back on a point that Claire Hanna made about the Scottish experience, because there are parallels with our situation. I remember how John Eldridge, whom I have met on a number of occasions, outlined how he knew that there would be departmental resistance to the new way of doing government. In effect, he brought it in overnight in consultation with Ministers. He knew that there would be institutional resistance from parts of the Civil Service. I have no doubt that there will be resistance from our local government

structures as well. I encourage the other parties not just to dismiss this new way of doing government. It is bold and progressive. It is about doing things differently and focusing on health and other outcomes that are important to the communities that we represent. We are moving away from the old way of doing business, the silo mentality and the culture of fiefdoms in Departments. It is a big, big step, and I urge the Opposition not to try to make hay out of this but to respond to the consultation and to ensure that we take this step forward for the better of everybody in our communities.

**Mrs Dobson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Executive's draft Programme for Government framework. I do so from a health perspective. Is it a draft framework or a vague wish list to buy some time for officials to draft yet another document that will probably only be ignored anyway? It makes me wonder what all the meetings in the six months leading up to the election were really all about. The fact that the last Assembly existed without a Programme for Government for 2015-16 demonstrated exactly how little regard the document is actually given.

The amateurish and unprofessional measures accompanying the health indicators will give people very little confidence. It would have been better to leave them out, rather than rush them in before it went to the printers. Targets, despite what some officials in the Department and trusts might say, remain important as a means of monitoring and judging health performance. From the outset, I urge the Executive to avoid being taken down the path of believing that somehow health targets are a burden or are in any way unnecessary.

There are 42 indicators in the current draft PFG framework document, and only six relate to health. I want to make some brief comments on some of them shortly. Whilst no one could disagree with any of the six, what is more noticeable is what is not included. At a time when 376,382 people are waiting for a first outpatient appointment, diagnostic test or inpatient treatment, surely the most pressing target for the Department and the Executive collectively is to deliver timely and safe treatments for patients.

Our second key priority would be to remove the abhorrent variances in the quality of care provided across the five health trusts. Take the target that 100% of patients with suspected breast cancer be seen within 14 days.

Overall, in 2015-16, 99% were seen on time in the Western Health Trust, yet only 66% were seen in the South Eastern Trust and an

appalling 43% in the Belfast Trust. In addition, rather than including bland indicators, such as increasing respect for each other, maybe the Executive should place a duty on its Ministers to respect their staff. Maybe then, scenes such as the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Midwives threatening to take industrial action, partially as a result of sheer anger at the attitude of the then Health Minister, Simon Hamilton, could have been avoided.

#### 4.15 pm

Why is there no indicator on committing to continually review services to ensure that they are able to adapt to an ageing population? When it comes to reducing health inequality, we cannot forget that people who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are much more likely to die from heart disease and respiratory disease. Far too many of those deaths occur before the age of 65, and most are entirely preventable with only a few lifestyle changes. Smoking, an unhealthy diet, excessive alcohol consumption and little physical activity all greatly contribute to this inequality.

We delivered the creation of the Public Health Agency despite opposition from the DUP at the time, and we will firmly oppose any measure to dissolve it, especially now after the deeply flawed and poorly handled announcement on the abolition of the Health and Social Care Board. I would certainly like to see a commitment from the First Minister and deputy First Minister for the PHA to continue for the next six years.

When we look at indicator four, "Reduce preventable deaths", we see that there needs to be a commitment to target each of the five big causes of early death: cancer, stroke and heart, respiratory and liver disease. We also need to look at our ratio of intensive care beds. There could be little surprise that following the success of the cancer patient experience survey in England and Wales, the PHA and McMillan Cancer Support here funded a similar survey for Northern Ireland. The 2015 Northern Ireland Cancer Patient Experience Survey covered around 5,000 adult cancer patients in Northern Ireland with the primary diagnosis of cancer who had been inpatients or day-care patients and were receiving active treatment between 1 December 2013 and 31 May 2014. This is just one example of why indicator five, "Improve the quality of the healthcare experience", is crucial. However, it is essential that the trusts, when listening to patients, are open and responsive to the concerns that will inevitably be aired.

Finally, turning to indicator six, "Improve mental health", there is an ever-increasing body of evidence proving that our poor rates of mental health are directly related to our previous levels of violence. It is a legacy issue, with not only victims being affected but the children and grandchildren of victims. We cannot ignore the staggering fact that more people have lost their life through suicide since the Belfast Agreement than died during the entire Troubles. This is a core issue for the Ulster Unionist Party, and it is why, in February, we published a detailed policy paper dedicated to the issue containing 15 specific points, including ideas like a mental health champion, greater focus on prevention and tackling signals earlier and tackling the stigma sometimes associated with poor mental health. The paper has been positively welcomed by experts, and I will send a copy to the new Health Minister for consideration with this indicator in the PFG.

In conclusion, I encourage the Executive parties, when they eventually consider the targets they will set for themselves, to challenge and not merely agree with the Civil Service and to set reasonable, tangible targets. I encourage them to not just accept the low hurdles but to seek to drive forward real, lasting and important changes for our people. That is not an easy task with a Civil Service that, two decades on, is still struggling with the post-devolution era. I trust that the Executive will do what is right for Northern Ireland. We on the opposition Benches will constructively criticise where necessary —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Could the Member bring her remarks to a close, please?

**Mrs Dobson:** — and do what is right for Northern Ireland.

**Mr Eastwood:** I congratulate you on your first sitting as a Deputy Speaker.

There has been quite a bit of talk today about process: the process leading up to this, the process before the election and the process from here to December or whenever we will have a final draft of the Programme for Government. That is fine. It is all important, and we have to put it all on the record. However, I think that the public are more interested in what we will do.

We believe strongly in consultation and always have done. We always argue for good consultation processes. We have just been through the best consultation you could ever go through. All of us sat down and worked with

experts, spoke to civic society and developed manifestos, argued over them, defended them and put them in front of the people. Then we went out. I consulted thousands of people about our manifesto, our ideas and about this place and how it works and does not work. We have been through that. It is called an election; it is called democracy. We then had to try to form a Government.

The SDLP went into the process to honestly get the best possible draft Programme for Government, even if it was a broad one. That is why we met the Civil Service, and we are thankful for the openness with which we were met. We met the head of the Civil Service and the heads and key figures in many of the Departments. We argued, interrogated and tried to come up with the best possible solutions to some of the problems on the basis of the work that we had done in our manifesto. We then put forward papers with specific policies and ideas. Mr McKay wants us to come up with specific ideas: we have done that, and they are all published. That was our approach to the process. Unfortunately, that is not where we ended up.

There was one meeting that we did not get: a meeting with the Finance Department on the overall financial picture. That was the only meeting that we could not get. We might not have been looking forward to it, but we are all interested in finding out why that was. What is the financial picture? How bad is it? It is important that the public are given an early understanding of the financial picture. We could not get that in the process.

We wanted a draft Programme for Government. The language of this is interesting. Many Members, many from government Benches, have talked about the "draft Programme for Government". Of course, this is not a draft Programme for Government; it is a framework for a Programme for Government or whatever the language is. From our consultation with the public, our view is that people are not interested in personality clashes up here, who is speaking to whom and who gets on well with whom: what they are interested in is when we will get down to the business of delivering. They will not be satisfied that we will not even have a Programme for Government for another five or six months.

People want us to rush urgently towards reform, change, action and delivery. That is what the last mandate was supposed to be about. We were in government, and we hold our hands up for the part that we played. We tried our best with one Ministry. None of us could stand here

and say that that was a mandate filled with delivery, opportunities taken and change delivered. That is not what happened. We should consult, but we should consult with something, not just a broad wish list. That is what our manifestos were supposed to be about: policies that we could deliver. We then had an election, and we all accept the result of that.

Society is crying out for action, not warm words. The framework does not understand or recognise the fact that we face crises on so many fronts. We face a crisis on emigration, with far too many of our young people leaving our shores to find work or a university place. We face a crisis in homelessness: in my city, thousands of people are on the housing waiting list.

We are facing a crisis in child poverty. In Derry, north Belfast, west Belfast, parts of east Belfast — right across the North — far too many of our children are living in levels of poverty that are far too high. We face a crisis in hospital and health waiting lists. We still face a staggering level of economic inactivity in many areas. Bizarrely, we face further cuts in our university sector.

We accept that this is the process now, and we will positively and constructively engage in it. We will put in papers, respond to the consultation and do our best to put forward alternatives where required. We will, however, need to see the needs of the people and areas that have been left behind for far too long being addressed. We need to see a commitment to increased opportunity for childcare for hard-pressed families. Our manifesto talked about moving from around 12 hours to 20 hours, with a view of going to 30 hours later. We want to see targeted economic investment in the areas that have been left behind. We want to see fairness at the heart of everything that this Government do. We want to see support for victims. We want to see the opportunity that arises out of the potential of North/South development — economically, in the health service, in education, in tourism and right across the different sectors — being realised once and for all. We need to see, once and for all, infrastructure going to the west, not more warm words about it. If we do not see —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

**Mr Eastwood:** If we do not see — I will make this point to finish — once and for all, after more than 50 years, investment in the university at

Magee in Derry, we will not support the Programme for Government that, again, fails to do that.

**Mrs Overend:** I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your new role.

As the Ulster Unionist education spokesperson, I will critique the education policy in the draft Programme for Government framework. As the Ulster Unionist Party leader said, our position is to scrutinise and critique — not necessarily to oppose — the work of the Executive. We are happy to give support where it is deserved.

In the wake of an election in which the Northern Ireland electorate was encouraged to vote for the DUP to keep Sinn Féin out of the First Minister's post, I recall the plea for education to be taken out of the hands of Sinn Féin. After 18 years of education in the hands of Sinn Féin, Northern Ireland now has a DUP Education Minister, albeit that it seems that he is joined at the hip with Sinn Féin. Only the second ministerial visit by new Education Minister Weir was to an Irish language secondary school in Belfast — Coláiste Feirste — which received a £15.5 million extension from the Department's coffers.

The visit probably raises more questions than it answers. Unfortunately, the answers are not found in this draft Programme for Government framework, which begs this question: what are the Programme for Government priorities for education? Will the 2016-2021 mandate see further such investment? Will the people of Northern Ireland see a change in the Education Minister compared with the last Education Minister when it comes to future decisions on funding for new secondary schools? In particular, I refer to the supporting of the start-up of a secondary school with a first-year intake of only 14 pupils, just because it is an Irish-language school. Will the new Education Minister go against any ministerial advisory group recommendations and seek to follow a personal or joint DUP/Sinn Féin political agenda?

While the last Education Minister was proud of taking politically biased decisions and going against the ministerial advisory group's recommendations on a value-for-money decision, I am not sure that we are moving into a new era in education. None of those questions is answered in the draft Programme for Government framework, and the actions of the Education Minister so far have not given me any confidence in the matter.

One key outcome in the draft Programme for Government refers to the Department of Education:

*"We give our children and young people the best start in life".*

Of course, who could disagree with that, but how do we achieve that outcome? We look at the indicators, and numbers 15 to 11 refer specifically to educational outcomes.

#### 4.30 pm

Indicator 11, "Improve educational outcomes", will be measured by the increase in the percentage of school-leavers achieving at level 2 or above, including in English and maths, but the unanswered questions remain. Are GCSEs the only method of measurement? The Chairman of the Education Committee, who is not in his place now, referred to that earlier. Will they consider other qualifications? More than that, are our young people actually job-ready with these qualifications?

I nearly got excited when I read the heading "Reduce educational inequality", which is indicator 12. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you recall, in the last mandate, the Ulster Unionist Party's attempt to remove article 71 of the Fair Employment and Equal Treatment Order 1998, which is the exception for schools under fair employment law that allows them to discriminate in the employment of teachers on the basis of religion. I thought for one moment that the 'Programme for Government Framework' might pledge to remove this fair employment exception, especially since, as recorded in Hansard, all parties said that they supported such a move; but, no, that is not in the document. The aspiration to improve the educational outcome of those receiving free school meals is a commendable one, but there is no mention in the framework of looking at the free school meals measurement to assess whether it remains a fair measurement of deprivation. Certainly, there has been a lobby to do this.

Indicator 13, "Improve the quality of education", again is motherhood and apple pie stuff. Of course we all want that. We also want the Education and Training Inspectorate to be changed to be more effective and to work alongside schools in a better fashion to enable schools to make improvements. There were a number of key recommendations in a previous Education Committee's report that, so far, have not been implemented.

By increasing their qualifications, indicator 14 wants to:

*"Improve the skills profile of the population".*

However, there is no mention of the particular problem of persistent underachievement in parts of Northern Ireland. Numerous reports published over the past 10 to 15 years identify where this attainment gap exists. The research has clearly identified, in particular, that boys from a working-class Protestant background are doing significantly worse than girls from a middle-class Catholic background. I am surprised that such necessary targeted interventions are not mentioned. Initiatives like the signature projects in numeracy and literacy proved successful but were cut in the previous mandate. Will these or similar make a comeback? We do not know this from the 'Draft Programme for Government Framework'.

Indicator 15, "Improve child development", aims to measure an age 3+ health review using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire in the red book formerly known as the personal child health record. In contrast to the other indicators, this is something new and, indeed, rather specific and focused. So, the argument used by the Ministers that this document is only at a high level and does not get into detail is lost in this case.

In conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am disappointed that we stand today with only a framework rather than a detailed Programme for Government as promised in the Fresh Start Agreement. Are you going to tell me that my time is nearly up, Mr Deputy Speaker? In regard to educational indicators and outcomes, it is very high level and without specific detail. Where is the aspiration to break down the barriers between the many and varied sectors that make up our education system?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Your time, in fact, is nearly up now.

**Mrs Overend:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. There is no mention of breaking down the barriers and moving towards a single system so, while this framework is aspirational, it lacks the central and overall vision that is so badly needed for education.

**Mr Allen:** I would like to congratulate those Members who made their maiden speech today, and I look forward to working constructively with them in delivering a better Northern Ireland for all our constituents. I welcome the opportunity to speak as the Ulster

Unionist Party's community spokesperson. During the previous mandate, I was not a Member of the House for very long. However, like many, I watched as we leapt from crisis to crisis whilst those who matter most — our constituents — suffered.

It is predicted that, by 2020, one in four children in Northern Ireland will be living in poverty. If this Executive do not address that, we will further fail our children.

In 2012, OFMDFM launched the Delivering Social Change framework, which stated:

*"The framework has been established to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages and to improve children and young people's health, well-being and life opportunities, thereby breaking the long term cycle of multi-generational problems."*

However, according to the most recent poverty bulletin, 23% of children were in poverty in 2013-14. That is approximately 101,000 children, and it is an increase from 20% the previous year. Some 20% of working-age adults were in poverty in 2013-14; that is approximately 213,000 working-age adults. That is an increase from 18% the previous year. Some 21% of pensioners were in poverty in 2013-14; that is approximately 63,000 pensioners. That is an increase from 20% the previous year.

The last Executive failed to deliver on key poverty targets, even though they went through a full process of listening to individuals, the community and voluntary sector and leading academics. Do the two parties of Government really expect the people of Northern Ireland to believe that this renewed listening, to the same stakeholders who will be telling them the same things, will create a policy portfolio that will address what should have been addressed over the last four years?

In 2013, homelessness charity Crisis carried out research that identified that Northern Ireland had higher rates of homelessness than any other region of the United Kingdom. Indeed, the latest statistics on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website show that there are 39,338 individuals on the housing waiting list, of whom 22,097 are considered to be in housing stress, including 11,016 households deemed to be statutorily homeless. That is simply not acceptable.

The Department for Communities is very large and has a wide range of functions. In addition

to the functions of DSD, it has taken on many of those of DCAL. I know that many people are concerned that arts and culture may receive less priority in the new Department, but I am determined that that should not be the case. Arts funding became a major issue in the last Assembly as budgets were cut and many groups faced severe difficulties. Prior to the election, the Ulster Unionist Party produced a policy document dedicated to the arts and, in our Assembly election manifesto, we committed ourselves to five points — not the only party that had a five-point plan. A key one was to lobby for the inclusion of the arts in the next PFG, outlining the Executive's acknowledgement of the importance of the arts and demonstrating our commitment to them.

Instead of entering this mandate with a clear strategy and a set of policies that are already addressing the growing demands for social housing, tackling poverty and delivering for communities, we enter a new mandate with fluffy promises to make it better and calling on those who have already been talking to us to say some more.

**Mr Stalford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allen:** I am just about to finish; you can come in in a minute.

I will give credit where credit is due, and I will play my part as a member of the official Opposition to ensure that those fluffy promises are turned into results that benefit those who need help the most.

That is me finished, folks; fire away.

**Mr Stalford:** Is the Member giving way?

**Mr Allen:** Yes.

**A Member:** I do not think he is giving way.

**Mr Stalford:** Fair enough.

**Mr Agnew:** This morning, when I woke up, I heard of the death of a constituent, which the police were investigating. In the last hour, I have heard that it was a member of the Assembly staff who died. I would like to put on record my condolences to the family and, if the initial suspicions of the police are true, I wish them every success in their investigation and in catching whoever was responsible for the death, if it has been untoward.

I welcome the outcomes-based approach of the draft Programme for Government framework. I

think it is a progressive way of providing a holistic and long-term vision for Northern Ireland. The test is not what is in the document; it will be in what is to come. Politics is not simply about what we want to achieve. Ask any person in the street, and they will want to see better educational achievement, better health outcomes and fewer preventable deaths. These are things that we can all subscribe to. The art of politics is in the how: how are we going to achieve these things? We are not there yet with this document, so it is right that this is a take-note debate because that is all we can do with the document. We can take note of it; the real substance will come in the actions plans and, I hope, a legislative timetable for what we should expect to come forward from this Executive on how they can deliver on these outcomes.

When he spoke, Mr Attwood talked about a hope of a paradigm shift and following the Scottish model of being open and being an interactive government that engages with the wider community. I hope for that too, but I have to say that I am not optimistic on that. My party was asked to meet the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in relation to the Justice portfolio. Quite reasonably, I thought, I asked to see a draft of the Programme for Government, and I was told no. If that is a sign of the type of engagement that we are going to see from this Government, I am afraid that the hope of a paradigm shift will not be lived up to.

The First Minister also spoke about a spirit of cooperation. Members will be well aware that that was high on my agenda in the last Assembly, having brought forward the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. I want to see us go beyond the legal requirement of government to work together for children and see a government that works together for the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. However, it appears that there is going to be no legislative requirement for that. In fact, in the last mandate, we could not secure a legal commitment to have cooperative governance. When John McCallister brought through his opposition Bill, his plan had been that the government would be a single entity. It concerns me that those now in power were resistant to that requirement. What I will be looking for today from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister is a commitment that we will not see a repeat of the embarrassment of Ministers suing other Ministers, which we saw repeatedly in the last Assembly, including from the now First Minister. This was not only a cost to public finances but a cost to the reputation of these institutions and our governance. We need to

see cooperative governance and a Government that act as one and are responsible for all decisions, not just those of their particular party colleagues.

I welcome the commitment to equality in outcome 3 in the document. Again, the test will be in what actions are taken to achieve that equality. Equality is not simply ending discrimination, as is mentioned in the opening paragraphs of outcome 3. Equality has to be about more than that; it has to be about inclusion and rights protected within the law. In that, we have a challenge to the parties of government. Are we going to see Minister Givan bring forward the long-awaited sexual orientation strategy, which was promised in the last Programme for Government but not delivered? Are we going to finally see legislation for marriage equality brought through and passed in this Assembly? We have to respect the mandate of the DUP, whose manifesto said that it would not support such provision. Equally, however, I call on the First Minister and her party to respect the mandate of those of us who were elected with the commitment that we would achieve marriage equality and that, when that proposal comes back to the Assembly, we will see no petition of concern and will see respect of that mandate. More importantly, I hope that we will see a signal that we can have inclusivity in Northern Ireland and that outcome 3, for a more equal society, is not just words but something we can achieve in reality.

#### 4.45 pm

There is another commitment to increase environmental sustainability. I express my optimism, I suppose, about that being there, but I am disappointed that the only measure seems to be the measurement of greenhouse gases. That is absolutely fundamental, of course, but I cannot stand over a commitment to environmental sustainability that says that if you reduce greenhouse gases it is OK if you pollute our rivers. We need something more holistic. We need genuine sustainability.

I worry that all the talk about openness and well-being is undermined by the very opening purpose statement, which talks about:

*"Improving wellbeing for all — by tackling disadvantage, and driving economic growth".*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close, please.

**Mr Agnew:** I hope we will not have, as we have seen in the past, an Executive agenda driven by economic growth over everything else.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** As this is Mr Gerry Carroll's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind Members that it is established convention to allow him to speak unhindered without interruption.

**Mr Carroll:** Having read through the document at length over the weekend and having read through it again and again, I cannot help but think that it is not a draft Programme for Government at all but is, in fact, 114 pages of concentrated waffle that is designed to deflect from an already agreed programme of Thatcherite austerity. There are plenty of aspirations in the document, many of which I agree with and, no doubt, many Members would agree with. In the end, the devil is in the detail and actions speak louder than words.

Take the aspiration to reduce poverty, for example. That is an important and laudable aspiration, but what does it mean in practice? We know, for example, that benefit cuts will increase poverty. We know that job losses will increase poverty. We know that the bedroom tax, which is coming in in 2020, will increase poverty, and we know that all that is in the Fresh Start Agreement. How can we reconcile the reality of an austerity programme like the Fresh Start Agreement with an aspiration to reduce poverty? The truth is that the Executive cannot.

Again, there is an aspiration in the document to improve mental health. Of course, everyone in the Chamber would welcome that, but how can we square that with a situation where in the areas with the highest levels of suicide and most affected by issues associated with mental health, north and west Belfast, there is a disgraceful plan to close down mental health centres? What use is that aspiration to the users of Everton and Whiterock mental health centres in Belfast?

What is more, how can any aspiration to reduce poverty or improve public services be reconciled with an economic plan taken straight from the Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan playbook to reduce tax on corporations and give big business handouts? The last 30 years of neo-liberalism have taught us that there is no such thing as trickle-down economics. It does not exist, and it does not work. In reality, the Fresh Start Agreement is a plan to send wealth upwards at the cost of hundreds of millions of pounds that will be paid by the taxpayer and the public sector.

There is an alternative to the right-wing economics advocated by the Executive. It is based not on cutting tax on corporations but on making the rich pay. It is an alternative that does not seek to set aside millions of pounds, as the Fresh Start Agreement indicates, to go after so-called benefit fraud; instead, it sets money aside to go after the real fraudsters, who avoid paying millions and billions of pounds in taxes. There are more multimillionaires per head of population in Belfast than in any other city here in the North or in Britain, except London and oil-rich Aberdeen. A socialist alternative says, "Make them pay".

Why not abolish the rates system and replace it with a progressive local income tax where the rich pay the most, or, at least, why not remove the cap on rates for the wealthiest? Why do we not stop wasting hundreds of millions of pounds on wasteful PFI schemes? Why do we not end the wasteful voluntary redundancy scheme where £700 million is being set aside to put people out of work?

Why do we not use £700 million to build homes and put people into work? It is not about a lack of money, it is about priorities. If it were about lack of money, the House would not have consistently afforded itself a pay rise while telling everyone else to take a pay freeze or pay cut.

The House has failed the vast majority of people here for too long. I am very doubtful that the Programme for Government represents anything different. Indeed, the introduction to the document says that its progress cannot be judged in a single Assembly term but, rather, in a generation's time.

I want to make it clear that we do not have a generation's time to wait in order for the House to get its act together. Public-sector workers and hard-working staff in places like the Royal Victoria Hospital do not have a generation's time to wait for the living wage. The LGBT community cannot wait a generation to see its right to equal marriage granted. Those in child poverty will not be children in a generation's time, and they cannot be expected to wait. Women who are being prosecuted because they want to control their own bodies cannot wait a generation. The Irish language community, the pioneers of Bóthar Seighe, with the thousands of people following in their footsteps in schools like Coláiste Feirste, have waited long enough for their rights and I am sure that they will not be prepared to sit back and wait to see if Stormont sorts things out in a generation's time. And, of course, the thousands of people who want to see a future free from sectarianism and communal bickering

cannot be expected to wait a generation when they already have had to wait for at least 20 years.

In closing, I remind the House, and anyone else who is watching, that what Stormont does, people and the workers can undo. Even if the Programme for Government goes through, which it likely will, that will not be the end of the matter, because the day of reckoning is yet to come, and it is coming soon for the austerity-mongers on both sides of the Chamber.

**Mr Allister:** This document can only be described, at best, as synthetic and shallow. It is not about producing a Programme for Government; it is a mere collection of platitudes. It is an all-things-to-all-men manifesto with no direction as to how it is going to deliver any of the platitudes. Of course, there is a very good reason for that, which is that this is a Government of irreconcilable differences.

It is no surprise then that they postpone the production of a Programme for Government. As has been pointed out, Fresh Start told us that this document was to be out in April 2016, and then there would be the draft Programme for Government. Of course, six months later, all of that is in reverse. The reason why it is in reverse is that this is a Government that are incapable of agreeing their vision. We know this through no better source than the First Minister, because she told us all, in her quest to be elected, that it was imperative that she be elected because Martin McGuinness, her partner, had a very different vision. She told her spring conference in Limavady that Sinn Féin would take Northern Ireland in the wrong direction. Now, the terrible twins, the DUP and Sinn Féin, are in the position of having to try to produce a Programme for Government, knowing as they do that they are pulling in opposite directions and that one wants to go socially, economically and in other ways in one direction while the other wants to go in the opposite direction. So, it is no surprise to me that we have this synthetic, shallow document which does not answer any of the questions.

This is a document with nothing on some of the key issues. We have the situation of education, where, for years, we have not even been able to regulate, within the ambit of government, the transfer of our children from primary to post-primary.

This document has no vision or way forward on that. It has nothing to say about cuts or the austerity to which the last Member referred.



Nowhere does it set out any sense of fiscal probity or direction. Why? They are pulling in opposite directions, so it just goes silent on those issues.

The document has nothing to say about paramilitaries to any degree that matters. There may be no surprise there. If they want indicators in this new world where we will judge things by indicators and match them against indicators, what about the indicator of Sinn Féin no longer being inextricably linked to the IRA? Would that be a good indicator of whether paramilitarism is being dealt with? It was the First Minister who told us that Sinn Féin — her partner — is inextricably linked to the IRA. There is an indicator, if you want to take one, of whether any progress has been made on paramilitarism.

Try another. Try the indicator that Sinn Féin at last admits that there is an IRA. Would that be a good indicator to tell us whether this coming together to address issues such as paramilitarism is bearing any fruit, or is it just OK within the ambit of this woolly, meaningless document that, even in the face of a report on paramilitarism and the Chief Constable reaffirming his assessment of last autumn, Sinn Féin can be part of this Government, pull in whatever direction it is meant to be that the framework suggests and still say, "IRA? What IRA? There is no IRA". The First Minister can tell us that there has to be because her partner — Sinn Féin — is inextricably linked to the IRA, which her partner says does not exist. Just let them think about how they will square that circle on paramilitarism. When you begin to think about that, you begin to see just how facile and meaningless the document is.

Finally, it is my hope that, in two and a half weeks' time, the document will require a major rewrite because it will become the responsibility of the devolved Assembly to play its part in extracting this part of the United Kingdom from the EU. We will then need to think about the policies by which we will retake our fishing industry, we will have a Department that will set the arrangements for fishing — there is not much shadow or thought of that in the document — and Departments will have to prepare a bonfire of EU regulations.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close, please.

**Mr Allister:** There is not much sign of that because this is a document of meaningless platitudes.

**Ms Bailey:** Unlike many of my new colleagues in the Assembly, I will not take the opportunity today to make my maiden speech. I will do that another time. I will just make my comments brief.

Throughout the document, there is much mention of improving health, housing, respect, poverty, economic inequality and education. It mentions various targeted demographics, such as children, the disabled and youth. Identity and even paramilitaries are mentioned, as I have heard in the discussion in the Chamber several times. Those noble sentiments are all to be applauded, but, for me, the glaring omission from the document is women. Women are over half the population in Northern Ireland, yet they remain untargeted by commitments to improve the inequalities levied on them. Indicator 7, for example, states that we wish to "Improve health in pregnancy", yet it is concerned only with a baby's birth weight; it does not address a pregnant woman's health outcomes. If we are to wait for wider society to fill in the blanks in the document, I call for wider society to take a very gendered view of what this Programme for Government should deliver over the next couple of years.

**5.00 pm**

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

I have watched, over the past several years, as consultation after consultation is responded to and those responses are ignored. I have seen strategies such as the childcare strategy being written and put forward after a lot of work, time, effort and money has been spent to produce them and then being shelved. I feel that this Programme for Government ignores the role of women in Northern Ireland and makes no commitment to us. Given the work undertaken in the previous mandate, particularly our previous Speaker's commitment to good works and the creation of a women's caucus in the Assembly, I hope that, in this mandate, we can begin to address gender inequality in Northern Ireland with the urgency that it deserves.

**Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I have listened carefully to what has been an interesting and, not too many times, passionate debate. I am pleased by the support shown for the Executive's Programme for Government framework approach. As the First Minister said in her opening remarks, the approach and style of the next Programme for Government will be different. That is not to say that previous Administrations were wrong to do what they did

or that their actions and strategies were misguided; much of the work started previously will continue and, I have no doubt, find a place under the new Programme for Government. However, the difference this time is that we will have a much clearer idea of what we want to achieve and be in a better position to tell what is working and what is not. We will also have a better picture of the things that we need to do — the things that will make a real difference — so that we can take the important actions for those whom we should be working with and supporting.

By adopting an outcomes-based approach to the Programme for Government, the Executive have made some significant statements of intent and ambition. It sets the bar at a high level and commits the Executive to taking on the most difficult challenges facing our society. If something can make a difference to our societal well-being, it will be taken on. Where evidence demonstrates that efforts are not making a difference, we will be quick to alter course and redirect resources to more meaningful effect.

The document that we are debating today has been agreed by the Executive, but it is just the beginning. It is a draft Programme for Government framework and, as the name suggests, a structure for carrying more detailed programmes, strategies, actions and plans. As an Executive, we are committed to improving public services, investing in our schools, hospitals and roads and protecting the most vulnerable, and that is against a backdrop of increasing pressure on public finances.

As an Executive, we need to be more creative and more joined-up if we are to deliver for all of the people. The new approach to developing a Programme for Government will allow the Executive to rise to those challenges. Over the next three months, the Executive will formulate the work programmes that they believe will deliver the outcomes contained in the framework. However, this will not be done in isolation. Ministers and their senior officials will want to use this period to take every opportunity to meet stakeholders and potential delivery partners from all sectors to discuss and agree on the roles that they might be able to play in achieving our common goal.

I turn to some of the comments that were made. I took a careful note of most of what Members said. Obviously, given the time, I will not be able to cover everything.

The discussion on the debate began with the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, who

declared himself proud not to have been involved in the Programme for Government process. He was not because he left the Government last year. Instead of standing with the rest of us to face down those still involved in criminality in our society, he took the coward's way out and took his party out of the Executive. He went on to say that there were two tests that they applied to whether or not they would be in government on this occasion. Both tests have no credibility whatsoever, in my eyes.

In my view, the reason why the Ulster Unionist Party did not come into government was because of the election results. It had absolutely nothing to do with the Programme for Government. If the party had been returned with enough MLAs to have three, or even two, Members in the Executive as Ministers, it would have gone through the door and into the Executive like a rocket. The leader did not do that because the election did not turn out as he thought it would. That was the only reason why the Ulster Unionists did not come into the Executive.

He also said that, from 2011 to 2016, the Executive did not deliver, but he totally ignored the fact that many of the difficulties presented to the Executive were mostly of an economic nature in relation to the massive cuts inflicted on our Executive by a Tory-led Administration in London. That had a very dramatic effect on our Departments' ability to deliver, including the Department for Regional Development, which the Ulster Unionist Party held. Of course, the Ulster Unionist Party went into the general election of 2010 supporting the Conservatives who took those decisions, and it is quite rich, in my opinion, to try to blame the Executive for the difficulties that were presented to us by the dramatic cut to our block grant.

Christopher Stalford went on to talk about a very important issue, which is how poverty affects communities. All of us recognise that we need to improve the health of everyone and ensure that people have the best opportunity to live longer, including people in Sandy Row and, indeed, many other areas. Healthy lives are an obvious outcome for inclusion in the Programme for Government. There will be increasing demands on our health system, and the implications for our public finances make this one of the biggest challenges facing the Executive.

As we all know, an international expert has been invited to study our health service and, no doubt, he will come forward with proposals that he hopes, and many of us will hope, that all the political parties can sign up to. Hopefully, that

will be a dramatic opportunity for us to ensure that we are consistently in the business of improving our health service. That is a major issue.

Conor Murphy and Pam Cameron mentioned the issue of how outcomes can help communities, particularly people who are suffering marginalisation and disadvantage. That is very important. That outcome is about helping and caring for the most vulnerable in our society and ensuring that provision is adequate to meet their needs, but it is also about giving people the opportunity and means to help themselves.

Somebody said that there was no mention of victims in the context of what we are trying to do, but an important dimension to all this will be addressing the legacy of historical institutional abuse, the legacy of the past, the needs of victims and survivors and other issues associated with our past. All those will have to be tackled in the next term of this Administration.

Alex Attwood asked a number of questions about the approach for the Programme for Government framework. He described it as a hybrid document. The reality is that, since November 2015, the SDLP had representatives attending all the meetings that took place from the very beginning right through to the election. I think that most of the people who came were note takers, and I do not think that any of the representatives uttered a single word during that conversation. We got that from the civil servants and from other political parties who attended the meetings. That clearly indicated something to me from a very early stage. I went so far as to ask for a meeting with the leader of the SDLP, well in advance of the election, to establish whether it was going to come into the Executive. He talked about how it would depend on the outcome of the discussions around the Programme for Government. We then had workshops, meetings and discussions, to which his party was invited, yet his party made little or no contribution to those discussions. It was then that the warning bells rang in my head that, in all probability, the SDLP would not come into the Executive. Why did it not come into the Executive? For the same reasons that the Ulster Unionist Party did not come into the Executive: it did not get the result that it had hoped for. The SDLP came back to the Assembly with 12 Members and decided, like the Ulster Unionist Party, in an act of desperation, that, in order to change its political fortunes, not the fortunes of the people of the North of Ireland, it would absent itself from the

Executive and go into opposition. That is the reality. Of course, the SDLP has hooked its wagon to a political party that, even though it held the Department for Regional Development, was totally and absolutely opposed to the construction of the A5. That is clearly on the public record.

Alex Attwood also said that people in the community are not happy about the approach that is being adopted. He certainly does not speak for Celine McStravick, who is the director of the National Children's Bureau for the North. She said that the NCB is delighted that the Northern Ireland Executive have adopted an outcomes-based approach with their Programme for Government. She went on to say that that is an extremely significant change in how government will work and, if operated correctly, will ensure that Programme for Government policies deliver tangible results for the benefit of all. She went on to say that, for the first time, citizens will be at the centre of policymaking, Departments will have to work together to achieve policy objectives and there are important implications for the way the entire Civil Service will work. She said that, to that end, the NCB has been heavily involved in working with the Executive to help bring this shift in direction, which is delivering great results across the world, and that the NCB looks forward to aiding the Executive with their aim of effective delivery and to therefore secure improved outcomes for children, families and communities.

I thank Naomi Long for her support for the process. She took a very honourable approach on behalf of her party. She gave a very clear and correct explanation of her party's understanding of the process and what was clearly the disingenuous approach of the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP.

John O'Dowd gave us all a reality check, setting out the challenges facing our Departments for the next five years as a result of the austerity agenda pursued by the Tory Government in London. Is it not amazing to hear people talk about the lack of achievement from the Assembly and Executive in the last term? How many times did you hear the British Government mentioned during this debate by some of the most vehement critics of what we are trying to do? The Executive are described as right wing, anti-children, anti-education, anti-health and anti-everything when, in reality, the people who hold the purse strings are the British Government. During the last term of the Assembly, the British Government cut ruthlessly into our block grant. There needs to be a reality check when people look at how we go forward,

and not just in relation to a recognition of that issue. The words "motherhood and apple pie" have been used quite a number of times today, and I hope that, when people come forward with their ideas about how we improve life for our people, they will come forward with costed proposals on how we do it. It will be against the backdrop of recognising that we are still dealing with a ruthless Tory Administration in London that are still committed to austerity. It was important that John gave us that reality check.

### 5.15 pm

Phillip Logan, from North Antrim, mentioned the issue of jobs in Ballymena, and we all know that Ballymena, like many other areas, has been hit, but they have been hit very badly by job losses in recent times.

Jenny Palmer, from Lagan Valley, talked about infrastructure. She actually mentioned the words "vanity projects". Implicit in all that was that we need more roads east of the Bann and not so many west of the Bann. I do not accept that. Of course, the Ulster Unionist Party was in no way enthusiastic about the high-level North/South Ministerial Council project that was the construction of the A5. She made points in relation to the Balmoral show, which has been a huge success, and access routes to the show, all of which are legitimate remarks. Of course, many of the difficulties and problems around the Maze/Long Kesh site came from the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party lined up alongside the extremists within society who were opposed to the construction of the peace-building and conflict resolution centre on that site.

Linda Dillon, from Mid Ulster, talked about the need for environmental sustainability; how we deal with household waste; the need for good, high-quality jobs for rural dwellers; the importance of the agrifood industry as well as improving rural broadband to remove the inequalities that rural dwellers suffer from. She made a vital point, and that is the relationship of this Administration with the super-councils that are now 14 months old.

Emma Pengelly, from South Belfast, talked about the need to tackle poverty and growing our economy, and she quoted Muhammad Ali. All of us who grew up with Muhammad Ali not only believed he was a great boxer but absolutely believed that he was somebody who was totally in favour of equality, coming as he did from a community in the United States of America that had been treated despicably for a very long time. So, we remember him fondly today.

Claire Hanna talked about prickliness from the Government parties and talked about Fresh Start. She was proud that the SDLP was against Fresh Start, and not just against it but voted against it in the Executive. What would have been the consequences if we had voted against Fresh Start and if the DUP had not gone for Fresh Start? I will tell you what the consequences would have been: direct rule Ministers would have been in here the next day imposing their water charges, removing the right to free prescriptions, removing the free travel for older people, and God knows what else.

**Ms Hanna:** Will the Member take an intervention?

**Mr McGuinness:** Yes.

**Ms Hanna:** The alternative to Fresh Start would have been to negotiate solutions to a lot of the issues that were ignored by Fresh Start. The Member critiques the lack of detail in our responses, yet the outcomes-based approach with no detail is fine for you. You critique us hitching our wagon to the Ulster Unionist Party, which, you claim, is anti-building roads. Have you any differences with the party you have hitched your own wagon to?

You criticise the process that we outlined to the electorate, which was that we would seek to negotiate a Programme for Government and, if it was not acceptable, we would go into opposition. You did that in the Republic; we did the same here. Can you outline, without recourse to the phrase "enemy of the peace process", the difference between what you did in the South and what we have done here in choosing to use opposition to hold a failing Government to account?

**Mr McGuinness:** You raised an awful lot of issues during that concise contribution. The reality is, no matter how you dress it up, if there had been no Fresh Start Agreement — you were involved in the discussions that led up to it — direct rule Ministers would have been in here the following week, and you would not be sitting in the seat that you are in today. I would not and neither would the First Minister be in the positions that we are in today. Let us deal with the reality of what we had to deal with during the course of last year. If we had followed the SDLP position, there would have been no Assembly, there would have been no Executive, and the British Government would have had their fingers on the tiller here in the North. That is the reality.

In terms of how we move forward, we were criticised right, left and centre by the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP during the last Administration. We were effectively dealing with a situation where both parties wanted to have one foot in the Government and the other foot out, one foot in the boat and one foot on the bank. We know where that takes you. It takes you absolutely nowhere.

During Colum Eastwood's contribution, he correctly talked about the fact that, during the election, everybody in the House went out and talked to thousands of people and stakeholders about what they were offering up. Of course, that debate was had. There were television debates, and people had an opportunity to make judgements. They sent the DUP back into the House with 38 seats. They sent the Ulster Unionists back into the House with 16. They sent us back to the House with 28 seats, and they sent the SDLP back with 12. The people made their judgement, and they judged that they wanted us, with all of the difficulties, challenges and problems that we had during the last term, to take our society forward. I had always hoped that we could have done that and that the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Ulster Unionists would have been in that power-sharing Executive, which was the central theme of the Good Friday Agreement, but of course that did not happen.

Barry McElduff went on to talk about education, the importance of literacy and numeracy and the brilliant work that John O'Dowd did in raising the levels of literacy and numeracy in schools. He mentioned the fact that there was a dramatic increase in the number of young people leaving with five good GCSEs. I think that he deserves credit for that.

Stephen Farry talked about SIF. I remember, when SIF was first mooted, that Alex Attwood described it as a slush fund for paramilitaries. Whatever about the challenges with a new and innovative project, it was certainly no slush fund for paramilitaries. The reality is that it was an attempt to empower local communities, and, indeed, projects are now up and running in local communities that are having an impact on poverty and on people who have not had a job for a very long time and which are also providing much-needed amenities and facilities for local communities.

On how we go forward, we also had a contribution from Doug Beattie from Upper Bann. Obviously, all of us were very sad to hear of the tragedy in his family, and I think that there is not a person in the House who was not totally sympathetic to his family at that time. He

raised the issue primarily of how we bear down on the activities of armed gangs and paramilitary groups that are still out there and are still hostile to the peace process and, clearly, would not like it to succeed. We have received the report from the three-person panel, and that will go to our Executive in the next while. That report deals with everything referenced in Doug Beattie's comments, and I think that people will await the outcome of that with considerable interest.

Declan McAleer talked about the situation in West Tyrone, and he made a very important point, which was articulated by others as well. He encouraged people in society and in the community to become involved in this consultation. That includes people who are involved in the community and voluntary sector, different stakeholders and ordinary people who have an interest in how we go forward. I renew that appeal. I think that it is very important that we see as much involvement as possible from the public in all of this.

Daithí McKay rightly talked about family-friendly hours, and he made the same point about the public and stakeholders having their say. He rightly challenged opposition parties to come forward with their costed proposals. That is where the "motherhood and apple pie" is in opposition land. It is out there because people think that they have the right to come in here and stand up and make all sorts of grandiose claims such as, "Why are we not doing this? Why are we not doing that? You have failed us on this. You have failed us on that". Let us hear and see the costed proposals, and let us see how that fits into the Budget that we as an Executive have to deal with as a result of the challenges that we face coming from London and the fact that they have the ability to cut our block grant.

Jo-Anne Dobson dwelt on a range of health issues. Of course, we have a new Health Minister who is working against the backdrop of what will be, hopefully, significant change as we go forward in this term, not least because of the challenges posed for all of us by the outcome of an international report on our health service.

I have already mentioned Colum Eastwood, who came after. The main point I made was in agreement with him. We all spoke to the public against the backdrop of the relentless criticism of the DUP and Sinn Féin from the UUP and the SDLP; yet the public, in its wisdom, decided to return us as the lead partners in this Executive.

I was quite shocked by the comments of Sandra Overend from Mid Ulster, which were terrible and very unfair to young people who are taught through the medium of Irish in Coláiste Feirste. For that to be her first point, in a criticism of the Education Minister's visit to the school, was shameful and I think she should be embarrassed at that remark.

Andy Allen talked about fluffy promises. There is nothing fluffy about what we are trying to do, which is to give the public an opportunity to have their say rather than take a top-down approach. This has been successful in other places in ensuring that there is an opportunity for the public to have a meaningful input into the outcome of this Programme for Government.

Steven Agnew mentioned the death of a member of Assembly staff, which shocked us all: some of us have been sitting here for a couple of hours and had not heard about it. Whatever the circumstances, the First Minister and I, with everybody in the House, send our sympathy and condolences to the family as they deal with a very traumatic situation.

Steven went on to talk about equality. On this important issue, there will be times when the DUP and Sinn Féin will not agree, particularly in relation to issues such as marriage equality. These are things that we have to work through. We are all on a journey, and we all recognise that there is a duty on us to ensure that nobody in our society feels discriminated against.

Gerry Carroll made his point that it was 114 pages of concentrated waffle. He also said that the devil is in the detail. Of course it is, and it is unfair to use such terminology at this stage when we have yet to see the outcome of the public consultation, including the public in West Belfast and those in many other parts of the North who want to see us tackling poverty and standing up for the most marginalised, vulnerable and disabled in our society. I was taken aback by his information, which I have not got, that the bedroom tax will be here in 2020. We have made it absolutely clear that, under no circumstances, will our people, no matter what section of society they come from, have a bedroom tax imposed upon them.

Jim Allister made his contribution, and the less said about that the better.

Clare Bailey talked about the glaring omission being the position of women, although she paid tribute to Mitchel McLaughlin for the creation of the women's forum, which has been a very important development in our Assembly.

I said before the election, at the beginning of last month, that my priority was to bring forward and implement a Programme for Government that grows the economy, provides proper public services and promotes equality and inclusion. I also said that we need a Government that work coherently and collectively, and with equality and respect at the heart of how we do business. I am pleased to say that the Executive's draft Programme for Government framework does all that and more. It will enable us to prosper, live longer and healthier lives, have an equal society, live sustainably, be innovative and creative and be a place in which people can fulfil their potential. It will help us to have more and better jobs, build safe communities, care for others and provide help to those most in need. It will establish a basis for us to be a confident, welcoming and shared society that respects diversity, where we give our children the best start in life, and where we are all well connected by good infrastructure in a place where people want to live and work and that is attractive to visitors and investors. It will also allow the Executive to do things differently, working in more joined-up ways and engaging with stakeholders and delivery partners from every sector.

### 5.30 pm

When the full document is finalised at the end of the year, I am committed to the fact that it will be not only a programme that affects us all but a programme to which everyone can subscribe and in which everyone can play a part.

I commend the draft Programme for Government framework and ask the Assembly to support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly takes note of the draft Programme for Government framework 2016-2021 as agreed by the Executive on 26 May 2016.*

## Private Members' Business

### Illegal Drugs

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the

Marshaled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. Other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr Frew:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly acknowledges with grave concern the impact and extent of drug-related incidents, crimes and fatalities in our communities; supports the ongoing work carried out by statutory services, the Public Health Agency and the voluntary and community sector; and calls on the Minister of Justice to work alongside the relevant bodies, to bring forward further measures to raise awareness, and to ensure that the criminal justice system is tough enough to deal robustly with those who are responsible for the menace of drugs on our streets.*

This is my first opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker. I know that you will do a grand job and bring to it all the fairness of previous Speakers. I know you very well; you have been a good friend to me, and I know that you will lead the House in a fair manner.

I also congratulate the newly appointed Justice Minister. This is our first opportunity to debate and engage with each other. I am speaking here as an MLA for North Antrim, but I also happen to be the Chairperson of the Justice Committee. I assure the Minister that the Committee will fully scrutinise the work that she and her Department do, but the Committee is also there to give advice and support in the coming months and years. There will be very exciting times for us all as we go forward.

This is an important debate, which is why we brought it to the House so quickly in the new mandate. We realise at first hand the devastation that drugs have on our society, not only on the people who suffer addiction but on their families — mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, wives and husbands. Everyone in the wider family circle suffers when someone becomes addicted to drugs.

An amendment has been tabled, and we fully support it. We realise clearly that the issue requires a holistic approach, and one Minister alone cannot solve the problem of this crisis in society that hits families so hard. It has to be a holistic approach, so we will be clear and gracious in supporting the amendment.

As the main motion states, we want a criminal justice system that is tough enough to deal robustly with those who are responsible for the menace of drugs on our streets.

We are not talking just about drug users. We realise that it is against the law and that you should not take drugs, but we also realise that people are addicted, that it becomes an illness, that it takes over your life and that it destroys the family from within. We are not necessarily talking about the drug mules or the drug carriers either, although they are breaking the law and need to be served justice in the same way as anyone else. We really need to see a day when we tackle the ones at the very top: the people who are organised enough to bring shipments of drugs to these shores. Whether they are paramilitaries or are linked to organised crime — it is much the same — we need to tackle those people and get them off our streets. When we do, there will be no need for drug mules or carriers, which will help us all, especially the drug addicts trying to adjust their life and move away from drugs. Without that, it cannot happen.

We cannot do the same thing over and over again. Drugs are here, drugs are real, drugs are everywhere. I would bet that there is not an establishment in the country that has not had a trace of drugs on its premises at some time or other. I suggest that every note that you have in your wallet or purse has a trace of drugs. That is how endemic the issue is in our society, and it is important that we tackle it in a smart, tough way. It is important that the Minister gets to grips with some of the work that the Justice Committee did in the previous mandate on drugs courts and innovation in that area: the smarter use of courts, for example, and being cleverer when it comes to tackling the issue and making sure that people are removed from society. Also, we must ensure that people are not just thrown into prison, because you can rest assured that they will come out with a drug problem. That is something that we have to tackle in our prisons.

If we are simply saying today — we are not — that we should throw everybody into prison, it will cost every one of us a lot of money. Surveys show that it takes about £73,000 to keep someone in prison in Northern Ireland for a year. Some say that it is even more than that. According to the prison inspectors, the cost per occupied place is £16,000 more. We have to get smart and clever in how we tackle this. Even if we throw people into prison, drugs will still be here, people will still find addictions, people will still have to go through treatment,

people will have to be tackled and families will have to be supported. That will all cost money.

How wide-ranging are drugs? Drug crime is not the only effect. I hazard a guess that violence against the person, theft, burglary, robbery, criminal damage, public disorder, miscellaneous crimes against society and even some motoring offences and some sexual offences are caused by drugs and their spectre. How do we become smarter? I make this appeal to the Minister: please, Minister, at the first opportunity you get, come down and visit the Railway Street addiction unit in Ballymena to see the work that is being done to help drug users by supporting them and trying to get them off the habit. It supports the families, the youngsters and the mothers and fathers in trying to move people away from addiction or at least help them in their suffering until they get to a point at which they can reduce their addiction. It is vital that places such as the Railway Street addiction unit are supported.

Minister, you are only just in post, but the previous Minister and the Department were prepared to reduce funding for that service only last year. Only after a massive campaign in the community, which fought hard to retain it, was there a promise of two further years of support. The DOJ runs that facility in partnership with the Health Minister, and that is why it is important that we have a joined-up approach. Two thirds of that funding should come from DOJ, but there has been a reduced service since last year. I appeal to the Minister to look at the Railway Street addiction unit in Ballymena and consider moving it right across the Province. Those are the experts and the people who hand-hold the victims and the drug addicts. They are the people who support families when times are tough. We cannot do it; we do not have the time. GPs certainly do not have the time, although they could do more. This is a specialised unit that deals with people even walking in off the street. Think of the chaos that would be caused by that happening. They bring people in off the street, cater for their needs and help them with all sorts of issues and dramas that GPs, MLA constituency offices and Citizens Advice cannot cope with. They are medically trained in some respects. Even if it is something like needle exchange or if it is to keep a drug user safer in his practice, those are things that we need to strive to gain. If we make the drug user safer, we make his or her family safer. Those are very important points that I ask you, Minister, to take away and make sure that you not only restore the funding needed to run addiction services and units throughout the Province but enhance the funding for those specialisms and spread them

out so that more people from across the Province can get help when they need it.

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Frew:** Yes.

**Mr Beggs:** I thought that there was supposed to be collective government decision-making. Will you advise me whether you, in approving the Budget, have provided sufficient funds so that the Minister of Justice can continue to fund that very worthwhile work, or, having appointed her, are you now starting to criticise her because she does not have enough funds to carry out her work? Is there collective responsibility or not?

**Mr Speaker:** I remind the Member: your time is almost up and you do not get an extra minute.

**Mr Frew:** OK, Mr Speaker —

**Mr Speaker:** Your time is up.

Before I call Ms Nichola Mallon to move the amendment, I remind the House that this is her first opportunity to speak in the Chamber. As is the convention of the Chamber, she is usually allowed to speak without interruption — that is, of course, as long as you follow the normal procedure of the Chamber. Otherwise, she may provoke some interruptions.

**Ms Mallon:** I beg to move the following amendment:

*Leave out all after "drug" and insert*

*"use and drug-related incidents, crimes and fatalities have on individuals, families and our community; supports the ongoing work carried out by statutory services, the Public Health Agency and the voluntary and community sector; and calls on the Executive to work collaboratively alongside the relevant bodies to bring forward further measures to raise awareness about the dangers of drug use, to increase investment in, awareness of, and access to, early intervention services for children and young people as well as adults, and to ensure that the criminal justice system is tough enough to deal robustly with those who are responsible for the menace of drugs on our streets."*

In moving the amendment, as you point out, Mr Speaker, I make my maiden speech to the House on what is certainly an issue of grave concern to my constituents in North Belfast.



The well-documented prevalence and escalation of drug misuse through the consumption of illegal drugs and prescribed medicines is having a devastating impact on individuals, families and our community. It is a growing problem that my predecessor Alban Maginness — a gentleman who dedicated decades of his life to trying to improve the quality of life of the people of North Belfast — was acutely conscious of and committed to tackling. He witnessed in North Belfast the torment of individuals falling victim to drug addiction and the anguish and heartache felt by their families struggling to help to free them from the cruel and debilitating grip of addiction. It is a heartbreaking situation that, as a councillor in North Belfast over the past six years, I have also witnessed far too many times. I share Alban Maginness's passion and determination to do what I can in this new role to prevent other individuals of all ages and their families having to go through the painful battle with drug addiction and the mental anguish that goes hand in hand with it, which, in the worst cases, ends in a family mourning their loved one for ever. It is for that reason that my party colleague Colin McGrath and I tabled the amendment on behalf of the SDLP.

Before I move on to address the amendment specifically, I commend the DUP for bringing a motion on illegal drugs before us on the first day of business in the new Assembly. The priority that they have given to the issue in bringing it forward today demonstrates a commitment to tackling the growing epidemic on our streets. I assure them that, even though we sit on opposite sides of the House, this is a priority issue for the SDLP and a commitment that we share, as, I am sure, other parties in the House do.

#### 5.45 pm

Certainly, as the motion points out, the Minister of Justice has a key role to play. The SDLP welcomes the increase in recent years in the number of drug seizure incidents and drug-related convictions. We also welcome the recent strengthening of legislation in respect of the supply of psychoactive drugs. We believe, however, that much more needs to be done by the PSNI and the Department of Justice, working with communities, if we are to seriously tackle the proliferation of drugs on our streets.

We also believe that this issue cannot be tackled by focusing on the supply side alone. If we are to be robust in tackling the scourge of illegal drugs — and the misuse of prescription drugs, for that matter — the job is not one solely for the Minister of Justice. It is a much

wider job for the Executive, with critical input and collaboration between the Justice Minister and the Ministers of Education and Health in particular, who have an instrumental part to play in reducing demand by educating young people in particular against the dangers of drugs to prevent experimentation in the first instance and, critically, delivering increased provision and awareness of, and access to, early intervention and support services when the symptoms of drug-taking first present and when the chances of breaking the dangerous and harmful downward spiral that ends in addiction are highest. It is for these reasons that we are seeking to expand the responsibility and remit of the motion with our amendment, and I welcome the DUP's indication of support.

I want, at this point, to put on record my appreciation for the tremendous life-changing, and in many cases life-saving, work that is carried out by those working in addiction and mental health services in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors in North Belfast, but also in constituencies right across Northern Ireland. They are working under immense pressure with an increase in demand for their services, particularly in services required by children and young people, as referrals for the child and adolescent mental health service and drug and alcohol mental health services show. They are trying to respond to this increase in demand at a time when budgets are being put under pressure. They rightly should be praised for their commitment and dedication to helping some of the most vulnerable in our society, and they should be supported to expand their collaborative work and intensive intervention. That is what this amendment is calling for.

Those organisations will tell you, and all the evidence shows, that prevention and early intensive support in the community works. It is about the right medication and the right support at the right time. This is critical if we are to prevent the spiral of physical and mental harm and other harmful behaviours that can follow to fund a habit when someone becomes hooked on drugs.

While we may not have total precise figures, we do know that drug misuse brings with it an immense cost, not least to our health service, economy and justice system. The human cost of the months and years of a life spent battling an addiction and the mental vulnerability that accompanies such an addiction, the many families left broken by a battle with this cruel addiction, and the lives of all the loved ones lost as a result of drugs can never be truly or fully captured.

It is, however, possible to get a sharp and startling insight into the human cost and misery when you spend time listening to individuals and families who have come through this journey. It is perhaps most acute when you listen to those families who have painfully lost a loved one caught up in what is a growing epidemic. Though the individual sets of circumstances may vary, the one thing that I find unifying the affected individuals and families whom I have spoken to is their response when I ask them what more, in their opinion, can be done. Almost always, it is the same answer: ensure that more help is made available and accessible earlier, before the full grip of addiction takes its hold and mental health and well-being deteriorates to a level that is incredibly difficult to come back from, especially for a young person who, in their formative years, is only beginning to find themselves.

I acknowledge phase 2 of the new strategic direction for alcohol and drugs and its key elements, one of which includes a focus on prevention and early intervention. However, families who have been affected and those families currently living with the horror of drug misuse, especially when it involves a child, feel desperately that much more needs to be done. It is in response to these testimonies that we have brought forward the amendment.

As I bring my contribution to a conclusion, I want to make reference to one of the many powerful testimonies shared with me over recent times. It is a message from Aaron Fox, who, while he had bravely and successfully battled his addiction, sadly lost his life, just a few short months ago, in a courageous battle with the resulting mental demons that proved just too much to bear. Aaron's story was relayed to me by his devoted father and mother. A budding chef and talented artist, Aaron was determined to use his gifts, particularly through his recovery, to share his personal experiences with other young people to prevent and protect them from going through what he had. Powerfully, through his creative gifts, he wanted to show the true picture and the real torment that, in this instance, legal highs unleashed on a young person and their loved ones. Since his painful passing, and even through their grief, his parents are determined to carry on Aaron's message, warning other young people and campaigning to ensure that help is available as early as possible, to young people in particular, so that they do not become trapped by their addiction and, critically, suffer the mental anguish that ensues.

I felt that it was important today, with the consent of Aaron's parents, to pass on his message and the call from his parents for more help at an earlier stage. It is a call that is echoed in so many homes and by so many people who are in or have been through the nightmare of this experience. There is a duty on us all to listen to those families and to act. Therefore, I hope that the amendment secures the support of all parties in the House.

**Ms Boyle:** I support the motion and amendment. I take the opportunity to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, in your role and also to welcome the Minister and wish her well in her new role.

We are all aware of the dangers of the use of illegal drugs, the scourge on society that they represent and the severe consequences that can lead to the death of those using them. Many during the debate will talk about illegal drugs. However, we need to include discussion of alcohol, and the fact that we have so many young people who are drinking and taking drugs at a very early age. Alcohol use is legal, but it plays a strong role in relation to crime.

Driving while intoxicated and using drugs and drug- and alcohol-related domestic violence and rape: all these crimes have risen in frequency. We know that they can also cause death and injury. We also need to look at further investment into the solution, not just the problem. We have talked about early intervention and awareness: that is key. Indeed, those who are already sentenced and in prison for drug-related crime also need help. They need proper help in prison, not more drugs. We are all well aware that drugs are easily accessible in some prisons. Treatment saves money in the long term, so early intervention is key.

My district council area is Strabane and Derry City. Recently released PSNI figures state that the overall crime figures across the district have increased in the period from April 2015 to March 2016. Right across the North, the overall crime figure has risen from 103,000 to 105,000 in 2014-15. Whilst overall crime was up by less than 1%, burglary, robbery and theft offences saw significant decreases, but the point I want to make is that within the slight increase in overall crime, the number of drug possessions recorded in my district council area rose by 5-8%. That means that more people are being detected in possession of drugs. Increased arrests in this area have to be welcomed; however, tougher and tighter sentencing needs to be part of the solution and follow those arrests.

We need to do more collaborative working between the Department of Justice, the Probation Board and the statutory agencies to work better with communities to address illegal drug use and, more importantly, provide assurances to the public that, if they have relevant information on who is responsible for bringing such illegal drugs into our areas, and they want to pass it to the proper authorities, they can come forward without any fear of reprisal.

The PSNI's community planning needs to be implemented in communities. The policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) should be the vehicle for moving this issue forward in our communities, but they are only one cog in the wheel. The PSNI, DOJ and everyone else need to be proactive in raising awareness. If there are effective agencies working together, this will promote positive outcomes for those in need and those who need to be safeguarded and protected from crime and illegal drugs.

The efficiency of the criminal justice system has room for improvement, and the community and voluntary organisations need to be working together to implement strategies that have been set out in the Justice Act 2015 to bring about greater powers to bring cases to the High Court, when those responsible for pushing drugs onto our streets are caught and there are more prosecutions going through the courts. The public needs to have confidence in our justice system. We are hearing from far too many families that the one place they depended on to get justice — the courtroom — was the very place that let them down.

In conclusion, the use of drugs and alcohol can negatively affect all aspects of a person's life. The impact on their family, friends and community, if not addressed, places an enormous financial burden on our Health and Justice Departments. The relationship between drugs and crime is indeed a complex one, and one question is whether drug use leads people into criminal activity or whether those who use drugs are already predisposed to such activity.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

**Ms Boyle:** However, at the most intense levels, drug use and crime are directly and highly correlated, and serious drug use can bring out pre-existing criminal tendencies.

**Mr Beattie:** First, I would like to say that I fully support the DUP motion. It is a good and timely

motion, and the SDLP's amendment gives it added teeth, so I also support that.

As I listened to other contributors — I will be reasonably brief because I cannot but agree with them all so far — I recognised that it is important that we focus on prevention as opposed to waiting until we get the drug addict and have to deal with that raw product. I also agreed with Nichola Mallon when she said that this cannot be just for the criminal justice system and the Justice Minister; this has to involve the Communities Minister, the Education Minister, the Health Minister and the Finance Minister. What we really need is a cross-ministry action plan to deal with the drugs issue. I hope that the Justice Minister can take that away and think about that for the future.

There is a problem with illegal drugs in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, which is the social messaging that is going out. It does not matter who we are — the slightly older, slightly fatter people standing in this Assembly. Under 18s and young men believe that it is socially acceptable to take drugs. Some of the messages that are going out tell them that it is socially acceptable to take drugs. Some people are told that cannabis is not habit-forming and that it is not a gateway drug. Having worked, trained and lived with under-18-year-olds, I know how difficult it is to try to sell the very clear message that there should be zero tolerance for drugs.

I have seen first hand what drugs can do to a society. I have stood in the cannabis fields of Asia and watched it being cultivated and sold. I saw the people who grow it getting pennies while the people who refined it, cut it and exported it to us in the West got the real money. There has to be an international response to drugs. One of the reasons why I genuinely believe that it is better that we stay in the EU is that we can try to tackle the drugs trade before it reaches our shores. When it does reach our shores, it is important that the National Crime Agency takes hold of the issue and tries to prevent the drugs from getting onto our streets.

## 6.00 pm

But the bottom line is that the work of dealing with the drugs issue in Northern Ireland will lie with our communities, it will lie with our messaging, it will lie with our health service and our justice system and it will lie with the PSNI. It is up to us to ensure that we facilitate them in dealing with it.

**Mr Lunn:** Like everybody else, I think, I approve of the motion and the amendment. I prefer the wording of the amendment on just small details because, for a start, it refers to "community" and not "communities". I am sure Mr Beattie made a slip of the tongue. This is a cross-community problem. Also, the amendment calls on the Executive rather than a single Minister to try to coordinate this. That is absolutely where it lies, because as others said, it involves a multi-agency approach — public health, Justice, Communities, social services and particularly perhaps Education and further education. There is no doubt that drug problems are far more prevalent in areas of low educational achievement and economic inactivity.

The other thing I will say is that the motion is listed as "Illegal Drugs". I think others referred to the fact that it is a question not just of illegal drugs; a Centre for Social Justice study back in 2011 indicated that perhaps the greater part of the problem is, in fact, the misuse of prescription drugs. That is a job for Education and all agencies to become involved in to try to wean people away from this practice, which now appears to be socially acceptable in a way that certainly surprises our generation. It never should have got to this point.

The last two lines of the motion and the amendment refer to what I really want to talk about, which is that:

*"the criminal justice system is tough enough to deal robustly with those who are responsible for the menace of drugs on our streets."*

Does anybody here seriously doubt who is responsible for the supply and control of the trade in drugs on our streets? It is paramilitary groups. I call them criminal gangs. I fully appreciate that some of our ex-paramilitaries are now doing good work on the streets. I know some of them are doing that, but, in my opinion, most of them are not. They have just morphed from one type of inhumanity to another, and they are leeching off the backs of those sections of our population who are the most vulnerable and least able to handle the pressures that are coming on them in this situation. Let us be frank: I am talking about the UDA, the UVF and the IRA, or what is left of them in different forms.

We need to stop treating criminals like upright citizens. It is as simple as that. We need to stop giving them credibility and credence in the way that some of us perhaps try to work with them and in the way that the PSNI perhaps

approaches them. I have assurance from the Chief Constable that if a member of a paramilitary organisation comes to the attention of the police through that sort of activity, they will be dealt with in a firm and robust manner, to use the terms of the amendment and the motion.

*(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Kennedy] in the Chair)*

I still think there is far too much cosying up between public agencies, politicians of all shades and people who used to be paramilitaries and who, in the opinion of some of us, are still just exactly that. They are supplying not only the drugs but the finance to enable youngsters to buy the drugs. They are then pursuing them at extortionate interest rates because they cannot pay for them, and, at the end of the day, what they will get out of that if they cannot pay is a beating or worse. By controlling the drugs trade, they are also setting themselves up as judge and jury and pretending to keep order by dealing with or perhaps eliminating drug dealers.

All they are really doing, however, is protecting their own interests and their own turf.

We talk about bringing a tougher justice system. I think that the criminal justice system, as it stands, is robust enough to deal with these situations, but we need the political will. We need to take away the credibility of these people to act in the way that they do. I hope that everybody will indicate a need for full political support for loosening paramilitary control, and the sooner the better. It is the only way. We have to tackle the root of this, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am glad to see you there. That is all that I have to say about it. It is a disgrace.

**Lord Morrow:** I commend those who have brought the motion to the House. As others said, it is a timely motion, and it is one, I am delighted to see, on which the House finds itself in agreement across the Benches. That is also the case with the amendment. Today, we will have the first response from the new Minister. I welcome her here in that capacity, and I wish her well in her new post. I think that I am doing more than others have done in the past, but I certainly wish her well. I have no doubt that she will equip herself well to the task that she will perform over the weeks, months and, hopefully, years ahead.

In my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, there are swathes of cases coming before the courts that are in some way rooted in

illegal drugs, but I fear that the message is still not getting through. I am also somewhat shocked when I hear people play down the use of cannabis. We hear people say, "It was only a bit of cannabis — nothing heavy". Let me be absolutely clear: in my opinion, any illegal drug, including cannabis, is a step on the road to addiction. It is known, for good reason, as a gateway drug. Even taken on its own, it is no less toxic on mental health than any other substance. When it comes to illegal drugs, there is no such thing as "nothing heavy". All have the potential and capacity to impact on the brain and other organs, with often catastrophic if not fatal consequences. The task at hand is to educate people away from drugs in the first place, but, in my book, enforcement of the law is also important.

My constituency has had far too many drug-related deaths over recent years, and, it must be said, a greater number of those were young people. In 2014, I supported the former coroner John Leckey when he called for a change in the law to allow dealers who sell drugs to be charged with manslaughter if a person dies after consuming them. Speaking at an inquest, John Leckey said:

*"To say I am not impressed is an understatement. Someone is dead here and there are 19 other people dead from taking these drugs. Anyone who has information has a duty to come forward. It's a disgrace and it's on their conscience."*

He added:

*"I acknowledge the difficulties for the police to link evidence, but I urge the PPS to consider manslaughter very much to the fore in these instances."*

He said that anyone taking these pills is:

*"playing Russian roulette with their life ... I hope this sends out a warning to young people ... No guarantee comes with the drugs and the risk of death is a high one."*

The inquest in question was that of a teenager from Dungannon who died after taking a synthetic form of Ecstasy. She was just 18 years of age.

Despite the former coroner's concerned comments and amongst heartbreaking headlines, drugs continue to be a scourge in our society, and the attraction for them has not abated. The consequences continue to demonstrate the horror of illegal drugs. The

myth that drug taking is an exciting game of chance must be dispelled. The cycle has to be broken and stronger efforts made to get the message home.

I draw the attention of the House to a tremendous facility in the Dungannon area: Breakthru. It has been working on this problem for over 20 years. During a meeting last year, I asked Breakthru to come up with an alternative disposal scheme that would drive home the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse, with awareness for potential victims of drug- and alcohol-related crime. I am pleased to say that the initiative was embraced by Breakthru and will be launched very soon, with a pilot planned for the mid-Ulster area. The initiative offers a referral scheme for drug/alcohol abuse and antisocial behaviour as an alternative to prosecution. However, it is offered only once and must be fully completed. They have done a magnificent job and must continue to be supported by all relevant government agencies. I will not say anything more about it because this is their project, and I do not want to steal their thunder. However, I can confirm that the scheme links with the Department of Justice's business plan for 2015-16 and is designed to meet departmental priorities and targets. I am unashamedly proud to have Breakthru in Dungannon and commend it for the work that it is doing.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

**Lord Morrow:** I extend an invitation to the Minister to come to Breakthru in Dungannon. If you have never been to Dungannon, Minister, your education is not complete. *[Laughter.]* I am sure that you will do that one day.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate you on your elevation and the Minister on hers. It is bound to be quite a challenging Department to manage.

I support the motion and amendment. Of course, most of the issues have been covered. Illegal drugs are absolutely everywhere. They have been everywhere since I was a child. When we went to school, if you wanted drugs, you could get them. If it was that bad then, how bad is it now? I dread to think. Drugs are available in the workplace, on the streets, on street corners and, most concerning of all, in schools and playgrounds. They have many secondary impacts, such as violence on the streets. We have seen the violent gang crime in Dublin, which was all related to the illegal drug trade as well.

The statistics for 2015-16 are interesting: there were 4,445 cannabis seizures, 566 cocaine seizures, 128 ecstasy seizures and 138 opiates seizures. The vast majority of seizures relate to cannabis use and addiction. The number of cocaine seizures is, I think, quite low given that, according to figures in the PSNI report, around 34% of drug misuse relates to cocaine. The number of cannabis seizures is significant compared with the number for class A drugs.

I want to pay tribute to the many services in Dungannon, Ballymena and elsewhere. I, along with other constituency MLAs, have worked for many years with the Hope Centre. It has worked tirelessly and struggled year after year to scrape together funding to deal with those suffering from addictions and the families who are affected. Continuing funding for such groups is vital to addiction prevention. Many of us in Ballymena, North Antrim and beyond campaigned to keep the Railway Street addiction service open after the Department of Justice withdrew £360,000. That campaign was a great success. Of course, all those services are vital.

**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for giving way. I really appreciate the manner way in which the House, with one exception, has conducted the debate. The Member is quite right about the work that is done by the community and voluntary sector, such as the good work that is done by the Hope Centre. You are talking about only hundreds of thousands of pounds — the same applies to Railway Street — to provide a service that can spend the money more effectively than any government agency. That is a good way to spend the budget.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McKay:** The Member makes a very good point. Sometimes, Departments are very quick to jump to defend their internal services but put much less value on external services on the ground in the community, even though they deliver best practice — sometimes better practice than the Department.

I think that Mr Beattie said that prevention was better than cure. We need to focus on prevention. That is key in this debate. Railway Street has been held up as a model of best practice in helping injecting drug users. The impact has been absolutely huge. Many of those who campaigned to keep the place open were addicts themselves, and they said that they would not be here were it not for the service provided.

## 6.15 pm

Drugs destroy lives, not only those who are addicted to the substances but their families. I agree with the Chairperson of the Justice Committee that you cannot just throw everyone with a drug addiction into prison. That simplistic approach has not worked. The various wars on drugs have not worked, and, at the end of the day, drug addiction is a health issue. Those who work in addictions and in support groups across the North all say that the worst addiction cases are those relating to legal substances, mainly alcohol. That is a fact that Michaela Boyle also referred to. We should not be focused on thinking that illegal substances are the worst and that legal ones are not so bad because alcohol is the worst substance that we have to deal with in our society.

The challenge for the Justice Minister, the Justice Committee and all of us as MLAs on policy and drugs is that we need some fresh thinking. According to the figures, drug seizures have doubled in the past 10 years, so whatever we are doing is not working correctly. Drug misuse is increasing, so we need to focus on prevention. We should have less of a focus on the criminalisation of those who abuse and are addicted to substances and more focus on those who are dealing and making money on the misery of many families. We need some fresh thinking. There is a lot of fresh thinking taking place across Europe in regard to the issue, and it is something that we really need to get to grips with in the new Assembly term.

**Mr Anderson:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wish you well in your new role and wish the new Justice Minister well in her new role. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion today. Drugs have a significant and widespread negative influence not only here in Northern Ireland but right across the globe. On top of this, drug abuse and the peddling of drugs in our communities continues to put major pressures on our health service and the PSNI. Many families have also been destroyed and left with grief that will never be resolved due to the scourge of drugs.

We must all recognise that drugs continue to blight our communities despite the best efforts of the police and the community at large to tackle drug problems. For instance, it has been documented that, between 2003 and 2012, there were 838 drug-related deaths in Northern Ireland. Notably, the number of drug seizures has increased year on year since 2006-07 to

reach a 10-year high of approximately 5,600 such incidents in 2015-16.

Whilst it could be claimed that it is welcome news to see an increased quantity of drugs being taken off our streets, it has to be recognised that the drug problem has not gone away. In recent years, we have witnessed what is formally referred to as legal highs presenting an ever-growing challenge to our society. We saw the Psychoactive Substances Act come into force across the United Kingdom last month.

From a personal perspective, when I met the PSNI in my constituency in recent times, they informed me that such substances pose more difficulty than the more traditional form of drugs on our streets. Even though such substances could previously be obtained legally, they still possessed a dangerous and sometimes deadly effect. The police now have new powers to shut down head shops and UK-based online dealers. Additionally, there now exists a UK-wide blanket ban on the sale, supply, importation and exportation of such drugs, with those who deal in such substances also facing up to seven years' imprisonment. Whilst legislation is not a silver bullet, the new measures can, hopefully, help to tackle the problems that psychoactive substances pose.

Tragically, in recent years, numerous people in my constituency of Upper Bann have lost their lives because of drugs, and many families have been devastated. I have met the PSNI locally on many occasions on which the scourge of drugs has been continually highlighted as a major challenge. Between the beginning of May 2015 to the end of April 2016, 391 drug-related incidents were reported to the PSNI in the Portadown, Banbridge, Gilford, Lurgan and Craigavon areas. Drug-related incidents are consuming a significant amount of police time, and I know that the PSNI in the area has done much work to fight the local drug problem.

I am also concerned by the fact that, in many cases, members of the public are aware of the individuals who deal in drugs in our communities, but are fearful of providing the police with such information due to fear of reprisals. On top of this, it is very worrying to note that drugs are being taken by a wide range of people, with some very young people getting caught up in drug-related activity.

Unfortunately, the problems that I have outlined are replicated right across Northern Ireland and, regrettably, there are no quick-fix solutions to eradicate the scourge of drugs overnight.

Whilst it is important to recognise the ongoing work carried out by the statutory agencies, the Public Health Agency, and the voluntary and community sector to tackle the drug scourge, it is important to recognise that drugs continue to damage communities and devastate families. It is vital that the community as a whole unites together to fight this drug plague head on. In particular, the PSNI, local policing and community safety partnerships, schools, youth organisations and other community groups have a very important duty to challenge the problems that drugs pose.

Moving forward, it is vital that the PSNI's commitment to fighting the challenge of illegal drugs continues. As I have said, it should be a collaborative approach. I hope that this Chamber takes on board what everyone has said. The message must go out clearly from the Assembly that those who peddle drugs and inflict misery and pain on individuals and their families will not be tolerated.

**Mr Beggs:** First, I declare an interest as a committee member of the Carrickfergus Community Drugs and Alcohol Advisory Group, which was previously involved in counselling and drugs awareness and resilience training but is no longer operating due to funding issues.

I congratulate the Minister on her appointment and wish her well in her post, but I have noticed that those who have been involved in appointing her are already pressing her on the budget that they set her. I wonder whether that is a sign of what is to come. I hope not.

I, too, support the motion and the amendment, which I believe strengthens the motion. I thank the Assembly research services for the useful background brief on the issue. The motion has been given the very short title of "Illegal Drugs", but in the detail of the motion and the amendment, the words "legal" and "illegal" are not mentioned. In fact, many Members who have spoken referred to the difficulty with legally available drugs and the misuse of alcohol and other drugs. To my mind, the issue covers legal and illegal drugs. There is the big issue of the misuse of legally prescribed medicines and, as I said, the misuse of alcohol, which, because of its availability and prevalence, is one of the biggest issues when addictions occur.

There are some interesting figures in 'Drug Prevalence in Northern Ireland Key Facts 2014-15', which surveyed people on the effects of taking drugs and alcohol in those 12 months and found that some 35% who took alcohol regretted something that they said or did — 7%

of those taking drugs. Then you go into a whole range of issues and find that there are equal dangers in the misuse of alcohol and in using other drugs, including harm to individuals' health, harm to their friendships and social life, harm to home life or marriage and whether they got into a fight or were involved in an accident. We need to be clear that difficulties can arise more widely than just with illegal drugs.

The Department of Justice findings on the view of alcohol and drug-related issues emanating from the September 2015 Northern Ireland omnibus survey highlights an increasing level of concern about drugs-related issues in Northern Ireland. Of those surveyed on the level of drugs-related issues, some 13% felt that things were getting worse and 5.2% felt that they were getting better. There seems to be a particular problem in the Belfast Health Trust area, where 23.2% felt that things were getting worse. In my area, the Northern Health Trust, some 8.2% perceived a worsening in trends.

The omnibus survey highlighted some areas of concern.

In terms of the harms caused, almost 60% of people were concerned that antisocial behaviour resulted. Damage to individuals' health was cited, as was crime in the local area, which was cited by some 13%. There are also the issues of fear and violence in the local area and some other issues. This, clearly, is an area of concern.

Turning to the amendment, I believe that it better highlights the need to invest in preventative work as well as recognising the role of statutory services, the Public Health Agency and the community and voluntary sector. It talks of the need to increase awareness to create greater resilience and avoidance of addiction in the first place. That is key from my experience and is a vital area. Early intervention services for children and young people and adults is important so that the addiction does not occur and young people are better informed of the dangers of alcohol and other drug misuse. I commend Nichola Mallon for highlighting the adverse effect, particularly in the area of mental health and well-being. Frequently, drug misuse and mental health and well-being issues are related, and it is important that they are highlighted. Of course, for the real hard-nosed criminals who profit from this, it is vital to have a robust criminal justice system.

I would like also to highlight the importance of preventative work and praise the work of Preventing Addiction Larne (PAL) in my East

Antrim constituency. They are a group of volunteers who have to fundraise and get little help from any statutory services. That is an area I invite the Minister to take a look at, given her interest in the community and voluntary sector in particular.

**Mr Robinson:** Mr Deputy Speaker, first and foremost, I congratulate the new Justice Minister on her appointment and you as the new Deputy Speaker.

Sadly, I speak in the debate shortly after a child's chocolate egg was found in Limavady with a packet of drugs hidden inside it. This is the reason each and every one of us should be concerned about the scourge of illegal drugs in our society. When depraved individuals consider it acceptable to hide drugs in children's sweets, it is obvious they have no regard or value for human life. On this occasion, it was a five-year-old who discovered the egg's contents. Thankfully, an older sibling took it to their father, who informed the police in Limavady. The possibility for a fatality here was immense. The sad thing is that this is only one of many drug finds, including a large cannabis find in a house in the centre of Limavady a few weeks ago. There are too many families who have lost loved ones to the scourge of drugs, so it is essential that robust action is undertaken, with the Court Service making an example of those who are apprehended for drug dealing. Another drug death is one too many.

I pay tribute to the many organisations that work to address the drug problems in Northern Ireland. They all deserve credit, but I am aware of the excellent work done by community and voluntary groups, and I commend them specifically for the work that they do. The police are very proactive, and we can all read or hear of the drug seizures that they make. Their problem is that every town, village and city has a drug problem, so it is difficult for them to track down the suppliers. Somehow they manage to achieve many successes, and those successes save lives. I would encourage the general public to report any suspicious activity to the police, so that, hopefully, some of the drug dealers can be apprehended and taken off our streets.

I assure the Minister that she will have my full support on the actions taken against the peddlers of death who are drug dealers. I can also assure her that I support an interdepartmental agency approach in raising awareness of drugs and ensuring that tough punishments are handed down.



**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for giving way. He leads on a very important point with regards to departmental budgets and responses. I was going to make this point to Mr Beggs, the Member for East Antrim, but I ran out of time: there is always a tendency with Departments, no matter what Department it is, to keep money in-house and in the centre, when that £300,000 or £500,000 could be spent far better in far greater ways by the voluntary and community sector. They are the ones with the real specialism who have got to grips with the problems.

**6.30 pm**

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Member will have an extra minute.

**Mr Robinson:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My colleague has made a very relevant point that I support fully. I am therefore happy to support the motion.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** As we welcome the Justice Minister to the Chamber on her first appearance at the Dispatch Box, we wish her well.

**Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I wish to congratulate you on your elevation. I am really delighted for you, and I think that you will do a fantastic job.

I very much welcome the opportunity to respond to my first private Members' motion as Justice Minister of Northern Ireland on an issue that I know regrettably affects the lives of so many across this country: drug misuse. I congratulate the supporters of the motion for highlighting this important matter early in the new mandate because I think that, with the support of the Assembly, which it seems we have, the Executive have an opportunity to tackle the issue in an appropriate way towards best outcomes for our community and wider society.

Whilst I appreciate that this is a private Members' motion, I note that the Members who tabled the motion are members of the Justice Committee, including the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson. I am keen to ensure a good working relationship with the Committee to ensure proper scrutiny. In fact, I welcome all constructive criticism from all sides of the House because I want to make the right decisions not just for me but for the people of Northern Ireland. I think that I can do that with the input of my colleagues in the Chamber. That is why I also congratulate the authors of

the amendment. The amendment takes the spirit of the original motion and provides a further considered perspective, strengthening the aim of this evening's debate.

We are all familiar with the impact on the health service of treating drug misuse, and, regrettably, we all know the recent figures that, tragically, over 100 people die each year of drug-related causes. I cannot begin to imagine the impact that that has on families, on the community and on the people who are in the grip of addiction. Mr Robinson alluded to a recent drugs find in my constituency and his, in Limavady. It is disgusting, and it is something that we need to address.

On the general drugs picture, the main illegal drug used in Northern Ireland is cannabis. I take Lord Morrow's point that cannabis should not be underestimated. The fact that it is the main illegal drug in Northern Ireland is in itself quite worrying. Thankfully, we have seen a drop in the use of drugs among 11-to-16-year-olds, yet the misuse of prescription drugs remains a challenge. That is something that we need to consider as well, and that was alluded to by Trevor Lunn and Roy Beggs. Others alluded to the new developments in the use of what we call "legal highs".

Michaela Boyle and Roy Beggs mentioned the relationship between the consumption of alcohol and drugs and how that relates to crime. It has been suggested that the consumption of alcohol and the use of illicit drugs is a contributing factor in a large percentage of crime. The misuse of drugs and alcohol is of increasing concern to the police and public alike, and I know that members of the previous Justice Committee received briefings showing the continuing drain that substance misuse places on the justice system.

Setting aside the complex issues around the misuse of and over-reliance on prescription drugs, which I know my Health colleagues are addressing, I want to take the opportunity to say at the outset that the only way to minimise the harm caused by illegal drugs is to simply not take these substances. However, it is not that simple; it is easier said than done. I appreciate the aspect of the amendment that suggests increased awareness around the dangers of drug use and early intervention for children and young people. However, we know that people will persist in taking drugs, so we must work together to tackle the problem. My Department, the Department of Health, other Executive colleagues, the PSNI and a range of organisations need to work together both to intervene early to prevent drug misuse and to

effectively tackle the drug misuse that is happening now.

Local communities also need to play their part in working with the PSNI to help to bring those who deal in this poison before the courts. This is not just my problem as Justice Minister; this is our problem in the Executive, in the Assembly, in the various agencies and in our community. We must work together to solve it.

I appreciate, therefore, the contributions from Nichola Mallon, Michaela Boyle, Doug Beattie and others who have suggested that this is something that we need to do together.

The motion tabled by Mr Frew, Mrs Cameron and Mr Douglas acknowledges the impact of illegal drug misuse in Northern Ireland and calls on my Department to:

*"work alongside the relevant bodies, to bring forward further measures to raise awareness, and to ensure that the criminal justice system is tough enough to deal robustly with those who are responsible for the menace of drugs on our streets."*

The amendment tabled by Ms Mallon and Mr McGrath further emphasises the role of joint working, calling for:

*"the Executive to work collaboratively alongside the relevant bodies to bring forward further measures to raise awareness about the dangers of drug use, to increase investment in, awareness of, and access to, early intervention services for children and young people as well as adults"*.

In the time allotted, I hope to outline how my Department has been working alongside relevant bodies, and I give my commitment to keep the issue of tackling drug and alcohol misuse front and centre in the criminal justice system. I hope to acknowledge the role of a wide range of bodies in addressing the issue and highlight the productive joint working that has taken place to date and will continue as we move forward on my watch. I also hope to show that, by some of the innovative thinking around problem-solving justice that has already started, ably supported by the Justice Committee, we are taking the theme of collaborative working to the next level.

The community safety strategy, which my Department leads on, recognises the fact that partnership working is essential if sustainable solutions are to be developed. The strand of

the strategy that focuses on alcohol and drugs draws heavily on the 'New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs' (NSD), which is led by the Department of Health, and which is now in its second phase.

The overall aim of NSD phase 2 is:

*'to reduce the level of alcohol and drug-related harm in Northern Ireland'.*

It commits government to working in a joined-up, cross-departmental and cross-sectoral way to prevent and address harm related to alcohol and drugs. NSD phase 2 seeks to direct action across five pillars: prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research.

The Department of Justice continues to be a major contributor to the outcomes defined in the new strategic direction and chairs an alcohol and drug delivery group to take forward the law and criminal justice actions. Partners on this group include a range of Departments and criminal justice agencies. This is a good example of the benefits of collaborative working and what we are trying to achieve through the new outcomes-based Programme for Government, acknowledging the role that a range of organisations have to play in tackling the complex problem of drugs misuse.

The new strategic direction includes a number of key priority areas and key indicators for the justice system, which include alcohol and drug-related crime; drug and drink driving; the number of criminal gangs dismantled, disrupted or frustrated; and increasing public confidence that drug-related problems are being addressed.

Delivery of these indicators is embedded in the community safety strategy, and, in March this year, my Department gave an update to the Justice Committee on all eight strands of the strategy, including on alcohol and drugs. The level of drug arrests went up by 4.3%, from 2,831 in 2014-15 to 2,953 in 2015-16. In my constituency, the number of drug arrests has gone up by 5-6%. The number of drug seizures has increased year on year since 2009-2010, with the figure currently standing at 5,597, an increase of 9.7% on the 2014-15 figure of 5,104. The number of drug seizure incidents has increased year on year, and in 2015-16 reached the highest level seen in the past ten years, at 5,597. The Organised Crime Task Force has made significant interventions against organised crime gangs, with 28 dismantled in 2015-16, 42 disrupted and 54

frustrated over the same period. Results show that over 72% of respondents have confidence in the work being done by the PSNI to tackle alcohol and drug-related issues in Northern Ireland and over 83% have confidence in the work being done by local policing and community safety partnerships. I will talk about their work later on.

The report to the Committee also highlighted some of the good work being taken forward by my Department, working in partnership with others, to underpin those results. Information about the health-led drug and alcohol monitoring information system (DAMIS), for example, was shared among key criminal justice networks, including the PCSPs, which were encouraged to work closely with the newly established drugs and alcohol coordination team (DACT) connection service in the planning and delivery of any alcohol- and drug-related actions, activities or projects over the next three years.

The amendment tabled by Ms Mallon and Mr McGrath calls for an increase in awareness of and access to services, including those that intervene early. The connection service will facilitate this via developing local events and initiatives; delivering targeted awareness-raising sessions; offering advice and support to local stakeholder networks and communities of interest; supporting a local drug and alcohol service providers network; and promoting and signposting to local support services.

Many Members talked about the influence of the community and voluntary sector in tackling this, and delivery would, in my opinion, rely heavily on community and voluntary sector partners. Some Members talked about the Hope Centre in Railway Street in Ballymena. Lord Morrow said that I would have an education if I go to Dungannon: I must be the most educated person in recent weeks because I seem to have been there a lot. Others mentioned community and voluntary groups in their constituencies. Previous to my new position, I advocated for that, so I certainly see its value.

It is envisaged that the principal benefit of this type of engagement will be the continued development of more jointly planned, delivered and coordinated initiatives in the years ahead. From the criminal justice perspective, a range of actions is being taken forward to combat drug misuse and to intervene at a critical point to prevent individuals from being drawn further into drug taking.

All young people who are referred to the Youth Justice Agency, either to youth justice services or to Woodlands juvenile justice centre, are assessed to identify any drug- and alcohol-related issues directly linked to offending behaviour or whether there are issues that carry the risk of harm to self or others. Interventions that consider each individual are employed to tackle such problems, in addition to group work and referral to specialised services in the community.

With the introduction of youth engagement clinics, young people on the fringes of the criminal justice system are now captured in the cohort of young people with drug-related issues and can, therefore, be offered support and help at an earlier stage. The Probation Board has revised its substance programme in partnership with the Public Health Agency, and ASCERT has trained all its front-line staff in the use of screening and the delivery of brief intervention tools to address substance misuse among offenders under Probation Board supervision. In the prison environment, a real and concerted effort is being made to address substance misuse, based on a three-strand approach to restrict supply, reduce demand and assist recovery.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service, working with partners such as the PSNI, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and others, offers drug counselling services and has diverted significant resources to the problem. Programmes are in place in all three establishments to assist and support those individuals who decide to maintain a drug-free lifestyle.

Finally, over recent months, my Department has been working with the Home Office and a range of agencies in Northern Ireland, including councils, the PSNI, Forensic Science Northern Ireland, the courts and others to prepare for the commencement of the Psychoactive Substances Act, which came into effect a few weeks ago. Members, including Sydney Anderson, mentioned that psychoactive substances are otherwise known as legal highs.

My officials worked with Department of Health and Public Health Agency officials as well as the PSNI to develop a pack of material about the new legislation, what it will mean for those who sell the substances and on the harm caused by psychoactive substances. This was distributed across the justice system, including to PCSPs. Public Health Agency and health officials undertook a similar exercise with their networks. It is another example of the cross-Executive collaborative working that I have

already seen much evidence of in my short time as Justice Minister.

I come back to our local initiatives. PCSPs continue to deliver a range of initiatives aimed at addressing drug and alcohol issues, including education and awareness programmes, which can include counselling elements for those requiring assistance with drug or alcohol dependency issues. PCSP action plans will continue to focus on working collaboratively with others who reach out to young people and develop activities and programmes that will encourage them to desist from taking illicit substances.

Some Members may be familiar with the Drug Dealers Don't Care media campaign that originally launched in February 2014. It is now in its third year, with plans being made for another campaign at the end of this year or in early 2017. This is a Northern Ireland-wide media campaign run in conjunction with Crimestoppers, PCSPs, the Policing Board and the PSNI.

The campaigns have had good levels of reported success, and they typically run for a number of weeks across Northern Ireland, utilising billboard, bus, radio and TV advertising, as well as social media, to deliver messages to target certain demographics.

#### 6.45 pm

In my constituency, much good work is being done by the PCSP that covers the Coleraine area, including the delivery of the Drug Dealers Don't Care campaign, which I mentioned, and the delivery of a parental awareness campaign on the purchase of drugs online by local young people.

From the health perspective, the Public Health Agency funds one-stop shops for children and young people across Northern Ireland. They provide not only diversionary activities but education, information and support for children and young people affected by substance misuse. They also address broader issues, such as suicide and self-harm, mental health and well-being, sexual health, relationship issues, resilience and coping skills.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I ask the Minister to bring her remarks to a conclusion.

**Ms Sugden:** Sure, although I have a lot more to say.

I hope that I have shown Members the breadth and depth of work that is being done across my Department, in conjunction with others across the Executive, to tackle drugs misuse. I thank Members for their attention, for raising the issue and for adding a new perspective to something that I am confident my Department will take forward.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I call Mr Colin McGrath to wind on the amendment. As this is Mr McGrath's first opportunity to speak as a private Member, I remind the House of the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

**Mr McGrath:** Thank you for calling me, Deputy Speaker, for this, my maiden speech.

It is an honour to serve one's constituents in a place such as this and to do so when winding up a debate about illegal drug use in our society — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order. Please continue.

**Mr McGrath:** The matter of illegal drug use in our society and trying to protect our communities is both relevant and pertinent.

I hail, for those who do not know me, from Downpatrick, which is the county town of Down and the final resting place and true home of St Patrick. I say that because I know that no Armagh city representatives can interrupt me during my maiden speech, and so I will say it again: I am from Downpatrick, which is St Patrick's true homeland.

I arrive to this seat in the footsteps of some political greats. Mr Eddie McGrady was the quiet giant of Northern Irish politics: fair, determined and yet well liked on all sides of this House and others. He was a gentleman and a mentor, and he is sadly missed in politics and in our area. I also follow Margaret Ritchie into the seat. Margaret has assisted me in my political career. She has been a friendly guide. She helped to establish me, and she had such drive and determination that we always had to work the extra hour, walk the extra mile and rap the extra door before we got to rest. I pay full respect to Seán Rogers. Another quiet gentleman of Irish politics, he will be missed from the front line. He leaves a legacy of hard work, service and care for the community that he served. I pledge to maintain and deliver on the work that he started.

The area that I represent is a beautiful place, stretching as it does from the shores of Strangford lough, past where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea and the idyllic expanse of Carlingford lough. If there is one thing that is better than the scenery in our area, it is the people of South Down. They are wonderful, caring and friendly, and it is my pleasure to represent them in this place and do all I can for them in the constituency.

I move on to the issue at hand: the scourge of illegal drugs. We tabled an amendment because we felt that the motion did not go far enough. We were worried that it focused too much on punishment. Whilst a clear message must be sent to drug dealers, peddlers and those in the supply chain, the motion could have gone further and called for a joined-up and coordinated approach to help to prevent those who feel tempted to partake in drugs from doing so.

I am finishing my role as a youth worker, and I know only too well the impact that drugs can have on young people, be they involved in taking drugs or watching a family member do so. Young people can become consumed by the drug culture: the places they hang out, the people whom they meet and the activities that they do. Young people might have the freedom of a new wage packet or a university place and become users, maybe of soft drugs first before, as was mentioned, moving on to harder drugs. We have young people who recreationally use harder drugs and whose weekends are incomplete without a dabble. With 86% of those convicted of drug-related crimes being male and well over 26% of convictions coming from the 18-24 age bracket, we are specifically letting down young men if we approach this in a simply punitive manner.

There is never a happy ending to taking drugs. It impacts young people's lives and futures, and it can have a debilitating impact on them for the rest of their lives. We call for more information and assistance, for emergency help when needed, and for guidance and support should people stray into drug-taking and want to put the brakes on. We have asked for an Executive-wide approach because, whilst the Department of Justice can lock people up, the Department of Education can teach people, and the Department of Health can help people when there is nobody else to support them. We must educate our children as well about themselves to help them to understand the reasons for the decisions that they take. With care and construction, an appropriate sharing of resources, and a suitably motivated and driven team of professionals, we could target that type

of education to the places it is needed most and prevent the next generation of drug users.

**Ms Hanna:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McGrath:** Sure.

**Ms Hanna:** Is there a role for local councils in the solution to the drug problem?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McGrath:** Thank you. Indeed there is. I think that it has been mentioned a few times today that policing and community safety partnerships can definitely utilise their experience on the ground in communities to identify problems and target the resources that can come from the centre. Nothing wipes out a supply chain more quickly than diminishing demand.

In conclusion, we have today something that we may not get a lot of in this mandate: agreement from all sides. I do not intend to go through bit by bit what people said. I think that we all know that we support the motion and the amendment. We are asking Northern Ireland to be tough when it has to be but caring when it needs to be and sensible enough to know the difference and to educate people about the risks to them and allow them to make truly informed decisions.

**Mrs Cameron:** I congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker, on your new role. I also congratulate the Justice Minister on what will be a challenging but vital role in the Assembly.

It is apparent that no one in the House disagrees with the intent of the motion. That is not surprising, given the seemingly never-ending cycle of drug-related tragedies that afflict our communities daily. Before I make some points in relation to the overall strategy of the Department and the broader criminal justice family, I convey my sympathies to all the families that have been affected by drug-related issues. I hope that, by highlighting some issues in the debate, those families will be reassured that the Assembly is serious in its intentions to look at how awareness can be raised and how more support can be offered by way of intervention. I will approach the debate from that perspective, and I trust that members from other Committees will highlight some of their own areas of interest and expertise in relation to health and communities in particular.

I will look at a couple of issues that are worth observing in terms of the overall approach of

government towards drug-related crime. I was interested to note some of the statistical research in the briefing pack provided for the debate; it seems to indicate that the majority of cases going through the court system relate to motoring offences. I suggest that, in terms of government spend on public awareness, spend since devolution on motoring-related schemes such as speed awareness is probably higher than most other types of campaigns. Whilst I am somewhat reluctant to base my argument on statistics alone, the broad point that I am making is that perhaps it is time for the Government to look again at its priorities in awareness, given the continued volume of motoring-related incidents going through the courts.

A secondary point in relation to that area is that, in terms of motoring and the courts, there are some who might think that the ordinary motorist is already subject to enough forms of scrutiny and penalty opportunities, where even the most basic mistake by a driver leaves them facing immediate financial and possible criminal penalties. I make the point again because, in the briefing pack, the surveys indicate that the vast majority of people believe that the resources of the police and courts would be better spent on dealing with the antisocial behaviour and criminality often fuelled by drugs or the need to finance the supply of drugs rather than putting thousands of motorists through courts for what may be deemed minor offences in the overall scheme of things.

Of course, that is in no way to minimise motoring offences that are truly shocking in nature; no one would seek to minimise the impact of those. However, I want to make the broad point that the criminal justice system must continually examine its priorities to ensure that they are in line with what the public want to see in terms of proper social justice for those who find themselves victims of criminality. It is important that the public have confidence in the system. My fear is that the public, who are shown a zero-tolerance approach for minor parking or bus lane misdemeanours, are then told by the same criminal justice system that there is nothing to be done for the victims of theft or criminal damage to their property, which results in a greater sense of injustice and a further loss of confidence in the police.

I believe that that sense of injustice in communities is further highlighted by the obvious link between drug-related crime and paramilitarism. It is a further sense, if you like, of one rule for one and another rule for the thousands of decent, law-abiding citizens, while paramilitary organisations appear to rule

communities without fear of interference from any aspect of the criminal justice system. Northern Ireland seems to be perhaps more gripped by paramilitarism and its never-ending criminal empires than ever. Every person in every community knows who the leaders, dealers and suppliers are. I accept that people are reluctant to name names, but that, in itself, cannot be an excuse for a lack of police action in tackling this scourge once and for all. The longer we accept this status quo, the more we condemn our young people to remain trapped in these unholy environments where drugs are a currency and criminality is a character reference.

I look forward to the Justice Committee being able to look into these areas in much more depth and to scrutinise the organisations and strategies that are responsible for ensuring that drugs and the misery that they cause can be given the highest possible priority.

I turn now to the comments from other Members in the debate. As one of the named proposers of the motion, I am pleased to see the united force behind the motion and, indeed, the amendment. I fully support the amendment also. It is a good day when you see the Assembly agreeing across the board on such a vital subject.

Paul Frew, who proposed the motion, stated that it was an important debate. He talked about the devastation that drugs cause for society and families. He was supportive of the amendment and the holistic approach that it offers. He talked about drugs being illegal but also addictive and the need to tackle those at the top of drug-dealing, whether it is paramilitaries or not. He talked about drugs being endemic in our society and even in prison. He mentioned that £73,000 is the cost to keep someone in prison for a year and spoke of all the other crimes connected to drug crime. He invited the Minister to visit Railway Street addiction service and mentioned the Hope Centre in Ballymena, speaking of the valuable supportive work that it does and about the fight not to reduce the funding for this specialised unit.

Next, Nichola Mallon from the SDLP moved the amendment. She said that the issue was of grave concern to her constituents in North Belfast and that she had witnessed the difficulties that families were suffering, the painful battle and the anguish of drug addiction. She commended the DUP for tabling the motion on illegal drugs and said that the Minister had a key role to play and that more needed to be done by the PSNI and the Justice Department.

She spoke of the misuse of prescription drugs and the need for Health and Education to have a greater role. She praised those in the statutory and community and voluntary sector and spoke of the referrals to CAMHS and the pressure there. She spoke of the immense human and financial cost of drug misuse and about mental health and well-being. She shared the testimonial of Aaron Fox — I hope I have got the name right — and the call from his parents to act on this subject.

Michaela Boyle from Sinn Féin spoke about the scourge on society of illegal drugs and young people abusing alcohol. She talked about the crime, domestic violence and rape that is associated with that abuse. She spoke about early intervention and of awareness being key and said that proper help in prisons was needed. She said that crime figures for the Strabane district council area had increased in 2014-15 and that there was a rise in recorded drug possessions. She welcomed the increase in arrests. She said that more collaborative working was needed and that the public needed confidence in the justice system, especially for those who felt let down by the courtroom.

#### 7.00 pm

Mr Doug Beattie of the UUP was fully supportive of the motion and amendment. He spoke about the focus on prevention and the need to involve all Ministers in dealing with the issues. He said that the problem with illegal drugs is that taking them is today socially acceptable. He also spoke of his experience of the cannabis fields in Asia. He mentioned that he thought we would be better off in Europe to tackle the drugs issue.

Trevor Lunn of the Alliance Party supported the motion and amendment, though he preferred the wording of the amendment. He spoke about cross-departmental issues and in particular education. He mentioned that prescription drugs were a bigger part of the problem and referred to paramilitary groupings and criminal gangs and their responsibility for those illegal drugs.

Lord Morrow of the DUP commended those who tabled the motion and welcomed the agreement across the Benches. He wished the Justice Minister well in her role. He spoke about cases coming before the courts in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and the use of cannabis, which, he said, was a gateway to other drug usage. He talked about how drugs had the potential to impact negatively on the body and spoke of a pilot scheme called

Breakthru in Dungannon, I think. He invited the Minister to visit that programme.

I move on to other contributors. Daithí McKay of Sinn Féin was supportive, as was Sydney Anderson of the DUP —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I ask the Member to bring her remarks to a close.

**Mrs Cameron:** — as well as Roy Beggs of the UUP and George Robinson. Just in finishing, I thank Members from across the Chamber for their support for this important motion.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly acknowledges with grave concern the impact and extent of drug use and drug-related incidents, crimes and fatalities have on individuals, families and our community; supports the ongoing work carried out by statutory services, the Public Health Agency and the voluntary and community sector; and calls on the Executive to work collaboratively alongside the relevant bodies to bring forward further measures to raise awareness about the dangers of drug use, to increase investment in, awareness of, and access to, early intervention services for children and young people as well as adults, and to ensure that the criminal justice system is tough enough to deal robustly with those who are responsible for the menace of drugs on our streets.*

## Woodburn Forest

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. *[Interruption.]* Order, please.

**Mr McMullan:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes with concern the application by InfraStrata to drill at Woodburn forest, County Antrim; recognises the concerns of residents in County Antrim over drilling proposals at the forest; and calls on the Executive to ensure that such applications are not approved until assurances are secured*

*against any negative potential impacts on water supply, the environment, tourism and local communities.*

Go raibh maith agat. The motion before us can go a long way in protecting our environment, water supply, tourism and communities. It is also a motion that will give the community the right to be consulted at all stages of an application and the right to express a view to all agencies involved. The granting of a drilling licence without a mandatory environmental impact assessment not only is a major flaw in our planning system but fails to protect the communities and the wider public. Members, let us not fool ourselves: activities such as gas and oil exploration are not without real and serious environmental risks and problems, such as water and soil pollution.

I ask Members to think how close to Woodburn reservoir this drilling operation is situated. It makes you wonder what people were thinking.

In the drilling process, highly toxic chemicals are combined with water to create a mixture that is pumped into the ground. This mixture comes back to the surface as a toxic mud, which carries contaminants such as radioactive materials. We also have air pollution from drilling, from gases such as benzene and methane. We will also have oil spills, waste management problems, noise, road damage and landscape impacts. Already they have cut away acres of trees and, according to the permitted development schedule, the council must give written consent for this to be done. I wonder whether that happened, because we have not seen anything from the councils at all.

Given all the risks, it is hard to believe that a drilling licence was granted at all without the need for an environmental impact assessment report. At present, a licence application needs only to be accompanied by an environmental awareness statement, which is no more than a brief statement demonstrating the applicant's awareness of environmental issues, regulatory requirements and sensitivities related to drilling, exploration, development and production. In other words, Members, nothing even resembling a full, independent assessment is required. Basically, it is only a nod of the head or a wink of the eye and you are through.

Under the EU directive 2001/42, a strategic environmental assessment is meant to be carried out before petroleum licences are granted. Unfortunately, our licensing policy here does not apply that much-needed directive. This assessment, if applicable here, would allow the full examination of effects on

things such as biodiversity, pollution, human health, flora and fauna, soil, water and air, to name but a few. As our planning policy stands at present, to hold a petroleum licence one has only to apply for permitted development rights (PDR) to carry out exploratory works. A full planning application is only necessary if the applicant is refused permitted development rights. One of the reasons for being refused is if your application needs a full environmental impact assessment. On this occasion at Woodburn, when InfraStrata submitted its drilling plans in 2013, the opportunity to put this application into the full planning process along with a full environmental impact assessment was gravely missed. I wonder how it was missed. Was it intentional that it was missed, or was it just missed?

When you look at the DOE's own stipulation for drilling in an area with an area of special scientific interest (ASSI) designation, you will see that, before any proposed exploration the company must consult with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and other relevant bodies.

**Mr Dickson:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McMullan:** Yes.

**Mr Dickson:** I am fascinated by the Member's quite correct litany of concerns that he has about environmental pollution, but this is the Member who has a family member who has been involved with some fuel laundering processes, which are on the record, Mr Deputy Speaker —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** Order.

**Mr Dickson:** — as some of the most polluting activities in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I caution the Member. He well knows the rules under which he speaks. I advise him to be very careful.

**Mr McMullan:** The application clearly states that the licensee shall not carry out any work within or in close proximity to an ASSI without the prior written consent of the DOE. I wonder whether this happened, because if we really know this area, we will know that two of the reservoirs served by Woodburn's catchment area are in an ASSI. What were these people thinking of and what were those responsible for the paperwork for this programme thinking of? Why, you may ask, did DOE not insist on a full equality impact assessment? Basically, it is my belief that the then Minister, Minister Durkan,



must have fallen asleep at the wheel. He wrote to Mid and East Antrim Borough Council telling it that it was responsible for removing the PDR, but why did his Department not take the lead? He also failed to respond to the 21-day deadline to be notified of the plans. That meant that the permitted development rights were granted by default. Where else would you hear of that? When the public quite rightly asked questions, the council went into committee and there was nothing coming out. Nobody was telling the public anything at all. That is something I was shocked to learn.

Failure to respond to the deadline to be notified of the plans meant that the permitted development rights were granted by default. When the Department was asked why that happened, it stated that it, DOE, had already received sufficient information from the company and the relevant agencies back in December 2013. That I am shocked to learn — that DOE took advice from the drilling company and not from its own report. As was seen in the papers, one of the heads of the Planning Service was quoted as asking the drilling company for advice on how to answer some of the questions that were laid down to the service. We have DOE taking the advice of the drilling company, so did the rest of the relevant agencies do the same? Is this where we have come to — the advice and word of the person who is applying for the licence was taken without the relevant agencies doing their own reports? I think those questions need to be asked.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I remind the Member to address his remarks through the Chair.

**Mr McMullan:** Pardon me.

Today we have the chance to ensure that this debacle can never happen again. What can we do? The motion states that we call on:

*"the Executive to ensure that such applications are not approved until assurances are secured against any negative potential impacts on water supply, the environment, tourism and local communities."*

How can we do that? Today I am calling on our new Minister, Minister Hazzard — I thank him for being here — to repeal the part of section 16 of the permitted development for minimum exploration that deals with oil and gas and to say that any future applications by anybody to do an exploratory drill or to have anything to do

with exploration for oil or gas should go through the full planning legislation and that a full environmental impact assessment should go with it. That is the only way we can ensure that we have control of our own planning service and that the multinationals do not dictate terms or anything that goes on. We must take back control of our Planning Service. I hope we get support for the motion.

**Mr Lyons:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I welcome you to your role and wish you well.

I listened carefully to Mr McMullan, a Member for East Antrim, and I also read with interest the motion before the House. It is one that I will not be able to support, for reasons that I will outline now. I certainly understand the concerns of some local residents — the genuinely held concerns that some people in that area have. However, I believe that those fears are unfounded. I hope that, in my remarks, I will be able to assuage the fears that some people have, but I am under no illusion that there are people who have their mind made up about this. I understand that and that no amount of fact, evidence or reason will convince them otherwise, but I hope I will be able to shed some light on what is taking place.

**7.15 pm**

**Mr Agnew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** No. I have a lot to get through and have only five minutes. Other Members will have a lot more collectively.

I also want to raise the last part of the motion that Mr McMullan has brought to the House. It calls on the Executive to:

*"ensure that such applications are not approved until assurances are secured against any negative potential impacts on water supply, the environment, tourism and local communities."*

If those assurances had not already been provided, we would have cause for concern and worry, but that is not the case. Let me address that. One of the issues that has been raised is permitted development rights. Some people think that InfraStrata has been given a free run and the power to do whatever it wants without any consequences, but that is not the case. It is not a free-for-all. Let us go through what has taken place so far. It was required to get the consent to drill by DETI. That is what it is regulated under. That consent, given by DETI,

states that DETI is satisfied with the technical, environmental and health and safety aspects of the proposed plans, so the former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was pleased. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has taken steps and has implemented a water quality monitoring report that includes surface waters and groundwaters. The NIEA also regulates the movement of waste from the site. In addition, the NIEA is responsible for ensuring that Northern Ireland's water quality monitoring and risk assessments for drinking water meet the regulatory requirements. So what do we have, when we consider the exploratory conventional drilling that has been taking place at Woodburn? We know that the NIEA is content. We know that Northern Ireland Water is content. We know that —

**Mr Ford:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** No. I already indicated that I will not give way.

We have heard that DOE, DRD and DETI are content. When we look at those in the round, we see that we have a number of Departments and public bodies that are tasked with ensuring that the environment and public water are protected.

I move now to the water supply. A number of concerns were raised. I am sorry that I have to say this again, but it is not fracking. That point has been raised again and again, and I have received correspondence saying that what is taking place is fracking and I should be opposed to it. This is conventional exploratory drilling. We know that no oil will be extracted; indeed, we know that the chemicals that are used in drilling — everyone knows that certain chemicals will need to be used — are used in this process all over the world. In fact, they have already been used at Larne lough. They are used for geothermal energy, and, in fact, they are also used for water extraction. We are asked in the motion —

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** I have already indicated that I am not giving way. I am running out of time. We have already indicated —

**Mr Ford:** You would get an extra minute.

**Mr Lyons:** You are right: I would get an extra minute. Sorry, go ahead.

**Mr Beggs:** The Member is certain that there are no risks, but does he appreciate that things

sometimes go wrong and that, when things go wrong, there are risks? The question is this: why take on board additional risk in a water catchment area?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Lyons:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am glad that the Member has raised that issue. That is why the company has said that multiple layers of steel casing and concrete will be used to help to protect the water supply in that way and why Northern Ireland Water, DETI and others are pleased with what is happening. I have a personal interest in this, by the way, as does the Member: we drink water that comes from the rivers that feed into those reservoirs.

We have a number of public bodies and government agencies — experts in the area — that have informed us that what is happening is in line with policy, is safe and poses no risk to the environment. Today, we are being asked to express concern and to ensure that applications such as this are not approved unless certain assurances are provided. I say it again: we would be right to express concern if those assurances were not there, but that is not where we find ourselves.

Finally, those who invest in Northern Ireland must be allowed to operate within the framework that has been established already. I want companies to come here and be able to operate within the law. That is what has happened in this case.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

**Mr Lyons:** I have not been convinced otherwise at this point. Therefore, I cannot support the motion.

**Mr Beggs:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I, too, congratulate you on your appointment.

I support the motion. I have to say that I it was with incredulity that I learned of the proposal to drill a borehole at Woodburn inside the water catchment area. I could not believe that it would be a location where Northern Ireland Water, the company whose job it is to guarantee water quality for the people of Northern Ireland, would take on additional risks. As I said earlier, there are risks involved in drilling. Some are using the language that this is a "zero-waste site" and that nothing will ever escape, but there are "Events, dear boy,

events". Sometimes, events can overtake the best of plans. Again, I ask the question: why take on additional risks?

I want to highlight the fact that I drive a car. I have a wood-burning stove, but I have an oil-fired central heating system at home as well. I use oil, so I am not anti-oil and do not come at this from an anti-oil point of view. We have to try to conserve our limited energy supplies, but why on earth would you take on additional risk by locating such a site in a water catchment area?

I note that the record of the Northern Ireland Water board meeting of 24 July 2013 indicates that the board was assured that the contamination risk had been dealt with in the preconditions for Northern Ireland Water's land being accessed for the project. Therefore, you write that into the conditions and nothing will ever go wrong. What surprised me about that minute was that there was no challenge from any of the Northern Ireland Water board members to ask, "What if something goes wrong?". I have to say that I found myself in a similar situation when involved in discussions with some departmental officials. They just assumed that it was a zero-waste site and that everybody had been assured by somebody else — but what if something goes wrong? Why take on the additional risks?

The next thing highlighted to me was concern in the community that there could be fracking. This was moving to a different plane. I could not believe that anywhere in Northern Ireland could be less appropriate for fracking than a water catchment area. You have the pumping of chemicals underground. You have the risk of heavy metals or other substances coming back to the surface. It was just ridiculous that that could be possible. I felt that it was important, so, in 2014, I engaged with the Department and Northern Ireland Water to seek at least an assurance that there would be no fracking and that it would ensure the highest level of mitigation if it leased the site. That was agreed. I am glad that no fracking has been written into the lease so that, if the company finds suitable fracking below, it will not come back. At least, I hope that it will not, and that is my understanding. It is already built into the lease, so it cannot decide to say, "We have developed this in good faith. You cannot stop us now unless you pay us x amount of money". I hope that we have, at least, prevented that issue arising.

Many have referred to the catchment area. I have been to the area several times and met some of the neighbours. The issue that strikes

me, which people are mixed up about, is that this is adjacent to Woodburn north but is actually in the catchment area of Woodburn south. There is confusion. There is a sluice that can direct water to and from the area, and I understand that mitigation can be built in there. I suggest that they should build in whatever mitigation they can come up with. We have been assured that there is a bund and that nothing can escape. What if we get exceptional rainfall and the bund fills? Northern Ireland has been fortunate to be dry recently.

**Mr Stalford:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I confess that my view is to be very cautious about undertaking a project like this. That said, given that the Government pay people from Northern Ireland Water, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and other statutory organisations such as DETI to provide advice to people like him who are charged to make the decision, why does he think that he is better qualified than those whom we pay to advise us?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy):** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Beggs:** Sometimes, you need a bit of common sense. Why take on additional risks? Why did you come here if you accept what the officials say every time? Sometimes, you have to challenge them. Why take on additional risks?

There was a site in the Glenoe area, in my constituency. It had an aquifer, and neighbouring well water was diverted. There was lots of mud, and, I am told, the Glynn river ran red. Who knows what could have happened if something similar had happened at Woodburn? You should not just assume that officials get it right all the time. Another thing, when I read on about this and gained knowledge, is the number of chemicals involved, and, again, this is in a water catchment area. There was 100 kg of biocide. I think that it was 24 tons of barium sulphate, and there were 2,500 gallons of Halad-300L NS. Biocide T and Halad-300L NS are defined as hazardous biocides under the Groundwater Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009.

Why bring such issues into a water catchment area? Why bring risks upon yourself? So, because of that I want to avoid risks, and we ought to be very careful in the future and not do this ever again.

**Ms Hanna:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is my first opportunity to congratulate you

on your role which we know you will bring integrity and balance to.

The SDLP supports the motion. First and foremost, it is clear that there are substantial concerns about the proposals for exploratory drilling in Woodburn and that not enough is known about this kind of drilling and the potential impacts and effects on local communities. We certainly do not have enough information to declare it safe. We had been told that the well site would be fully watertight — a zero discharge zone — and lined with layers of cement and steel to prevent liquids escaping into the surrounding soil and the ground water.

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Hanna:** I will.

**Mr Beggs:** Is the Member aware that already there has been flooding in the entrance lane? Mud was flowing onto the road and, ultimately, down the stream that, potentially, could have gone into the water supply. So, already, they have not been able to do things properly.

**Ms Hanna:** I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, I am aware of that, and I believe that InfraStrata has acknowledged some of those breaches, even if others have not accepted that they have had breaches. I believe that this has been compounded by the fact that there have not been baseline studies and surveys to allow us to effectively quantify any environmental damage. I understand that there are concerns as the company doing this exploratory work is not financially secure and would not necessarily be in a position to fund any clean-up, if such clean-up was possible, in the event of a substantial breach.

As a background to how we got to this point, we know that the DOE got an application from InfraStrata in August 2013 detailing its intentions at Woodburn to probe the subsurface geology and identify areas for potential oil and gas deposit. I understand that officials in the Environment Agency made a determination, based on the information available at that time, concluding that the development did not need an environmental statement and that, according to the information submitted, the proposed borehole was essentially a legally permitted development (PD) and that planning permission was not required.

Since that decision, further information has emerged about the detail and the potential risks of what was proposed. The work was initially described as minor and non-contentious

exploration — I think that we can clearly say that it is not. InfraStrata was lately granted a licence to reinject petroleum and other fluids, and I thank the Member for outlining what some of those were, into the site, and therefore it no longer could fall into the category of permitted development.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

After local government reform, the DOE had no jurisdiction over the permitted development notification, which had become, at that point, a matter for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. In September 2015, the then Environment Minister, Mark H Durkan, wrote to the council clarifying this. He advised that the means of removing the PD rights was for the council to carry out a further environmental impact assessment (EIA) screening exercise and consultation based on the new information available. Unfortunately, we think that there was a missed opportunity that it did not take place. If the reforms to planning were to do anything, and even though they were not as comprehensive as we had initially designed them to be, they were designed to bring in community consultation and give the people closest to the impact of a decision a say through their local councillors.

A previous Member to speak has, I believe, continued with the campaign to try to pin the blame on the former DOE Minister and Department and, potentially, throw some anti-politics sentiment about why a decision might have been made. I do not think that that is the case. Once the details of what was being proposed emerged, I think that it is fair to say that there have been a number of missed opportunities to bring the development in. I have outlined the role that Mid and East Antrim Borough Council could have played in it; I understand that DETI granted the licence; DRD has influence over Northern Ireland Water, which has a demonstrable interest in protecting our water supply; and, indeed, the outgoing Agriculture Minister has responsibility for the Forest Service and could have potentially rejected permission to take the —

**7.30 pm**

**Mr McMullan:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms Hanna:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr McMullan:** Does the Member agree that this was granted under default because the 21-day term was not taken up, and we sat on our

hands and let the application go through by default?

**Ms Hanna:** As I have just outlined, at the time, the information available did not say that it was exploring the sub-geometry or whatever it is. And I think after the fact, when the follow-up proposal — *[Interruption.]* Geometry, yes.

**Ms Hanna:** The follow-up proposal detailed some of the chemicals being used. As I have outlined, a number of Departments, including DARD, had the opportunity to pull the development back in. You can take the plank out of your own eye before you start to apportion blame here.

The discussion of this matter is frequently raised alongside fracking, and I accept Mr Lyons's point that it is not the same as fracking, but there are some parallels. On the latter issue, I commend Mark H Durkan for taking appropriate deployment of the precautionary principle during his term and refusing permission for that to take place in Northern Ireland until such time as it is proven safe, which is not the case at the moment. Although we are far off any confidence that this is safe, we are not blind or absolutist in our position on many things, including this. If we were given evidence that said that it was safe, we would reconsider the position. I wish that the same effort, determination and resource that are put into increasingly complicated and contrived extraction methods like this would be put into developing the renewable base here that has so much potential —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

**Ms Hanna:** — to meet our energy security and to reduce, necessarily, the greenhouse gas emissions for this place. Onshore wind, for example, is cleaner, safer and less expensive than this sort of tactic, but it is being overlooked. We support the motion.

**Mr Dickson:** Mr Speaker, I will take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important matter for many of my constituents and those who live in a much larger drinking water consumption area served by the Woodburn dams. Earlier this evening, I and some party colleagues met some people from Stop the Drill, particularly residents who live in the most immediate area around the drill site. They impressed us and persuaded us, if we needed any further persuasion, about the folly of this particular enterprise.

Equally, I find it very strange that Mr McMullan and Mr Kelly are co-signatories to a motion here tonight when they are effectively a party of Government, and they could, at the stroke of a pen, stop all this. It seems rather false that they do not take that course of action. In fact, the motion that is in front of us, which I intend to support, is —

**Mr Kelly:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Dickson:** I will.

**Mr Kelly:** Does that stroke of a pen equally apply to the time of the previous Minister of the Environment, Mark Durkan? You seem to be attacking Sinn Féin now.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Dickson:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The reality is that, despite the words that Ms Hanna used to congratulate her Minister on his actions, he could have perhaps taken that decision as well, but things are much simpler now because there are just two parties in Government, and it is very easy. You do not have all the breadth of consultation that you needed to do in the past.

The reality is simply this: Mr Hazzard has the powers to introduce departmental legislation with regard to planning. That is what the motion calls for, so I look forward to hearing a major announcement from him tonight in respect of planning matters. Furthermore, through you, Mr Speaker, will the Minister instruct Northern Ireland Water to release documents to protesters who believe that documents are being hidden from them and from public view and from open and transparent government? He is a party of open and transparent government, so I am absolutely sure that he will do his level best to ensure that every document that is being requested is discovered and placed in the public domain.

The motion states that all the environmental factors must be considered before such a serious project is permitted again. Why should they not be considered while this project is continuing? Of course we want to protect future drilling opportunities, but we have a genuine opportunity tonight to stop this now. I have serious concerns, as others have, about the way in which the Agriculture Department has an environment portfolio and, indeed, that the leadership of that Department is in the hands of the DUP. Essentially, we have a government lock on the decision that faces the Assembly today, and I encourage the Members who have the power in the Chamber to stand up and do

what is right and stop now the process and the potential pollution of water that supplies hundreds of thousands of houses in the greater Belfast area.

The motion should be calling for a strong and independent environmental protection agency rather than the mouse of an organisation that we have at the moment, which cannot even decide what day of the week it is. I wonder whether the two parties of government will tell us tonight whether they will introduce an independent environmental protection agency to Northern Ireland.

We need to remember that it is an exploratory drilling process that is going on in Woodburn and that there is no guarantee that oil will be found, but should it be found, will the Minister give us a commitment tonight that that oil will stay in the ground? That is where the oil, if it is discovered, should remain. In the 21st century, we do not need 20th-century technology. We do not need additional oil in Northern Ireland. We do not need that type of exploration in Northern Ireland. We need to get smart and look for the appropriate alternatives that will deliver 21st-century energy needs for the whole of Northern Ireland. I have no desire to see east Antrim turned into the DUP's idea of a Northern Ireland Dallas, no matter how much it would suit the MP for East Antrim.

**Mr Speaker:** The next Member who I will call is Ms Caoimhe Archibald. This is the first opportunity that she has had to speak in the Chamber. Therefore, I remind the House that it is the convention that there is no interruption during the speech; that is, unless she becomes controversial in her remarks.

**Ms Archibald:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In supporting today's motion, I would like to touch upon three areas: first, addressing the flaws in the system; secondly, so-called economic benefits; and, finally, some wider environmental considerations.

My party colleague detailed how flaws in the planning and licensing systems have led to the undesirable consequences that we now face. It is necessary that we correct those flaws to prevent a repeat situation arising. Therefore, I reiterate the call for a change to planning policy to require minimal exploration, including exploration for hydrocarbons, to undergo full planning permission. It should no longer be granted under permitted development rights.

I also call for the following changes to licensing policies. First, the application process for petroleum licences should include the need to

carry out mandatory independent environmental assessment. Ideally, this would take the form of a strategic environmental assessment, the like of which is used in Britain for petroleum licensing. This would overcome any gaps allowing exploration to happen in ASSIs or other special areas. Secondly, the petroleum licensing system in the North places emphasis on maximising the successful and expeditious exploration and exploitation of the North's oil and gas resources. All decisions are made in pursuit of that policy. This must change to become a policy that is more precautionary and recognises the problems of global warming, carbon emissions and fossil fuel depletion and therefore places primacy on environmental and economic sustainability.

I will move on to so-called economic benefits. InfraStrata makes certain claims about the economic benefits of its activities. It said that the Larne/Lough Neagh basin has reserves that could provide the North's energy for 25 years, offsetting the need for international oil or gas imports; that any oil or gas discovered will provide income through tax revenues and royalties; and that there would be potential for job creation and other economic benefits. At best, the claims are vague and non-committal. In general, it is common for the oil and gas industry to quote such economic benefits. However, in the case of Woodburn, and in any other case for that matter, it is unlikely these benefits would be realised. Rather, given that the industry is labour-intensive during the development phase and capital-intensive during the production phase, there is financial pressure to front-load drilling activity, resulting in boom/bust labour economics that none of us wants to see.

About 98% of potential jobs are associated with well development. They are short-term, low-skilled jobs, predominantly filled by a transient workforce experienced in the industry. Only 2% to 5% of jobs are associated with the production phase and would remain local and predictable. The transient workforce leads to low tax recovery. Also, the destruction and contamination of the natural landscape by heavy industry is irreversible, and any real or perceived environmental degradation will impact on tourism and reduce the demand for agricultural products and agrifoods from the island of Ireland. Any tax or revenue generated will go straight to Westminster and not stay in the North. I therefore contend that we should not be taken in by vague promises of cheaper home-produced fuel and lots of jobs and prosperity.

I would like to discuss some wider environmental considerations. Oil and gas exploration and extraction are taking us in the wrong strategic direction. Few people now dispute that global warming is a reality and is primarily caused by emission of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide. If we continue our current emission levels, the global temperature will increase with dire consequences, including rising sea levels and more-extreme weather.

The world community accepts that we must reduce our use of carbon, with the G7 committed to ending the use of fossil fuels, and the UN climate change summit announcing a landmark goal of net zero human emissions. The North also recently signed the Under 2 memorandum of understanding to limit global warming to an agreed threshold of below 2°Celsius relative to pre-industrial levels.

Our strategic planning policy statement states that we must continue to work towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025. Given all of this, I do not see any other way but to move towards a low-carbon society, where we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and use of fossil fuels. That is the path that I and Sinn Féin want us to take. That path is not compatible with issuing licences for and encouraging investment in the oil and gas industry.

Instead, we should promote renewable energy technologies and create the legislative and political environment that encourages not only the proliferation of these technologies but community and public ownership of renewable energy generation.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

**Ms Archibald:** Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Durkan:** I also rise in support of the motion. I cannot understand why any party or person would have a problem in ensuring that any application is not approved without assurances being secured against any potential negative impacts on our environment, let alone on human health.

**Mr Lyons:** I thank the Member for giving way. I completely agree with what he has said: of course we want those assurances. The point that we have made, however, is that those assurances have already been provided to us. You might disagree on the issue of whether we should be there, but you cannot deny that

assurances have already been provided in those terms.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Durkan:** I would not deny that assurances have been given. I would maybe question the adequacy of some of the assurances that have been given, in the light of recent revelations.

This precautionary approach is essential to ensure confidence in our planning system, and, indeed, confidence in our Government here. I very much welcome the fact that the motion calls on the Executive rather than on any individual Minister or Department. These projects do tend to be cross-cutting in nature. Indeed, the situation at Woodburn pervades four of the legacy Departments, as outlined by my colleague Claire Hanna, DETI, naturally enough, has responsibility for licensing; DRD has clear responsibility for water supply and ensuring the safety of it; DARD did have control of or responsibility for the forest; and, of course, DOE. As a former Environment Minister, I will attempt to clarify some of the misinformation that is out there and some of the misinformation that is in here.

What we are seeing at Woodburn forest was never subject to a planning application. It is what constitutes permitted development. People are shocked, and rightly so, that something of this scale and nature was not subject to the scrutiny of a full application, and I do have a great deal of sympathy with them.

Indeed, before leaving office, I commenced a review of permitted development with a call for evidence in relation to exploratory drilling, with the intention that something like this cannot happen again without the wider consultation and deeper scrutiny of a full application. I look forward to the new Minister concluding this piece of work and working with him on it.

**7.45 pm**

I have been inundated with angry tweets, emails and correspondence on this issue. I even got a letter from Mark Ruffalo, the Incredible Hulk actor. Believe me, you do not want to make him angry.

**Mr Agnew:** He turns green.

**Mr Durkan:** He clearly is green, all right.

Sadly, most of this has come too late, after responsibility for planning and jurisdiction for this matter had transferred to Mid and East

Antrim Borough Council, and I was unable to stop it with the stroke of a pen or a push of a button. Much has been made of the fact that DOE did not complete an EIA on time and that had this been done the situation would and could have been avoided. While missed deadlines make good headlines, this is not the case. Permitted development rights can be withdrawn at any stage, but, as I have outlined again and again, that power and responsibility now lies with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Following a meeting with Friends of the Earth and some concerned residents, during which I learnt more about this application, I wrote to the council relaying and sharing these concerns.

**Mr Agnew:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Durkan:** Yes.

**Mr Agnew:** Before the Member moves on from the initial decision not to object to permitted development rights, can he explain the comments of his colleague Claire Hanna that somehow the Department did not know that this was going to be an exploratory drill? Under what basis was it permitted? What did the Department know?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I have to say that he is one of very few Members who have had an interest in this issue for some time. At the meeting that I had with Friends of the Earth and concerned residents, I learnt new information about the nature of what was being proposed and about the chemicals that may be used to assist in the carrying out of this exploratory drilling. I became more concerned and followed up with a letter to the council expressing those concerns.

Mr Lyons tried to establish that we are not talking about fracking here, but there is always the fear that fracking will follow. As Claire Hanna outlined, I, as Minister, did demonstrate a clear and a very strong approach to fracking and a precautionary approach to exploration, which saw legal proceedings taken against me. The SDLP is completely opposed to fracking. We now have enshrined in planning policy a presumption against fracking in the absence of evidence that it is not harmful to the environment or human health.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Mr Durkan:** I do recall an allegation from a former DOE Minister, Mr Lyons's predecessor in the House, that that was a breach of the

ministerial code and that there might be further legal action on that.

**Mr Agnew:** We are here because one of the most invasive, destructive and dangerous processes has been allowed to take place without public consultation, without public scrutiny and, importantly, without public consent. There have been a lot of attempts to play the blame game here this evening. I think that we have to be honest. Every party that sat in the last Executive has to hold its hands up. I will maybe make an exception for the Alliance party, and I will say why in a minute.

There was an opportunity to scrutinise this decision. The failures of DOE have been pointed out, and it has been pointed out that DARD had responsibility and that DRD had responsibility. The whole Executive have responsibility, and that is what I was talking about today. It is the collective responsibility of being in government.

As Alex Attwood is often keen to say, it is not just being in government but being in power. Those parties in power had the power to act. Indeed, I sought to initiate a petition to have the decision recalled and reviewed by the Executive. That is why I make an exception for the Alliance Party, because it was the only other party prepared to sign.

I will give way to Mr Swann.

**Mr Swann:** I am just checking the Member's memory of who signed.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Agnew:** Sorry, Robin Swann also signed, but his party collectively did not come on board. Mr Beggs also signed. Two Ulster Unionists signed. The Ulster Unionist Party did not approach me to sign the petition.

Ultimately, that is what the Government is for: to make, challenge and review decisions and to make sure that they act in the best interests of the people. I appreciate that Mr Durkan has been honest in the process. The DOE was asleep at the wheel when permitted development rights were granted. It should not take Friends of the Earth to tell the DOE how to do its job or what it has missed, or the Minister for that matter. This should have been examined closely at the time. It should have been stopped at that point, but, as was pointed out, there were many opportunities to stop this.



When I sat on the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee, we were told quite openly by the Department of its open-door policy on petroleum licensing. The only condition to be met when seeking a licence — Mr Lyons used DETI scrutiny as an example of proper scrutiny — was evidence that the applicant could carry out what was required by the licence. DETI holds no regulation beyond that and certainly did not scrutinise the work that passed to the DOE.

Two things need to change —

**Mr Lyons:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Agnew:** I will not give way; the Member did not give way to me.

It is clear that permitted development rights are not appropriate for this type of development. We had to fight to get permitted development rights for solar panels on people's homes. We should not be drilling, particularly in a public forest in a water catchment area adjacent to a reservoir, without full environmental scrutiny and proper independent assurance that it is safe to do so.

I have heard a lot of talk about the supposedly watertight environment that InfraStrata is operating in. I was there on Friday, and I saw the pipe coming out of the site into the forest, presumably for water run-off. It is not exactly watertight. There were plenty of damp areas outside the site, and everybody knows that they are not because of the recent rain.

We need to change the open-door policy at the Department for the Economy. We need to get rid of permitted development rights for minerals exploration and to ensure maximum scrutiny when these types of applications come forward. We heard today about the Programme for Government and the new model of how we will do things. I welcomed elements of that, one of which was going out to the public and asking them. I have a petition signed by close to 65,000 people objecting to this. If there is to be a new model from this new Executive — a paradigm shift, as it was described earlier — we need our Executive to listen. We need to hear that the people do not want this. We need to stop the drill.

**Mr Carroll:** It is very important that the Assembly debates this issue, particularly given the massive environmental hazard that faces Woodburn reservoir. It is nothing short of a disgrace that the drill has been given the go-ahead just 300 metres from Woodburn

reservoir. The potential risks to the water are obvious. Dangerous chemicals are used in the drilling, and the oil well itself sits in a reservoir catchment area. The reservoir supplies water to thousands of homes across Belfast, including my constituency of West Belfast.

It is absolute madness that this drill was given the go-ahead by politicians. Not only have we allowed InfraStrata to drill on unprotected land for fossil fuels that are ruining our environment but we are allowing them to run the risk of contaminating our water supply. It is simply unheard of for an oil well to be situated in the catchment area of a reservoir, and the fact that some politicians allowed this to go ahead shows how out of touch some of them really are.

We should be exploring ways to increase our renewable energy and setting an example to the rest of the world, not digging for oil beside a major reservoir and potentially contaminating our water supply. Indeed, the draft Programme for Government that we discussed earlier today refers to a commitment to reducing greenhouse emissions. Will the Executive intervene to halt the drilling at Woodburn? Shame on the politicians who let this drill go ahead, and shame on NI Water for putting the interest of corporate profits ahead of the safety and hygiene of our drinking water. I offer my support to the campaigners who have worked tirelessly over the last few weeks and months to highlight the issue. This drill must be stopped. We cannot risk our water, and we need to put the environment before the interest of big companies.

**Mr Speaker:** This is Mr Eamonn McCann's first opportunity to speak as a private Member. I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption. That is, of course, predicated on whether there is sufficient controversy in the speech to provoke an intervention.

**Mr E McCann:** There will be nothing controversial in anything I say, as always. *[Laughter.]* I was struck by what I heard when listening to some contributions. Bells kept ringing in my head, if you know what I mean. When Members were talking about what is happening at Woodburn, the phrases used and the problems described made me think of Mobuoy Road, of Dalradian and of Prehen wood. If you want to know what all of those are, I can tell you that they are all examples of exactly the same thing as is taking place at Woodburn. Gerry Carroll and Steven Agnew were right: ideologically, economically and

politically, what we are witnessing is a clash between the interests of business — of profit — on the one hand, and the interests of the people on the other. This is about rapacious capitalism despoiling our country and our countryside. That is what is happening here.

I mentioned Mobouy Road. Most of you have probably not heard of Mobouy Road, but, before the year is out, you will know all about it. At Mobouy Road, just outside Derry in the townland of Campsie, is an illegal dump that, at a conservative estimate — the previous Minister, Mark H, will, I think, confirm what I am saying — holds 1.2 million metric tons of waste that is illegally dumped. Members of the Assembly, you do not dump 1.2 million tons of waste out of sight, or, as we say around Derry, "unknownst". Loads of people knew that was going on — it is a wide area. The former Minister, Mark H Durkan, was good enough to accompany me and members of Friends of the Earth, the River Faughan Anglers, the Enagh Youth Forum and many others from around the area on a tour of what is there. I tell you this: you should go and see that dump. See the lagoons, as they are called, where water is gathered. See the bubbles coming up from below. These are not little bubbles like a fizz; these are huge bubbles —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to return to the debate on Woodburn forest.

**Mr E McCann:** Yes indeed. What I am saying — I think that it is necessary to say this because we are not dealing with the issue that arises if we concentrate on Woodburn only — is that this is not a one-off; it is part of a pattern. I cannot illustrate the pattern that the problem before us today is part of without saying that. I mentioned Mobouy and Prehen wood, where exactly the same thing happened. All that is left of Prehen wood is a little clump of pristine greenery along the banks of the Foyle, just outside Derry. It is being treated in exactly the same way as this area of Woodburn forest, which is another little forest. It is the last pristine piece of forest in what was once a forest running all the way from Derry to Strabane, and it is all cut down and destroyed.

We have this little place; it has red squirrels, it has buzzards, it has badgers. When I was a kid, it was known as the "Bluebell Wood", because you would collect an armful of bluebells. All the kids did that and took them over Craigavon Bridge home. The magical thing was that, when you came back the next week, they had returned; it was still carpeted with bluebells. That is under threat. That is

something precious. You cannot put a price on that experience. People are entitled to beauty as well as bread, a house to live in and all the rest of it. We are destroying the beauty that has been bequeathed to us by nature.

### 8.00 pm

There is a housing development that begins at the edge of Prehen wood. The developers had the nerve to advertise it as "Prehen wood development". It literally abuts the forest, and it has been given planning permission.

The connection between those things is this — I could mention Dalradian and the gold mining, but I will not because I do not have time. I could bring you the correspondence between the Planning Service and the Prehen Historical and Environmental Society, which was treated like dirt. It was quite clear that the Planning Service was laughing at them. When the Information Commissioner twice intervened and told the Planning Service, "Give these people the information they are asking for. They are entitled to it", there was no result. There was just mulish reluctance even to comply with their own regulations and with the law. Exactly the same has happened at Woodburn.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

**Mr E McCann:** In each of these instances, commercial interests have trumped the interests of the environment. That is the real context within which we have to understand these things. Whatever we do, regardless of super-councils and the rest of it —

**Mr Speaker:** The Member's time is up.

**Mr E McCann:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):** I thank the Members who tabled the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak on an important issue that has attracted significant concern and public interest. I have been very conscious of the concerns of residents in Antrim and further afield about the exploratory drilling at Woodburn forest.

The ongoing development at Woodburn involves InfraStrata carrying out an exploratory borehole at Woodburn forest to understand the subsurface geology and identify areas where there may be the potential for oil and gas deposits. Those drilling operations are not for the unconventional extraction of hydrocarbons.

At the outset, I assure Members that the work is restricted to exploration only and for a limited period. If commercial extraction were to take place in the future, it would be subject to the full planning application process, environmental assessments and assessment of all potential impacts, including the impacts on water supply, the environment, tourism and local communities.

Given the nature of this development and the issues raised, responsibility cuts across a number of Departments, including the Department for the Economy, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and my own Department for Infrastructure. As Minister with responsibility for planning, I aim to continue to improve our planning system and to make sure that it is effective and efficient and that it operates in the wider public interest. I am committed to ensuring that it delivers for local communities and the region as a whole and that the planning system addresses the present as well as the long-term future needs of our society.

The planning system should, where possible, facilitate development, but it must not compromise on environmental standards. Sustainable development is at the heart of our planning system, and it is clear that there will be many instances where it is necessary to balance competing social, economic and environmental interests. Whilst the planning process may not always be able to reconcile competing interests, transparency, fairness and accountable decision-making are fundamental to ensuring that all interests are taken into account.

Minerals are an important natural resource, and their exploitation makes an essential contribution to the North's prosperity and well-being. The minerals extraction industry provides employment, often in rural areas, and produces a wide range of products for a variety of purposes in construction, agriculture and industry. I want to facilitate sustainable minerals development and balance that with the need to protect the environment and ensure compliance with all environmental regulations. As a result, I have decided to propose a change to the current legislation, policy and procedures in relation to mineral exploration.

I propose to remove permitted development rights for oil and gas exploration. In the future, under my proposals, exploration for oil and gas will require the submission of a planning application and will be subject to the full rigours of the planning process, including environmental impact assessments (EIA) and

public consultation. I intend to consult on the legislative change shortly.

As I have indicated, given the nature of the Woodburn development, responsibility cuts across a number of Departments. The work is being carried out under a licence awarded by the former Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, which is now the Department for the Economy. The initial licence was granted for five years in March 2011, and a further five years was approved earlier this year. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs also has a range of responsibilities, mainly through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, which is responsible for water quality and environmental protection. Its water management unit granted consent under the water order to regulate any potential impacts on surface water and groundwater and, as a result, has implemented a surface water and groundwater monitoring plan. NIEA is also responsible, through the Drinking Water Inspectorate, for ensuring that NI Water's drinking water supply meets regulatory requirements.

My Department's primary role is in relation to the associated planning and water responsibilities.

**Mr Ford:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Hazzard:** Sorry; I just want to get through this.

First, in relation to planning, the work at Woodburn is being carried out within the existing legislative framework for assessing proposals for mineral exploration referred to as permitted development (PD). Existing permitted development rights are provided for mineral exploration by class A of part 16 to the schedule to the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. That permits development on any land for a period not exceeding four months of the drilling of boreholes, the carrying out of seismic surveys or the making of other excavations for the purpose of mineral exploration.

A number of other conditions apply, including the storage of topsoil and restoration of the site. Under article 7 of the 2015 order, there is a requirement to notify the relevant district council of the proposed exploration, and the council may, within 21 days, issue a direction, if considered appropriate, that permitted development rights under article 3 shall not apply to the development, therefore requiring the submission of an application for planning permission. That remains an important

safeguard. In addition, where an environmental impact assessment is applicable based on the details of the proposed development, PD rights cannot apply. It is important to emphasise that the temporary permitted development rights for minerals exploration do not allow the commercial extraction of minerals, including oil and gas. Such activity will be subject to the full planning application process as well as the relevant EIA, licensing and environmental permitting arrangements.

In April 2015, the vast majority of planning powers transferred to local government. Therefore, for over a year, the planning responsibilities at Woodburn have been a matter for Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Up to that point, the former DOE had responsibility to consider permitted development notifications. In August 2013, InfraStrata submitted a permitted development notification to DOE detailing its intention to carry out an exploratory borehole in Woodburn forest. In addition to the provisions of the permitted development legislation, environmental impact assessment regulations require consideration. In the case of the InfraStrata proposals, an EIA determination was carried out, which concluded that the proposed development did not need to be accompanied by an environmental statement and, therefore, that planning permission would not be required. InfraStrata was advised of that in December 2013.

Following the transfer of planning powers in April 2015, the jurisdiction for the proposal moved to Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. It is understood that the council sought legal opinion on the project and was similarly of the opinion that the operations were indeed permitted development. Members should note that the council's procedures in respect of Woodburn are the subject of a legal challenge. In that regard, it is not appropriate for me to comment further on those matters.

If the company finds oil and gas deposits from its current exploratory work and wishes to extract them, it will need to apply for full planning permission to Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, or to my Department if the amount extracted exceeds 500 tons per day in the case of petroleum or 500,000 cubic metres per day in the case of gas. If the proposal involves the extraction of unconventional hydrocarbons, the application will be regionally significant development and will be considered by my Department.

A number of issues have also been raised about the impact of the exploratory borehole on

the water supply. NI Water owns the land at Woodburn forest and has entered into an exploration agreement with InfraStrata. That agreement allows for the construction of an access road and the drilling of an exploration well.

If InfraStrata wishes to move ahead with oil production, the agreement allows for InfraStrata to exercise an option for a long-term lease. However, that option is only exercisable if InfraStrata receives full planning permission for the production well and any associated infrastructure.

As previously referred to, there are other regulatory safeguards in place relating to pollution control, groundwater regulation and water abstraction practices. NI Water has in place drinking water safety plans for all its water treatment works and supply areas. Those plans identify the potential risks in the catchment and, where needed, put in place any appropriate mitigation measures and controls to protect drinking water quality. NI Water also works closely with NIEA to minimise any potential impacts on drinking water quality and monitors risks as part of the drinking water safety plan process.

Before entering into the agreement with InfraStrata, NI Water gave careful consideration to the protection of the water supply in the catchment area of the site. The exploration project at Woodburn has been designed as a zero discharge site. This was achieved through the development of a fully bunded site, lined with a specialised geosynthetic clay liner that prevents liquids on site from soaking into the ground below. In addition, NI Water has taken further precautions to allay concerns that the public may have and has put in place increased monitoring of raw water at all reservoirs in the catchment area and at the associated water treatment works. NI Water has also ensured that the portion of the Woodburn north river that is within the catchment area of the drill site is not currently flowing into any of its reservoirs. While NI Water is of the opinion that the project is well designed and well managed, this is a belt-and-braces approach to provide further reassurance to the public. NI Water is satisfied that the proposed work will have no detrimental impact on the impounding reservoirs or the public water supply.

Clearly, the ongoing work at Woodburn has generated significant public concern. However, one of the key restrictions to the permitted development for mineral exploration requires that development does not exceed a period of four months. I am advised that this time

restriction will expire in a few weeks, in early July. Permitted development legislation also includes conditions regarding reinstatement of the land, including that, within 28 days of the cessation of operations, the borehole shall be adequately sealed, any structures and waste material removed and the land restored.

Given the short remaining time frame for the Woodburn development to operate within the permitted development framework and the fact that jurisdiction for this matter is the responsibility of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, there are very limited opportunities for me to act in this case. However, the case has highlighted to me the need for change. I am very conscious of the need to ensure that permitted development rights are fit for today's purpose. That is why, today, I have proposed changes to permitted development rights. I look forward to working with the Assembly and the industry in taking those proposals forward.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, I have asked my officials to take note of the Hansard report of the debate. If I have not addressed any points that have been raised by Members during the debate that fall within my remit, I will write to them in response.

**Mr Kelly:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Comhghairdeas faoi do cheapachán, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate you on becoming the Speaker.

Oliver McMullan opened the debate and really summed up the difficulties right from the start. He asked why the previous Environment Minister had not insisted on a full environmental impact assessment and why there was a failure to respond within the 21-day deadline. He called for what, I think, most people agree to and what the Minister dealt with in the end: the repeal of section 16 of the permitted planning rights for mineral exploration and for all future applications to be put through a full planning application.

Gordon Lyons got up and said that he was happy with the assurances provided because they came from DETI and other agencies that he mentioned. The question that I would put back to the Member is this: if there is no difficulty with that and you think that there are no risks, what is the problem with full planning permission being used in these terms? When you think about it, if you, as a single parent, are building an extension to your house — as a single person, I beg your pardon; maybe you are a single parent — as a single person, you will have to ask for full planning permission. A single person has to do that, yet it does not

have to be done here despite the number of people who are personally affected, many of whom are above us here. It affects something like 1,800 streets, including over 500 in Belfast.

### 8.15 pm

Roy Beggs took up the challenge from Gordon Lyons and said that there are risks, and he went through a long litany of those risks which, you will be glad to hear, I am not going to repeat. He articulated the risks, and I think that most MLAs agree with him.

Claire Hanna said that the original decision did not have all the facts and that, now that there was further information, she defended her colleague Mark H Durkan valiantly — I am not too sure whether she did it well — by blaming everyone else. However, she supported the motion.

Stewart Dickson said that this was a vital matter, but then he tried to launch a very vicious attack on the proposer of the motion, and I think that was quite despicable. He said that it was a simple matter of a "stroke of a pen". When we get on to the Minister, we will find out that it is not simply a matter of a stroke of a pen, but it can be done, and the Minister has outlined how it can be done.

Caoimhe Archibald said that the law should be corrected because it is flawed and that the licensing should be by a mandatory and, I think, very importantly, independent environmental impact assessment, so that there can be no question about the impact assessment. She also said that we were going in the wrong strategic direction, and I agree with her. What we should be doing is reducing our dependency on the use of fossil fuels, so that it is not just — as Eamonn McCann later mentioned — to do with Woodburn forest, but to do with the whole of the North and, indeed, if you think about it widely enough, the whole of humanity.

Mark H Durkan — who, it is important to say, also supports the motion — explained that it was not a matter of "the stroke of a pen", in his case or anybody else's, and that there were other Ministers involved and indeed councils. Some of that was disputed by Stephen Agnew, who got up afterwards. He said that it was a huge decision and that it was made without public consultation or public agreement. I think that it is very important to try to rectify that. He also said not to play politics with it but then blamed all the other parties; but then, all is fair in debate. He is also supporting the motion. He argued, as others have done, for a change in permitted development rights and that there

must be full planning permission and maximum scrutiny.

Gerry Carroll spoke very briefly. He mentioned the fact that thousands of homes, including some in West Belfast, are affected. As I remember, it is over 1,800 streets. It was unheard of to have a drill site as close to a reservoir as we have in these circumstances. He supports the motion. I notice that he referred a number of times to "politicians"; I remind him that he has now entered that field himself. He will soon be referred to as a politician also. He also said, as Eamonn McCann did, that we should put the environment before big business. In that, I absolutely agree with him.

Eamonn McCann, with his usual passion, said that this is not new. He named only a small number of other examples, but there are clearly many. He said that this is capitalism versus the ordinary people and capitalism versus the environment. He also said that this is much more widespread and we will see that as we go on. He very eloquently said that you cannot put a price on nature or natural beauty. He demanded change.

Minister Hazzard — which, if he does not mind me saying so, is either a very appropriate or inappropriate name for the debate that we are involved in — went through a whole litany. He went through the history of this and what the difficulties are. He agreed with many of the Members who spoke about that.

Let me get back to the remark about the "stroke of a pen", which was made earlier. While it cannot be done by the stroke of a pen, it can be done, and the Minister made the point that he intends to do that. I am not even going to try to go through all the issues that he raised, but he put forward a plan. It will appear in Hansard; people and demonstrators can read it there. I am very confident that we will end up dealing with this matter under this Minister, even though, as he pointed out, there are other Departments and agencies involved in what must be dealt with. I commend the motion to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes with concern the application by InfraStrata to drill at Woodburn forest, County Antrim; recognises the concerns of residents in County Antrim over drilling proposals at the forest; and calls on the Executive to ensure that such applications are*

*not approved until assurances are secured against any negative potential impacts on water supply, the environment, tourism and local communities.*

*Adjourned at 8.20 pm.*

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