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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 8 December 2014

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The first item on the Order Paper is a motion regarding DUP Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Alastair Ross replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee; that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Ian McCrea as a Member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Ms Paula Bradley as a Member of the Committee on Procedures. — [Mr Weir.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): The next item on the Order Paper is a motion regarding SDLP Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Seán Rogers replace Mr Colum Eastwood as a member of the Committee for Education. — [Mr Ramsey.]

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the nineteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Thursday 13 November 2014. The statement has been agreed with Minister Kennedy.

Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Alan Kelly TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, who chaired the meeting.

Ministers welcomed the presentation from Co-Operation Ireland in relation to its recent scoping study outlining the opportunities for greater North/South cooperation in the area of waste management.

Ministers also welcomed the publication of the Northern Ireland waste prevention programme 'The Road to Zero Waste' on 30 September 2014, which focused on using materials more efficiently and not sending waste to landfill or other disposal.

This will impact favourably on the economy, help to promote and support green jobs, protect the environment and conserve resources.

The Council noted the proposed package of legislative measures that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) is preparing on household waste collection. It also noted the publication of Ireland's latest national waste prevention programme, Towards a Resource Efficient Ireland; the final report on the review of

the producer responsibility initiative (PRI) system in Ireland; and the national hazardous waste management plan for Ireland.

Ministers noted the intention to make legislation in Northern Ireland before the end of the year to ban separately collected food waste being dumped in landfill and on the regulations that the Irish Government recently introduced on the traceability of waste to counter the trade in stolen metal.

The Ministers welcomed the ongoing work on the development of a new used tyre scheme in Ireland, which may inform the development of a complementary scheme here in the North.

The Council noted that the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has in place a programme of work for 2014-15 that was agreed with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and Dublin City Council. The first of those repatriation sites was commenced in August and completed in November. Ministers also noted that Dublin City Council has established a framework agreement for the disposal of repatriated waste and has completed a public procurement process for the haulage of excavated waste to authorised facilities. It was reported that resources continue to be targeted into joint enforcement action against illegal operators, including carrying out coordinated inspections and exchanging intelligence and information on problem areas.

Ministers discussed the negative impact of fuel smuggling on the environment. They commended the action of agencies on both sides of the border, with the recent finds of an illegal fuel plant in County Monaghan and a large amount of toxic waste in south Armagh.

Ministers noted the ongoing opportunities for cooperation on EU funding, including Horizon 2020, the LIFE Programme and INTERREG V. Those opportunities also involve transnational and interregional programmes, including a joint €72 million INTERREG VA bid that is being pursued covering the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. The Council noted that a Horizon 2020 workshop related to climate change, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials was to be held in Derry on 20 November 2014, which would bring together parties from both jurisdictions to encourage and support those who may decide to enter into a joint project.

Ministers welcomed the recent announcement confirming the success of a Horizon 2020

cross-border project worth €3.5 million. The project, which is now at grant preparation stage, aims to establish a training network for specialists dealing with the remediation of contaminated land.

Ministers also welcomed that collaboration will continue to maximise drawdown of EU funding and encouraged officials to seek new opportunities for potential projects that can attract EU funding.

Ministers noted that the contract for the all-island air quality research study into airborne pollution from the combustion of residential solid fuels, in particular smoky coal, was awarded in February 2014. The Council noted that officials are considering an interim report, which will be presented to Ministers in the near future. Ministers noted that the study is due to commence its second and final phase before the end of the year and is expected to be completed in the first half of 2015. A final report will be presented to a future NSMC environment meeting.

The Council noted the continuing collaboration on the second-cycle river basin management plans (RBMPs) under the EU water framework directive (WFD). Ministers welcomed the publication in Northern Ireland of the synopsis of responses to the consultation on significant water management issues reports and the publication in Ireland of the consultation document on the timetable and work programme for the development of the second-cycle RBMPs.

We welcomed the collaborative work on development of the river trusts, including the cross-border River Blackwater trust and the Erne Rivers Trust, as well as the revised WFD governance arrangements put in place in Ireland.

Ministers also welcomed the continued coordination on the clean coast and coast care schemes and the cooperation on the development of programmes of measures for the marine strategy framework directive.

Ministers noted that the contract for the all-island research project into the environmental impacts of unconventional gas exploration and extraction — fracking — has been awarded.

The Council noted that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held its 2014 national information day, titled "Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 5", on 2 October and that it published its research strategy for 2014-2020, with the evaluation of the first call for proposals under

way. The Council welcomed the fact that the NIEA and DECLG are exploring the possibility of a joint Life programme workshop in 2015. We also welcomed the continued collaboration between the EPA and the NIEA to identify emerging research needs and strategic planning of research funding programmes, with European funding remaining a high priority for joint actions.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment sector meeting next spring.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The Minister mentioned that the meeting received a presentation from Co-operation Ireland on its recent scoping study outlining the opportunities for greater North/South cooperation on waste management. Obviously, it is a very important issue, particularly now with the continuing constraints on the DOE budget. Can the Minister elaborate a bit on the study? What sort of work does Co-operation Ireland hope to explore?

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Lo, Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment, for her question. The Co-operation Ireland study is primarily a baseline analysis of waste management data and policy in both jurisdictions. The analysis has identified opportunities — as Ms Lo has pointed out do exist — for central and local government cooperation on regulation of priority waste streams, approaches to waste prevention, managing waste as a resource, reconciliation of data sets, and cross-border movements and disposal of waste. It is quite a comprehensive piece of work. I believe that it highlights and identifies a number of opportunities for enhanced collaboration going forward.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. It is good to see that there is at least some progress being made on cross-border movement of waste. However, there is still quite a large backlog. When will the next phase of repatriation take place and to what extent will it happen?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the question. He is quite right: although there has been progress, and that should be welcomed, it has not been as quick as some of us might like it to be.

We have now cleared 10 of the 17 sites that had been identified. The majority of sites have therefore been cleared. However, the majority of waste remains. Most recently, a site was

cleared just last month. The next site will be cleared early next year. That will leave six sites remaining, but those six sites represent almost two thirds of the volume of waste that was illegally dumped here. We continue to work closely with the Government in Ireland on the matter. It is something that they are addressing, albeit not as quickly as we would like. It is something that we are keen to assist them with. A huge cost is attached to the repatriation of waste as well. That has been compounded somewhat by the fact that, I think, the only landfill site to which the Irish Government can currently repatriate that waste is in Dublin. There are huge transport costs associated with that.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My question relates to the environmental protection section of the Minister's statement. Can he tell me whether, before the second and final phase of the all-island air-quality research study is completed, Ministers will engage directly with key stakeholders, including coal importers and distributors and those organisations that seek to combat fuel poverty?

12.15 pm

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McElduff for that question. I assure him that, before anything is implemented, I will be in full consultation with anyone and everyone with an interest in whatever it might be that is going to be implemented. However, we are years away from the implementation of any recommendations in this report. We have not yet even seen the final report.

At the meeting, I raised some concerns I had around differences between how data is measured in the North and the South; there are already some inconsistencies in the report. That is not to ignore the fact that there is a problem with airborne pollution on the island. It was highlighted in the media last week as well, with some asthma and other respiratory condition support organisations calling for a ban on smoky coal.

I have already engaged with representatives of the coal industry — and I will do so again today, as chance would have it — and port and harbour commissioners across the North, who depend very heavily on the export and import of coal.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his statement and answers thus far. Will he provide the House today with an update on the

all-Ireland research project on unconventional gas exploration and extraction?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. The research programme to which Mr Eastwood refers is being funded by the Environmental Protection Agency; the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency under my Department. It is scheduled to run for 24 months, after which it will report its findings, which is likely to be in the latter half of 2016. The two-year research programme will further the understanding of the potential impacts on the environment and on human health from unconventional gas exploration and extraction — or fracking — projects and operations, including construction, operation and aftercare.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note the all-Ireland air quality research study launched in February that the Member for Sinn Féin referred to. At 42%, Northern Ireland has one of the worst rates of fuel poverty in the whole of the European Union. Does the Minister accept that a ban on smoky fuels, not just smoky coal, could make those matters worse here in Northern Ireland? What discussions has he had on that issue with the Department for Social Development and groups interested in tackling fuel poverty?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for her question. As I outlined in my answer to Mr McElduff, I have difficulty accepting other issues flagged up in the report, although they are maybe more stylistic issues than substantive ones.

Obviously, I am extremely aware of the problem that fuel poverty is here in the North for so many of our citizens. I lament the fact that it is more of a problem here than it is anywhere else on these islands. That is largely attributable to the fact that we do not have one single Department responsible for tackling it; someone deals with energy, I deal with the environmental impacts of energy, and DSD deals with poverty and fuel poverty. That makes it very difficult to have a joined-up approach, and it is why we have singularly failed to address fuel poverty here.

I have received a letter from the Minister for Social Development on fuel poverty and the potential impact of any ban on smoky coal on fuel poverty. I will happily meet the Minister to discuss that further.

Lord Morrow: I noticed that the Minister's statement today contained 23 noting and welcoming aspects.

He referred to the negative impact of fuel smuggling on the environment. Will he tell us whether there were any debates, discussions or expressions of concern or regret about how few people who are engaged in these activities are being brought before the courts?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I assure him that such regret, frustration and anger was expressed at that meeting by me, Minister Kennedy and, obviously, Minister Kelly. I was there in my capacity as Environment Minister. I very much regret the cost not just to my Department but to the environment. Over the past two years, the NIEA spent £900,000 on cleaning up after fuel launderers. That does not go anywhere in trying to calculate how much money these people are ripping off the Exchequer and undercutting and undermining legitimate businesses. The Government in the South have similar difficulties. It would clearly be in our interest, therefore, to apprehend and arrest those responsible and to stop them doing what they are doing.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister's statement referred to the ongoing work on the development of a new used-tyre scheme in the Republic of Ireland. Will he inform the House what that is all about and what impact it could have if a similar scheme were brought into Northern Ireland?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, the scheme in Ireland is still under development. It has not been finalised yet, so I am reluctant to go into full details. However, a key element will be producer responsibility. I would very much like to replicate that in legislation up here so that you have a way to track tyres from manufacture to disposal. I believe that that would be a powerful weapon in tackling the issue of waste tyres and their mishandling, which has been raised by Members from every party in the Chamber over the past number of months.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed statement. It is important that there is cooperation between North and South on European funding, and his statement referred to collaboration. Will he expand on the type of collaboration that might be useful in drawing down additional European funds?

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr Maginness for that question. In recent years, my Department has shown its strong commitment to increasing engagement with Europe through the establishment of a small dedicated EU team in our environmental policy division. Part of the role of the EU team is to support and encourage the drawdown of European funding related to environmental objectives. To date, the team has provided support to a range of projects, working with partners in local and central government, the not-for-profit sector, the business sector and the research sector.

In relation to the largest EU funding stream — Horizon 2020, which I mentioned quite a bit in my statement — the EU team has held three information workshops for stakeholders. I opened the most recent of the workshops in Magee a couple of weeks ago, specifically to facilitate engagement with local and cross-border stakeholders in the north-west. The team has also provided briefings to individual stakeholders and small groups on the available funding streams.

In relation to the drawdown of funding by the Department itself, my officials proactively engage with fund coordinators at local, regional and national level to secure funding from the 2014-2020 funds to deliver a range of environmental outcomes. These outcomes relate directly to targets that will be embedded in the new Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy and the appropriate management of habitats and the freshwater and marine environments.

The funding programmes that provide opportunities to support environmental outcomes that the Department is engaging with are INTERREG Va, the Atlantic Area transnational cooperation programme, the Northern Periphery and Arctic cooperation programme, the rural development programme, LIFE integrated projects, LIFE traditional projects and Horizon 2020. Collectively, these projects could deliver up to €80 million in direct funding of environmental measures and up to a further €200 million through indirect environmental outcomes, especially from agri-environment measures.

Mr Wilson: Despite the Minister's assurances that he has an open mind on the outcome of the air quality report, the fact that he describes household coal as smoky coal may be an indication of the direction in which he is going.

Is he aware of the concerns that, if he goes down the road of banning household coal, it will increase fuel poverty? It is the kind of fuel that is used by tens of thousands of fuel-poor

people in Northern Ireland, and that would require considerable investment in their heating systems.

Will he explain to us why, if he is concerned about air quality, it is only household coal that is being given the emphasis here and not peat as well? Is that because he had his eye wiped by Ministers in the Republic who realise that the peat industry is important to their industry —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. Is there a question coming sometime soon?

Mr Wilson: — and, therefore, have excluded it from the report? What will he do to remedy that situation?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I think, Minister, that there may be at least one question in there.

Mr Durkan: Hopefully, there will be just one answer as well. I assure Mr Wilson that I am well aware of the concerns that he outlined in his speech. I outlined in an earlier answer to Mr McElduff and Mrs Overend the concerns that I have about the content of the report and how that has been presented to date. Whether that is amended between now and the final report remains to be seen. However, again, let me reassure Mr Wilson and everyone in the House that I am fully aware of the issues that he referred to.

Mr Campbell: The Minister mentioned fuel laundering and fuel smuggling. He will be aware, as my honourable friend mentioned, of the lack of arrests in relation to these issues. At the next NSMC meeting, will he ensure that the police here in Northern Ireland and the guards in the Irish Republic are aware of the public concern about plants being uncovered but nobody behind them ever being brought before the courts?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I think that he deliberately waited until the Minister of Justice came in before he asked me that. I have outlined my concerns as Environment Minister, primarily the cost of this crime to the environment. Persistent offenders are causing this damage to the environment and this cost to the public purse of clean up.

I have, on more than one occasion, made representation to my right honourable friend here, the Minister of Justice, on the issue, and my counterpart in the Republic has raised it with the guards. There needs to be more

cross-departmental and cross-border work on the issue.

Mr Allister: The statement refers to the recent find of a large amount of toxic waste in south Armagh. Is it the case that the scale of the toxic waste found was so disproportionate to the plant that it is suggestive that it was a collection point for toxic waste from multiple plants?

Can he comment upon the speculation that, in consequence, the raiding of those premises was on foot of an arranged tip-off so that the public purse would stand the expense of disposing of the toxic waste?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. As far as I am aware, the public purse always bears the cost for the disposal of this waste.

Mr Allister: A collection service.

Mr Durkan: Yes, that is how it seems. The find in south Armagh to which the Member refers was inordinately huge compared with recent finds, which were also extremely expensive to clean up but paled in comparison with this one.

I am not in a position to say whether that waste all came from one plant or whether it came from multiple plants. However, it is often the case that sludge is found separate from any plant. As the Member describes, it is a collection service; like someone leaving a bin out on the side of the road that we, in the NIEA, have to collect at a huge cost.

12.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Regeneration Bill: First Stage

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to introduce the Regeneration Bill [NIA 32/11-16], which is a Bill to confer functions on district councils in relation to regeneration; to amend the Social Need (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and Part 7 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 in relation to the functions of the Department for Social Development; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Serious Crime Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Ford: I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Serious Crime Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 November, dealing with: the proceeds of crime as contained in chapters 3 and 4 of Part 1 of the Bill; proposed changes to the Serious Crime Act 2007 as contained in clauses 45-49; the possession of a paedophile manual in clause 66; and female genital mutilation in clauses 67-70; and agrees that the Westminster Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to make explicit in statute common law safeguards (R v Waya [2012] UKSC 51) in relation to the exercise of confiscation order powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The Serious Crime Bill deals with a wide range of matters. A number of the issues require legislative consent if they are to be extended to Northern Ireland.

First, there are provisions on the proceeds-of-crime legislation. These proposals are not a fundamental change; rather, they are a tightening of aspects of the current system so that it operates as originally intended. Extension to Northern Ireland would ensure consistency, as far as possible, in the operation of this complex legislation. At the request of the Northern Ireland Executive, the Home Office proposes to add to these amendments by introducing a statutory protection regarding proportionality in calculating the amount of a confiscation order.

Secondly, the Bill proposes to consolidate the financial reporting order within the serious crime prevention order (SCPO), increase the penalty for failure to comply and extend the time limit and range of serious offences that can be caught.

Thirdly, female genital mutilation has been an offence since the introduction of the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003. The Bill's provisions introduce a number of additional and new offences as part of a general move to strengthen the law on that crime across the United Kingdom. These cover the provision of anonymity for victims; the introduction of an offence of failure to protect for parents; and the introduction of female genital mutilation (FGM) protection orders, which can contain prohibitions, restrictions or requirements that the court considers appropriate to secure the health, safety and well-being of the girl. These protection orders are a civil procedure and so fall to the Finance and Personnel Minister, who has given his full support to the proposal. The Bill will also extend the prosecution of FGM offences committed outside the United Kingdom to include people habitually resident in the UK, whether as perpetrator or victim. A further proposal regarding mandatory reporting is still under local consideration across a number of interested Departments.

Finally, there is the issue of paedophile manuals. A new offence aims to criminalise the possession of material containing practical advice on how to commit a sexual offence against a child. That would deal with a gap in the law.

There are a number of reasons why I am asking for legislative consent for these proposals. First, those I have consulted, including the police and the Public Prosecution Service, have said the proposals would be beneficial and that they would welcome them. Secondly, the crimes being addressed by the Bill are those that cross jurisdictions and therefore need to be tackled in, as far as possible, a consistent fashion across the United Kingdom. Organised crime knows no boundaries and needs to be addressed in a combined, joined-up way.

Thirdly, as well as that policy reason, there are timing factors. The nature of the provisions are such that it will be important for judicial and law enforcement consistency for them to come into force as early as possible and at the same time. Given the current demands on the legislative programme, the earliest an Assembly Bill could be introduced to achieve the same ends would be 2016. It would, therefore, be to our great

advantage if we were to implement these provisions in a more timely fashion.

Finally, there are procedural advantages. As we have seen with the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill, there are considerable complications in managing the combination of reserved and devolved measures in legislating both at Westminster and in this House on the same general subject. I appreciate that the Assembly's preference is to legislate on Northern Ireland matters where possible and, indeed, that would be my own preference. However, in this instance, for the reasons I have outlined, with the support of the Executive and the Justice Committee, I ask that the Assembly supports the terms of this legislative consent motion.

Mr McCartney (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mise ag labhairt thar ceann an Choiste ar maidin. I will speak on behalf of the Committee for Justice.

The Committee was advised in July 2014 that the Minister of Justice was proposing to bring forward a legislative consent motion (LCM) for the devolved aspects of the Serious Crime Bill, which had been introduced in the Westminster Parliament on 5 June 2014. At that stage, the Committee noted the details of the Bill, which will provide additional legal powers to deal with the threat from serious and organised crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised illegal immigration, child sexual exploitation, high-value fraud, counterfeiting and cybercrime, all of which affect this jurisdiction and operate on a cross-jurisdictional and international basis.

The LCM was laid in the Assembly on 10 November. As outlined by the Minister of Justice, it will enable the Serious Crime Bill to cover four areas, powers for which have been devolved to the Assembly. These include proceeds of crime legislation, serious crime prevention orders, female genital mutilation offences and a new offence criminalising the possession of material that contains practical advice on how to commit a sexual offence against a child. The Committee has previously supported legislative measures to strengthen the notification arrangements and monitoring of sex offenders and, therefore, welcomes this new offence.

While the Committee is of the view that it is preferable for the Assembly to legislate on devolved matters, given the cross-jurisdictional nature of the crimes being addressed in the

Serious Crime Bill, the difficulties in managing the combination of reserved and devolved measures if legislating at Westminster and the Assembly on the same general subject and the need for the measures to come into force at the same time for judicial and law enforcement purposes, the Committee agreed at the meeting on 19 November 2014 that it was content to support the legislative consent motion. The Committee subsequently provided all MLAs with a copy of its report on the LCM. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr Wilson: I welcome the agreement from Sinn Féin on this legislative consent motion on the Serious Crime Bill. I especially noted that one of the reasons that Mr McCartney gave for the Committee's support and, indeed, his acceptance of its report was "the cross-jurisdictional nature" of many of these offences. It just strikes me as a bit odd that when a legislative consent motion was sought for the National Crime Agency (NCA) on the very basis that the crimes were of a cross-jurisdictional nature, Sinn Féin and the SDLP did not find it worthy of —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will, yes.

Mr McCartney: Perhaps the Member, not being a member of the Justice Committee and, perhaps, not following the debate, particularly in relation to the NCA, does not know that our issues around that are about accountability. Indeed, if he read the judgement last week in a London court about the NCA, then perhaps he too would have a look at some of the commitments that were supposed to have been made in England, never mind those that were supposed to have been made here. If he does so, he will see that we are well justified in not supporting the transfer of the NCA because of issues around accountability.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. I can see this debate going everywhere. I encourage the Member to stay on the subject.

Mr Wilson: It is not going to go everywhere, Mr Deputy Speaker, but it is worth pointing out that the rationale behind this is that there are issues of a cross-jurisdictional nature and a legislative consent motion has been accepted in relation to the Serious Crime Bill but has not been accepted in relation to other legislation that was dealing with exactly the same kind of problem that we are facing here.

The Minister mentioned — this is really the only reason that I wanted to speak on this, although I was glad to get the opportunity to once again highlight the inconsistencies from those in the Assembly who appear to be supporting the criminal class in one way or another — that one of the issues that would be covered by the Bill would be the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the ability to bring in money from the proceeds of crime. However, he added another sentence: "as far as possible". Really, I would like the Minister to indicate, when he sums up, whether even the parts of the Serious Crime Bill that deal with the proceeds of crime will be impaired in some way by the fact that we are not part of the National Crime Agency. Indeed, is that what he meant when he talked about them applying to Northern Ireland "as far as possible"? If that is the case, whilst I welcome the legislative consent motion, it would appear that the Westminster legislation will be less effective in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr Dickson: The Bill, as the Minister outlined, covers a number of areas from dealing with the proceeds of crime to the protection of children. On the former, I welcome the greater powers for law enforcement agencies to effectively pursue and bring to justice members of organised criminal gangs. Like the Member who spoke previously, I think that the operation of the National Crime Agency is a key part of the UK legislation, and our efforts against serious organised crime would be greatly aided if those who are blocking its operation in Northern Ireland were to drop that opposition. That would be extremely helpful to the Bill.

I particularly welcome the provisions in clauses 66 to 70, especially those dealing with female genital mutilation. This will help us to better protect the most vulnerable. A week rarely goes by now when we do not hear on the news terrible stories of abuse. By adopting these legislative changes, we are firmly saying that those activities will not be tolerated by this Assembly or Northern Ireland society. These are important provisions, and I believe that they are a step forward in dealing with serious crime. I encourage Members to support the motion.

Mr Ford: I thank the three Members who contributed to the debate and, as I said earlier, the Justice Committee and the Executive for their support and consideration of these issues.

I should particularly highlight the fact that, I believe, Mr McCartney made his first formal response to a ministerial proposal as vice Chair of the Committee, and his support is therefore particularly welcome on these issues. We

normally hear him only second; on this occasion, we heard him first. Both he and Mr Dickson gave fulsome support for the proposals that are before us.

Really the only issue that was raised was that raised by Mr Wilson when he quoted me as having said, "as far as possible". I should stress, first of all, that the issues in this legislation, as far as they relate to the Proceeds of Crime Act, are related to criminal confiscation and not civil recovery. Therefore, they are powers that are available in Northern Ireland. "As far as possible" was merely, from my point of view, expressing the fact that legislation is not identical across the United Kingdom. Aspects of the legislation in England and Wales differ from that in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. It was simply a slight technical term. I was not suggesting that there is a problem with its operation but merely that the legislative basis is not identical across the three jurisdictions because that is what devolution is about. I hope that I can reassure Mr Wilson on that point. I hope that I have not now upset Mr Maginness by saying that.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for giving way. It is just on the point raised by Mr Wilson in relation to NCA. I know that the Minister would like to see the NCA fully endorsed by all parties in the House, including the SDLP, but will he agree that there are discussions ongoing in relation to the NCA — they may be drawn out, but nonetheless they are ongoing — around the whole issue of accountability, and once accountability has been agreed, the NCA should come into being in Northern Ireland with its full operational strength?

12.45 pm

Mr Ford: If Mr Maginness felt obliged to defend the SDLP's position, I am happy to allow him that intervention to do so. However, as far as I am concerned, 14 months on from the coming into operation of the NCA, with a significant amount of work done by my officials and, indeed, significant lobbying on my part with the Home Secretary, I believe that we have made major steps forward. Like other Members, I would like to see the accountability to ensure that the NCA's role is in support of the PSNI and does not subsume the role of the PSNI. I believe that we have made significant progress there.

I trust that the ongoing and somewhat extended discussions with the SDLP and Sinn Féin will terminate shortly and that we will see the NCA operating in a way that supports efforts against

organised crime in this jurisdiction, with all the costs that we see to the work being done by the PSNI and the dangers to people in this society through a variety of organised crime that has been highlighted on numerous occasions. However, I suspect that, if I go on much further, Deputy Speaker, you will tell me that I am digressing from the topic.

I welcome the support from four Members for the principles of the LCM and recommend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Serious Crime Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 6 November, dealing with: the proceeds of crime as contained in chapters 3 and 4 of Part 1 of the Bill; proposed changes to the Serious Crime Act 2007 as contained in clauses 45-49; the possession of a paedophile manual in clause 66; and female genital mutilation in clauses 67-70; and agrees that the Westminster Parliament should consider amendments to the Bill to make explicit in statute common law safeguards (R v Waya [2012] UKSC 51) in relation to the exercise of confiscation order powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Modern Slavery Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Modern Slavery Bill, as brought from the Commons to the House of Lords on 5 November 2014, dealing with enforcement powers in relation to ships, as contained in clauses 37, 38 and 39 of Part 3 of the Bill and Part 3 of schedule 2 to the Bill; the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, in Part 4 of the Bill; and transparency in supply chains, in Part 6 of the Bill.

The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill tabled by Lord Morrow has made good progress through the House, and, indeed, we expect to complete its Final Stage tomorrow. It is important legislation that will help to reinforce our response to human trafficking and slavery. My proposal that these further measures in the Modern Slavery Bill should be extended to Northern Ireland is intended to complement the provisions in Lord Morrow's Bill. They will help to ensure that the arrangements in this jurisdiction are improved to address human trafficking and slavery, to protect victims and to bring perpetrators to justice. We want to ensure that they are underpinned by the most comprehensive and effective package of legislative provisions possible.

The provisions deal with three key areas. The practical limitations of the existing powers of law enforcement to tackle human trafficking and slavery offences at sea were highlighted by a recent case in which a UK-flagged vessel suspected of being connected with human trafficking was anchored outside UK territorial waters. In that case, police were unable to board the vessel until it sailed into territorial waters. The Home Office has advised that it is aware of similar incidents in recent years. The Modern Slavery Bill therefore sought to close that potential loophole and clarify law enforcement's powers to act at sea where there is suspicion that a human trafficking or slavery-type offence has occurred. The Bill includes provisions to create new enforcement powers, but they were limited in extent to England and Wales only when the Bill was introduced.

I have engaged with the Home Secretary and the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice on the development of a comprehensive package of maritime enforcement powers that would

cover the whole of the United Kingdom. The Bill was subsequently amended to include those new powers. Essentially, there are two distinct elements. First, the Bill now provides general enforcement powers that can be exercised by constables operating within their respective jurisdictions or in international waters and by enforcement officers, such as officers of the UK Border Force, who are well placed to identify and respond to suspected cases of trafficking at sea. The general powers include specific provision for PSNI officers. The Bill also makes it clear that the authority of the Chief Constable is needed before an enforcement officer may exercise the powers in Northern Ireland waters. The Bill also makes provision for powers to be exercised in hot pursuit situations, that is where a vessel is pursued from international waters or from another UK jurisdiction. Together, the package of powers is intended to ensure that traffickers could be apprehended anywhere in UK territorial waters or in adjacent international waters. It would enhance the effectiveness of our collective response to these crimes.

As I noted, I have been mindful to preserve the PSNI's primacy in Northern Ireland waters in all but hot pursuit situations. I am satisfied that this strikes the right balance. The Chief Constable and the Policing Board agree that extending the powers to Northern Ireland would enhance our capacity to respond to these crimes and bring perpetrators to justice. I have also ensured that appropriate accountability arrangements broadly mirroring those for mutual aid are in place where operations take place in our waters. To summarise, the powers will assist law enforcement in bringing to justice those responsible for trafficking and exploiting other human beings.

The second area covered by the LCM is the proposed extension to Northern Ireland of the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner under Part 4 of the Bill. Members are well aware of the reasons why I believe Northern Ireland will benefit greatly from the oversight that the commissioner offers. The proposal received overwhelming support, with 30 of 34 responses to the public consultation supporting it. I hope, therefore, that Members will support it, not least because just last week the House voted to remove from Lord Morrow's Bill clause 26, in relation to a Northern Ireland rapporteur, in favour of the UK-wide commissioner.

As I have said before, a commissioner operating across the entire United Kingdom will provide an effective oversight model for all relevant bodies operating on these issues in Northern Ireland whether devolved or not. The

commissioner's role is to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences and in the identification of victims. In doing so, the commissioner may carry out research, consult, make reports, make recommendations to public authorities, provide information, education or training and work in partnership with other persons in the UK or elsewhere. That latter power is especially welcome in the context of the particular challenges posed by traffickers operating across our shared land border. I am encouraged that Kevin Hyland, the commissioner designate, is already engaging with such cross-border issues and has agreed to address next month's cross-border conference on forced labour hosted jointly by my Department and the Department of Justice and Equality.

After significant lobbying with the Home Secretary and her team, the Bill makes several specific provisions to cover Northern Ireland interests. They include a requirement to consult the Northern Ireland Minister on the appointment of the commissioner; consultation on the strategic plan; powers for the Northern Ireland Minister to commission ad hoc reports; powers of redaction, where needed; and annual reports to be submitted simultaneously to Ministers in each jurisdiction. There will be a requirement on my Department to lay the strategic plan and annual report before the Assembly, and there will be powers to specify in regulations the public authorities in Northern Ireland that will be under a duty to cooperate with the commissioner. The provisions, if agreed, will ensure that there is a comprehensive, coordinated response and consistent, joined-up oversight across the United Kingdom to reinforce and improve our collective response to modern slavery. Again, I trust that we will have the Assembly's support.

The final area that the LCM covers relates to new provisions to enhance transparency in supply chains under clause 51 of the Modern Slavery Bill. That clause will place a requirement on commercial organisations operating in the UK and supplying goods or services to prepare a slavery and human trafficking statement for each financial year and to publish it on their website. The current expectation is that the measure would capture approximately 1,000 of the largest commercial organisations operating in the UK. However, the detail of the level of the threshold is to be established in regulations after consultation with the devolved Administrations and business. The slavery and human trafficking statement would set out the steps that the organisation

had taken in the financial year to ensure that its business and its supply chains were free of human trafficking and slavery, or, where no such steps have been taken, there would be a statement that the organisation had not taken any such steps. I have no doubt that public pressure would then come into play. Once businesses are required to disclose what they do to tackle human trafficking and slavery, consumers and campaigners across the United Kingdom will have a better understanding of what action business is taking and can call for more action if they think it is needed.

The provision has been the subject of considerable lobbying by NGOs. The Home Office has also been engaging with the business sector, and there is broad support for the measure. Given the large size of the companies that will be affected by the clause, it is likely that very few will be operating here that are not also operating in the other UK jurisdictions. Thus I believe that a UK-wide response would be the most effective and appropriate way to legislate on the issue, so I am keen to see the provision extend to Northern Ireland. I trust the House will support it.

I am confident that, taken together, the three provisions will further strengthen the response to modern slavery and human trafficking in this jurisdiction in conjunction with the proposals before the House in Lord Morrow's human trafficking Bill. I, therefore, seek the Assembly's support for the LCM.

Mr McCartney (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee was advised in July that the Minister was proposing to bring forward a legislative consent motion for the transferred aspects of the Modern Slavery Bill, which aims to enhance the effectiveness of the legal framework for tackling human trafficking and modern slavery offences and to improve the protection for, and support provided to, victims of such offences.

Modern slavery can take a number of forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude, and victims come from all walks of life. Victims are often unwilling to come forward to law enforcement or public protection agencies, not seeing themselves as victims or fearing reprisals from their traffickers, and those who come into contact with them do not always recognise them as being victims of trafficking.

As we are all aware from the Assembly's consideration of the Human Trafficking and

Exploitation Bill, modern slavery is a particularly brutal form of organised crime, in which people are treated as commodities and exploited for criminal gain. The Committee heard about such experiences at first hand from a number of victims, and, in particular, from one victim of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The Minister outlined the provisions in the Bill that are covered by the LCM. The first area will introduce new enforcement powers for ships in order to tackle human trafficking and slavery where it occurs at sea. The Committee noted that the Minister had consulted the Chief Constable and the Policing Board on the proposed powers, and both agreed that they would be beneficial and would enhance our capacity to respond to human trafficking and slavery crimes and assist in bringing perpetrators to justice.

The second issue covered by the LCM aims to fill the current information gap around the overall corporate response to tackling slavery in supply chains and to encourage companies to take meaningful action. Departmental officials advised that they had had initial engagement at official level with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development on the proposal. The Committee noted that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment indicated that it is content in principle with the proposal to extend the provision, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is satisfied that the provisions would not raise any departmental issues for them.

The third issue covered by the LCM relates to the extension of the office of the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner to the North. It is an issue that the Committee has given extensive consideration to, and the Chair covered it during the various stages of the Human Trafficking Bill.

When the Committee considered the clause at Committee Stage, there was clear support for the concept of an independent oversight mechanism to provide effective monitoring and accountability arrangements. The key issue was whether having a local rapporteur or an independent anti-slavery commissioner was more appropriate. The commissioner was seen to be beneficial, given the clear international nature of, and dimension to, human trafficking and the fact that such a commissioner could look comprehensively at the actions of all the organisations and agencies involved in tackling trafficking in the North and could link to the British Home Office, the Human Trafficking

Centre and the Gangmasters Licensing Authority. A local rapporteur would not be able to do that, and a commissioner might not have considered the specific needs of the North and its particular challenges, including the land border, as it is called, with the Twenty-six Counties.

There was also concern, as initially drafted in the Modern Slavery Bill, that the commissioner would consider only law enforcement and not areas such as victim support, which it was intended that the rapporteur in the North would consider. At that stage, the Committee agreed that it supported the principle of having an independent body to monitor and report on the response to human trafficking. In the absence of further information on how the commissioner would operate and on the extent to which the post would meet the particular needs of the North, it agreed to support the provision in the Human Trafficking Bill for a local rapporteur. The Committee also agreed to consider the matter further once clarity on the remit and responsibilities of the Anti-slavery Commissioner was available.

1.00 pm

More recently, on 5 November 2014, the Committee was briefed by departmental officials on the LCM and on how the Anti-slavery Commissioner would consider the interests of the North, including a requirement for the British Home Secretary to consult devolved Ministers, including the Minister of Justice, on the appointment of the commissioner; a duty on the British Home Secretary to consult devolved Ministers before agreeing any strategic plan or annual report; and a power for the Justice Minister to be able to request ad hoc reports on any matters. Reports by the commissioner will be jointly submitted to the British Home Secretary and devolved Ministers, and there is a statutory duty on the Minister here to lay the reports in front of the Committee.

Given all those considerations and, indeed, that individual parties were then able to take up positions on the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill, the Committee subsequently agreed, at the meeting on 19 November, that it was content to support the legislative consent motion. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Speaking in my capacity as an individual MLA, I would have raised the point that we believe that Lord Morrow's Bill would have been strengthened by a local rapporteur, but those points are now on the record.

Lord Morrow: I am very glad to be able to speak in favour of the LCM before us today on powers in the Modern Slavery Bill. It is quite fitting that we are debating this LCM one day before the Final Stage of the passage of my Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill. It is clear to me that the changes to the Modern Slavery Bill that the passage of the LCM before us today would allow will complement the provisions of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill. They will help to improve the response of our society to the awful crimes of human trafficking and slavery and, as a consequence, are to be commended.

I should say — and Members will not be surprised to hear me say this — that I am of the view that the provisions of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Bill are considerably better in many respects than those outlined in the Modern Slavery Bill, especially with regard to the area of support for victims of trafficking, the introduction of guardians for separated children and our measures to reduce demand for trafficking. That said, we are gaining the best of all worlds through this LCM. We are working with the rest of the United Kingdom where it is beneficial to do so while going further than the rest of the UK through our own legislation.

I will not look to comment on all aspects of the LCM today, although I want to make it clear that I support it in its entirety. I want to focus on two particular aspects of the LCM: the measures that establish the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner and that will apply to Northern Ireland; and the provisions to enhance transparency in supply chains. Members will be aware that, in the original version of my Bill, there was provision for a Northern Ireland rapporteur. I agreed to remove the provision at Further Consideration Stage last week due to the introduction of the Anti-slavery Commissioner through the Modern Slavery Bill, the details of which are set out in the LCM. The general functions of the commissioner, as the Minister set out, are to encourage good practice in the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of slavery and human trafficking offences and the identification of victims of those offences.

I want to be clear that I retain a number of misgivings about the role of the Anti-slavery Commissioner. The Minister is aware of those concerns and understands where I am coming from. I am particularly concerned about the operational independence of the commissioner

from the Home Office, his lack of status with regard to promoting best practice in the support for victims and what level of interest he will take in Northern Ireland. I hope to be able to raise some of those concerns in another place as the Modern Slavery Bill progresses through its parliamentary stages at Westminster.

However, despite those misgivings, it became apparent to me after a lengthy period of interaction with the Minister and his officials that the right course for Northern Ireland was to come within the ambit of the UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner. That was for four main reasons. First, it is manifestly apparent that the crimes of human trafficking and slavery are no respecters of borders and there is wisdom in having a single commissioner to consider the entirety of the UK's response to that crime.

Secondly, the fact that the commissioner could scrutinise practice in areas that are not devolved in Northern Ireland, especially that of immigration, makes a UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner a more attractive prospect than a Northern Ireland rapporteur. Thirdly, I appreciate that we are working in financially stringent times. The Department of Justice's budget is under considerable pressure, and the Minister outlined to the House that it would be considerably cheaper to be part of the UK-wide Anti-slavery Commissioner than to introduce a rapporteur exclusively focused on Northern Ireland.

Fourthly, the Minister and his officials, to their credit, gained a number of important concessions from the Home Office on how the Anti-slavery Commissioner would function in Northern Ireland. The Minister was not able to deliver everything that I would have liked on the commissioner, but I think that we got the most that we could have hoped for in the circumstances, and I commend him for that.

I have questions for the Minister that I want him to consider in his response to the debate today. First, how often does he envisage the Anti-slavery Commissioner coming to Northern Ireland? Will it be every month, every two months or every six months? Secondly, does he have any ideas about what kind of reports the Department would like the Anti-slavery Commissioner to produce? Thirdly and crucially, how will he ensure that the commissioner considers the nature of cross-border trafficking between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland?

I am very glad that Northern Ireland will be covered by the provisions seeking to enhance transparency in supply chains. A number of

stories have been reported in the British press about the presence of modern-day slavery in the supply chains of major firms in the United Kingdom. Those firms by no means support such dreadful practices but often do not realise that some of their suppliers are employing such methods. Having considered the proposals in the Modern Slavery Bill, I think that they strike a good balance in encouraging businesses to take meaningful action against modern-day slavery in their supply chains while not overburdening businesses with regulation. It would be helpful if the Minister could outline how many businesses his Department estimates would be affected in Northern Ireland by the new provision.

The Minister of Justice and his officials have been working on the LCM for quite some time, and it has not been easy for him to negotiate some aspects with the Home Office. I offer my congratulations to him on getting to the point of having the LCM approved by the House today.

Mr Dickson: I will be very brief, but it is important to note the important areas that the Bill covers, and, indeed, the complimentary way in which Lord Morrow referred to it. I particularly welcome the Bill in relation to shipping. I recently had to write to the Home Secretary about concerns that I raised about security at our ports and the frequency of inspections. I appreciate that the Bill does not specifically deal with that issue, but the extra powers to stop, board, divert and detain ships will no doubt aid efforts against serious and organised crime gangs exploiting the seas and our ports.

I particularly welcome the provisions on the appointment of an Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, which will complement and enhance our efforts to tackle human trafficking, among other things, the functions encouraging good practice in prevention, detection and investigation, and prosecution. The provisions will help us to improve security and protect the most vulnerable. I encourage Members to support the motion.

Mr Ford: I thank the Members who contributed to the debate. I suspect that it is more than a coincidence that, as Lord Morrow reminded us, we have the Final Stage of his private Member's Bill tomorrow. We will debate the fine detail of that Bill tomorrow, but I have no doubt that he is right in principle when he says that, with the Modern Slavery Bill, we are getting the best of both worlds: cooperating with the other UK jurisdictions when it is appropriate and going beyond that for

something better, whilst we might not entirely agree on the definition of "better" in this place.

Apart from the comments just made by Mr Dickson, very little reference was made to the issue of enforcement powers at sea. I take it, therefore, that we are fully agreed on that. Transparency in supply chains has attracted relatively little debate, yet it is of significant concern to a number of our NGO partners. Specifically on that point, I cannot give Lord Morrow any idea of the number of businesses among the UK's thousand largest that we currently believe would be affected, but the answer to the question that he did not ask, which was how many operate exclusively in Northern Ireland, is, we believe, probably none. It is therefore entirely appropriate that we link in to the UK-wide arrangements for that. However, as we see how the regulations develop, we will know exactly the answer to that question. I have no doubt that he will follow that through, whether in this place or in another place.

The key issue that raised interest was the matter of the Anti-slavery Commissioner and the role of the independent commissioner in Northern Ireland. I am grateful to Mr McCartney for the way in which he explained his party's previous support for the concept of a Northern Ireland rapporteur, but his willingness to accept that the significant concessions that we achieved in discussions with the Home Office, as highlighted by Lord Morrow, have made for a much better arrangement than was originally proposed, is welcome. Certainly, when I saw the first draft of the proposals from the Home Office, I saw that what was there would have been unacceptable. It may not be everything that we would want, but I believe that we now have the opportunities to use the independent commissioner in Northern Ireland in a way that will enhance our fight against slavery and human trafficking.

As to the three questions that Lord Morrow asked on that, I am not sure whether he expected me to have the answers on the hoof, but I will try. He asked how often I expect to see the Anti-slavery Commissioner in Northern Ireland, and the answer is this: as often as is reasonable. The commissioner was prepared to travel here last week. It turned out that the only group that he would have met comprised officials from the DOJ and me, so I thought that a phone call was more appropriate than asking him to jump on a plane. However, he has indicated his willingness to be involved, and, as I said earlier, he will take part in the cross-border conference due to take place next month.

To some extent, that answers the third question raised by Lord Morrow: the commissioner is fully aware, from his previous role in the Metropolitan Police, of the importance of the entire bundle of relationships within these islands, and he is fully aware of the cross-border issues that we have that other regions of the UK do not have. I think that he will certainly be prepared to ensure that he follows those through. The fact that he has the power to cooperate with organisations outside the UK is of significant benefit. I have no doubt from my contacts with the Department of Justice and Equality in Dublin that it will be keen that its officials cooperate with him as well.

Lord Morrow also asked what kind of reports I expect. I think that that will be the interesting point as we see the work done by officials from the Organised Crime Task Force and by the DOJ's engagement group, which is comprised predominantly of NGOs with concerns about human trafficking and modern slavery. As to what kind of reports we collectively wish to commission from him with particular regard to Northern Ireland as well as the wider reports that he is preparing for us, that is an open question. There is currently no restriction on what we might seek to ask in that respect, save for the fact that I am conscious of Lord Morrow's kind references to the budget of the DOJ: if we commission additional reports for Northern Ireland, the DOJ will pay for them, so we will not necessarily be able to commission that much.

Lord Morrow: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Ford: Sorry, I will let Lord Morrow heckle me more loudly, as I missed that.

Lord Morrow: I am sorry. I said that I hope that I have not been too kind.

Mr Ford: I was going to say, in summing up, that I am grateful for the extremely kind remarks that Lord Morrow has made because, as I have said on previous occasions, he wanted to see the colour of the Home Office's money before he withdrew his proposals for a Northern Ireland rapporteur. He was quite right in that, but I believe that the good work done by my officials — I claim some small credit for that myself — meant that the Home Secretary significantly modified her proposals to the extent that we will see a valid, UK-wide role that will mean that Scotland and Northern Ireland will benefit from the work of the commissioner. From my contacts with Kevin Hyland already, I believe that he intends to carry that through. I think that we can, therefore, have a degree of

confidence in the proposals, especially as we abolished the post of Northern Ireland rapporteur last week. On that basis, I commend all three sections of the LCM to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions of the Modern Slavery Bill, as brought from the Commons to the House of Lords on 5 November 2014, dealing with enforcement powers in relation to ships, as contained in clauses 37, 38 and 39 of Part 3 of the Bill and Part 3 of schedule 2 to the Bill; the Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, in Part 4 of the Bill; and transparency in supply chains, in Part 6 of the Bill.

1.15 pm

Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That the draft Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

This statutory rule is made under powers contained in the Energy Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which prescribes that these regulations must be laid in draft for approval by affirmative resolution of the Assembly. The draft regulations provide the statutory basis for the introduction of the Northern Ireland domestic renewable heat incentive (RHI). Policy proposals for the development of the Northern Ireland RHI were subject to public consultation last year. The consultation highlighted the need for further work to finalise the policy position and to draft these regulations. This has taken longer than I would have liked, but I am pleased to introduce the scheme now, and I hope that all Members will be supportive.

This legislation will provide the necessary powers for my Department to implement the domestic RHI scheme. The RHI will support generators of renewable heat in the domestic sector through upfront and long-term incentive payments that are designed to cover the additional costs involved in renewable technologies, as well as to provide a favourable rate of return for investors. Although our focus is often on renewable electricity generation, heating and transport are our two largest energy needs. Ensuring a more competitive and diverse heating market in Northern Ireland is therefore a key priority. In order to reduce our current reliance on fossil fuels, heat from indigenous and renewable sources must be promoted. To incentivise a switch to renewable heating technologies, the domestic RHI will provide households with upfront payments followed by seven years of tariff payments.

The domestic RHI will replace the grant support for householders currently available through my Department's renewable heat premium payment scheme, which I launched in May 2012. Through that scheme, over 1,200 renewable heat installations have been supported, and this represents a total investment of over £3 million. Householders who availed themselves of the premium

payment scheme will be able to transfer across to the new domestic RHI scheme.

We already have a very successful non-domestic RHI scheme in Northern Ireland, which has been in place since 2012. Applications are currently running at 4% of all UK applications, well ahead of the expected 3%. I hope to bring forward proposals to extend the non-domestic scheme in 2015. The regulations laid today are in relation to the domestic RHI, but there is one non-domestic issue in the regulations. The very last regulation is in relation to an issue that was brought to me about Carbon Trust loans and the RHI. A number of local businesses in receipt of 0% Carbon Trust loans could not avail themselves of the non-domestic RHI because their loans were classed as state aid. The regulations include an amendment to the non-domestic RHI to facilitate the payback of grants or aid. This will enable applicants to pay back their loans and become eligible for the RHI.

It is expected that the extension of the RHI to the domestic sector will increase the number of properties switching to renewable technologies and help achieve our target of 10% renewable heat by 2020. In addition, it is expected that the RHI will provide other, wider benefits in the form of fuel diversity, lower emissions and, importantly, jobs, particularly in association with the installation of the new technology.

The launch of the domestic RHI in conjunction with the grant support already in place represents up to £25 million of funding to 2015, with a further budget profile in annually managed expenditure until 2020. That amount demonstrates the national Government's commitment to increasing levels of renewable heating. Our targets in the Programme for Government have to be met, as do our European Union targets nationally, towards which we make a small contribution. It is accepted that it is a small contribution; however, it is one we still need to make.

These regulations will support the introduction of the domestic RHI and set a clear framework for the scheme, including how payments will be calculated and made, the conditions of the scheme and eligibility standards.

The domestic RHI scheme — as was the case with its predecessor, the renewable heat premium payment scheme — will be administered in-house by DETI, which is the most cost-effective option for delivery.

In conclusion, I ask that Members support the passage of the regulations. If they do, I will launch the domestic RHI scheme as soon as possible.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na moltaí seo a chur os ár gcomhair. I thank the Minister for bringing the proposal to us. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment welcomes the introduction of the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (NI) 2014.

The Committee recognises that, although Northern Ireland has no binding targets under the EU renewable energy directive, we are expected to contribute to the Westminster share of that target. As part of that share, the strategic energy framework commits the Department to achieving 40% of electricity and 10% of heat generated from renewable sources by 2020. However, as the Minister informed the House last week, the 40% target is due to be reviewed. To assist in increasing the level of renewable heat to 10%, the Westminster Government made £25 million of funding available to the Executive.

The introduction of the renewable heat incentive has provided a structured means to provide long-term guaranteed financial assistance for renewable heat installations. The incentive is designed to provide a cost-effective option for consumers to switch to renewable sources of heat. It also provides an option for any consumer to avail themselves of a source of heating that can lead to lower CO₂ emissions, increased fuel security and an increase in local employment opportunities in the green energy sector.

The 2012 RHI regulations represented the first phase in a two-phase approach to incentivising renewable heat generation. Phase 1 concentrated on non-domestic installations, and, in the intervening period, the Department has introduced the renewable heat premium payment scheme for domestic installations, which the Committee considered to be a fair and equitable approach in the intervening period until the development of a domestic renewable heat incentive.

At the time that the 2012 regulations were introduced, the Department informed the Committee that phase 2 of the scheme was to be introduced in the summer of 2013. The Committee has closely scrutinised the development of the renewable heat incentive

since that time and has requested and received regular updates from the Department. The Department informed the Committee in October this year that the renewable heat premium payment scheme had received more than 2,000 applications with almost 1,500 offers issued by energy division, representing support of around £2.7 million and a total investment of £9.2 million.

The regulations will provide the legislative basis for the domestic renewable heat incentive, and that is to be welcomed. The Department has informed the Committee that the renewable heat incentive will have scheduled reviews built in to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. The Committee will pay particular attention to those reviews and will continue to scrutinise the implementation of the non-domestic and domestic aspects of the scheme, especially in areas relating to eligibility criteria, compliance of participants, accreditation, metering and tariffs.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment therefore supports the Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 and recommends that the regulations be affirmed by the Assembly.

Mr Dunne: I, too, support the statutory rule and recognise its importance. Following the renewable heat incentive scheme in November 2012, it is important that a similar scheme is introduced for the domestic sector, as often the domestic is secondary to the commercial and industrial sectors.

Given that 98% of our heating fuels are imported fossil fuels, it is imperative that we support any initiative to encourage the greater uptake of renewables. That will also help to meet the 10% renewable heat target in the Programme for Government. The scheme, which has a number of key features, includes tariffs that have been specifically designed to bridge the financial gap between heating systems and will bring real benefits to those seeking to develop a renewable heat system. Another positive factor is the fact that the funding for the domestic RHI scheme will not impact on consumers' energy bills.

It is important that we have stability and certainty in this sector for domestic and non-domestic users, and this is a step in that direction. I welcome the rule and am happy to commend it to the House.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sí inniu. I thank

the Minister for what she said today, and I support the rule that she is bringing forward.

Phase 2 includes new technologies in the non-domestic sector and the introduction of an RHI scheme for domestic customers to replace the temporary scheme that was in place and was attractive for domestic householders. I suppose that this puts it on a more permanent footing and gives greater clarity to customers and those in the sector on what will exist in the future. The public consultation took place on phase 2 between July and October 2013, and much of the focus in the consultation responses was on the domestic sector and the opportunities that lay there. From a consumer point of view, the big focus that individuals and consumer advocates had was on the ability of householders to pay heating costs, which is a serious problem, particularly at this time of year. One of the biggest problems that householders face is growing heating costs, so I welcome the support that is being provided for domestic households to embrace renewable forms of heat generation. It is certainly more sustainable and more affordable. It is a small start, but I hope that it can be a catalyst for greater growth in the sector in the future.

The soaring cost of energy along with the continuing pressure on falling and stagnant household incomes presents great difficulties for many of our citizens, households and businesses. We have a complete over-reliance on fossil fuels for the creation of heat and electricity for our homes. The third aspect of that is transport, and that is where we need to see government support. We have seen some support across all of those areas, and that needs to be maintained.

The warm homes scheme helped people to reduce their bills through greater energy efficiency measures, and it is proposed to end that scheme in March. We need to explore whether that could be extended beyond March, because it is questionable that councils will be ready to go with affordable warmth from 1 April. Bryson has told me that it is about to put its staff in Fermanagh on protective notice, and that means that there may be a gap in provision between the ending of the warm homes scheme and the full roll-out of affordable warmth. I take the opportunity to appeal to the Minister to raise the matter with the Social Development Minister and the Environment Minister to see whether that very valuable service can be retained.

The boiler replacement scheme has been fairly unsuccessful. It is hard for people who are fuel-poor or live in a poor household to avail

themselves of that scheme. The numbers who have signed up for it are fairly low, and, although there is considerable demand for it, only around 5% of those who make an enquiry can or do get it. The terms of the boiler replacement scheme need to be reviewed, and it needs to be part of a much broader package, such as that proposed through the green new deal scheme, that would encourage people to invest in energy efficiency and energy conservation measures or to move across to renewable energy. This is a small step in the right direction, but the fact that people who want a boiler replacement have to put either £1,000 or £1,500 of their own money up front is a huge disincentive for some, particularly when you look at the payback time of moving from oil to gas or renewables. The fact that there is not a loan of £1,000 to support people in poor households to move across to benefit from such a good scheme is a bit of an anomaly.

The Minister proposed to bring forward an energy Bill, which would have been significant legislation for her Department. For one reason or another, including some of the implications of what happened at Westminster with energy policy and other matters, that is not going to happen. However, at some stage in the near future, the Minister needs to provide clarity on what legislation she intends to take forward to deal with energy-related issues between now and the end of the mandate.

In terms of support for large energy users through the scheme, it is concerning that reports came out the week before last from the regulator that some of our large energy users pay the highest electricity costs in Europe. They are now paying more than any other region in Europe. We want to see sustainable energy for all our customers, whether that is a domestic household or a large energy user.

If something is not done to tackle the high cost of electricity, which the Committee has raised on a number of occasions, there will be serious job losses across the sector. It is discouraging potential manufacturing companies from basing themselves here.

1.30 pm

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: Happily, Sammy, yes.

Mr Wilson: The Member used a phrase beloved of all politicians when they are not really sure what their policy is: "Something needs to be done". Perhaps he would tell us

what the "something" is that will reduce costs for large non-domestic energy consumers while not passing it on to domestic consumers.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. The Committee covered this in detail through phases 1 and 2 of our recent inquiry, which was debated last week with phase 3. One of the things that the Committee asked to be done was for the Department and the regulator to explore a possible scheme that would take the NISEP scheme and retail charges out of every customer's bill. We cannot simply hand money to large energy users because it would have state aid implications. I do not think that it is fair that we take money off them and hand it on to domestic customers, as there would be a knock-on impact, particularly in fuel-poor households. There are opportunities. I was not advocating that we do that; I was advocating that the Department and the regulator bring forward a paper on what such a scheme would look like, whereby the Executive actually put some money in themselves instead of funding for a NISEP scheme or the energy savings opportunity scheme (ESOS) that the Energy Bill proposed and that they fund that instead of it being added on to every unit of electricity. We do not have enough detail on it yet, but there is work that could be done to tease out what it would look like.

Mr Frew has a solution for constraint charges: the erection of an overground North/South interconnector. I think that the erection of an underground North/South interconnector along the route of the A5/N2 would solve many of those problems. There are huge issues with how the electricity industry here is regulated. I do not think that it is delivering for customers at the minute. Unfortunately, generators are running rings round the regulators North and South, and much more needs to be done to sort that out.

I move on to global matters. The reduction in crude oil prices has been heavily raised, although prices have gone down. With regard to petrol and diesel, the British Prime Minister, the British Chancellor and Danny Alexander have all raised the issue of how the global price of crude oil has dropped, but we have not seen a knock-on impact on —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order. I advise the Member to come back to the debate.

Mr Flanagan: I am coming back to it. We have seen those Ministers applying pressure to fuel companies and the knock-on impact on the

price of petrol and diesel, but we have not seen any reduction in the price that customers here pay for gas and electricity, despite falling prices. We have to ask why that significant fall in prices has not been passed on to hard-pressed consumers. The Utility Regulator has not done enough to pass those savings on, so that, despite the fall in global and wholesale prices, the price reduction has not been passed on to consumers. It certainly should have been at this stage.

There is a knock-on impact on non-regulated supply companies that take their prices from regulated firms, which are the prices that customers pay. I am tempted to talk about the impact of fracking on current prices, but I am sure that you would not let me, Mr Deputy Speaker. We need to look at where long-term future prices are going. Despite the present short-term reduction in crude oil and wholesale gas prices, the trend is very much upwards. The price of fossil fuels will continue to rise once fracking companies realise that it is not making them money, as the price of oil and gas has fallen because OPEC countries and companies know that it is in their interests not to increase supply at the minute. The long-term price is going up; that is why a scheme like this makes sense. I encourage people to look at the long-term projection for the cost of oil and gas as opposed to taking a short-term view.

As regards how we reach the challenging 10% target, which is the driver for the renewable heat incentive scheme, the public sector needs to take the lead on this. We need to see public-sector buildings and organisations making the change to renewable forms of energy, particularly heat. The fact that this Building is still heated with gas baffles me; I do not understand why we have not moved to a renewable form of heating for this Building. One of the reasons that I was given in the past was from the former Minister of Finance and Personnel, who told me that there was no room on the Stormont estate for a shed to store biomass to feed a boiler. Such attitudes need to be addressed. There is plenty of room here if somebody wanted to put up a shed and put a bit of timber in it to keep a boiler going. I do not think that that is the problem.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. I think I have given the Member plenty of room for flexibility. I wish that he would now do what he promised and return to the debate.

Mr Flanagan: I thank you for your guidance.

This scheme applies to the public sector, and public-sector organisations can avail

themselves of it. We need to see more work being done to encourage public-sector organisations, local authorities and others to make the change and invest in renewable heat generation. If we expect businesses and domestic households to make the change, the public sector needs to take the lead and show that this makes sense.

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the statutory rule. We as a party support it. It is good to see us encouraging switching to new technology. It is also good to see new clear frameworks, eligibility standards and jobs coming into the technology world. Many people in my constituency have used the boiler replacement scheme. We should do all we can to help people to heat their home and to especially have alternatives when one scheme or type of fuel gets more expensive than the others. That is what we should all push for.

I have one or two questions. When the Minister is responding, will she confirm whether we will support the use of air-source heat pumps for domestic purposes? The Member who spoke previously touched on this and said that the previous renewable heat premium payment scheme provided a one-off payment of £1,700 to domestic consumers. Will the Minister indicate what financial incentive there is? Are we looking at any? The impression I got from the previous Member who spoke was that we were not. What financial incentive will be offered to domestic users to help them to install renewable energy? Will we help them with loans or something else? Will it be as generous as the previous scheme?

I note that the Minister said that the Department would be running this. Did it consider Ofgem or other possibilities for that? It may well be that the Department is the best, but I am always slightly sceptical, because, when we try to do things ourselves, we tend to be that little bit slower. Being agile and trying to put things in place that mean that we can act quickly are essential. In my brief time on the Committee, I have heard the manufacturing industry say that energy is one of its three key costs. As the Member who spoke previously said, we really need to find a way to tackle it. Before Mr Wilson asks what my plan is to do that, I will tell him that it is to look at how we use better the small amounts of money that we have so that we can share. That means changing the regulations so that there are different ways to lever money on the back of what is being paid. I have not been on the Committee long enough to see all the different ways, but there must be ways. I know that Scotland has clever ways through its financial trust. I will say this with a

smile, but surely there is a way to use all the paperwork that we all get to heat the Building.

We support the regulation.

Mr Wilson: First, I will make it clear that I do not share some Members' enthusiasm for the use of renewable energy. That is mainly because, as I have pointed out time and again, renewable energy by its very nature is quite expensive and therefore has caused problems for domestic householders who have been hit by fuel poverty and for businesses. I am glad to see that the Minister is looking at reviewing the targets in response to the difficulties that have been caused.

I am pleased to see what the Minister has done. Although this is about domestic incentives, I am pleased that the Minister has used the opportunity of the regulation to smooth out an anomaly. If we are to have renewable energy, we should at least not impose further distortions on the market. There was a distortion on the market, whereby those who tried to do what the Minister sought to achieve — getting the targets for the use of renewable energy up — took loans from the Carbon Trust at an early stage.

As a result, they were not eligible to apply for the non-domestic incentives, because, as she pointed out, there was an issue with state aid. That, of course, distorted competition between those that were eligible for the incentives and those that were not. Although it was only a small number of businesses involved, they were very often competing with other businesses in the same sector and not able to access the same support for their heating, especially if their business was very heat-intensive. One business that contacted me is a nursery business that has a greatly intensive use of heat, especially early in the new year when it will be starting to bring on plants in glasshouses etc. A lot of heat is required for that. The incentives distorted the market, because some businesses had already got a Carbon Trust loan and therefore could not apply for any incentives to put in equipment in order to use renewable heat. The Minister has responded to that and removed the anomaly. Perhaps she should let us know when businesses will be eligible to apply.

In closing, I will mention that many people ask what use the Assembly is and what is done. The minutiae of government, which can have a huge impact on businesses, individuals and employment, can often be easily overlooked when it comes to the kind of reporting that goes on. I would like to congratulate the Minister. The issue was brought to her attention. I know

that it does not affect a lot of businesses, but it is important to those businesses that are affected. It is important to the people who work in those businesses. She has responded quickly. That is the kind of fleet-footedness that we want to see in government here. I thank the Minister. Although this is about domestic incentives, she has used the opportunity to relieve a problem that was causing difficulties for a small number of businesses in Northern Ireland. That has illustrated, once again, the value of having this place, where issues are looked at in Committee, responded to by officials and then brought to the Assembly by the Minister.

Mr B McCrea: When we get towards the end of the term and are approaching Christmas, there is a danger of getting bogged down in what appears to be "minutiae", as Mr Wilson called it. Having listened throughout the debate, this is one of the more significant bits of business that the Assembly will transact in the entire session. I am really very pleased that the Minister has brought it to our attention.

When we look at the regulations, there are a number of points to be made. One of the key ones is that heat and transport are a bigger part of our energy consumption than just about everything else. We tend to talk a lot about electricity, particularly if it comes from wind farms or the like, and there are certain problems with that. Our key challenge is to do with heating. I will put some things out there, but one of the things that I would like to hear about from the Minister concerns being joined up on tackling fuel poverty.

When people talk about the cost of renewables, one of the issues raised is that not all renewables cost the same amount of money. Gas is one of the most cost-effective sources of energy at the moment, but, of course, not everybody is connected to gas pipelines. Mr Kinahan talked about air-source heat pumps. I wonder whether he was also minded to include ground-source heat pumps. When you look at the cost of installation and the ongoing costs, you will see that heat pumps are even cheaper than gas in the longer term. Therefore, if you want to do renewables, that is a cost-effective solution. Furthermore, heat pumps were invented by a man from Northern Ireland known as Lord Kelvin. I say "invented"; rather, he worked out the theoretical background to them.

On the issue of trying to get joined-up working to support the domestic initiative that the Minister has announced here today, the University of Ulster is, of course, our lead on energy matters through Horizon 2020.

They will have been able to draw down I think £11 million from European sources: not from the Assembly, not from Westminster, but from European sources, of course with the assistance, I am quite sure, of DETI in the proposals, so — *[Interruption.]* — If you will excuse me. Yes, very bad. I do apologise.

1.45 pm

The key point, though, having got people's attention, is that there are areas where we can take research that has been developed in the University of Ulster coming through Horizon 2020, which we are all agreed that we should try to do more of, and let us see if we can get more —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): Order, please. Now that the Member has switched off his mobile phone, could I encourage him to get back to the subject?

Mr B McCrea: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take guidance from you, of course, but I do think that this is absolutely germane to the point. I hope that the Minister will be talking to her colleagues in the Strategic Investment Board about how we might use the financial transactions capital to assist in other incentives for domestic encouragement. That should be tied in with the research that we do for the university.

I will just conclude by saying where we might have industrial support. We have Emerson, Kingspan, and the people in Newry, Glen Dimplex, all of whom have got low-energy and low CO2 heat equipment available. But you run into a problem when you try to adopt that as part of the scheme that the Minister is going to bring forward because it is not clear that the domestic electrical connections will be strong enough to support this equipment.

We need to do a bit of work on that. We can bring down the power utilisation of this equipment or strengthen the grid. We had a discussion about who would pay for the enhancement of the grid.

This is important, because fuel poverty affects our people significantly. These initiatives are good for not just the climate but they offer a way of bringing fuel relief to those most in need. Secondly, it should not go beyond notice that at a time of real austere financial conditions, the Prime Minister is announcing flood defences. We are spending money on flood defences when we could be spending it elsewhere. That is an indication of the climate change issue.

Finally, it was announced recently that China and the US voluntarily agreed that they would do something about climate emissions. That is why the initiatives that are being announced by the Minister are significant. They are not just something tagged on at the end of business. It is a really important thing and I look forward to seeing how it develops. I wish her well with her initiatives.

Mrs Foster: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank those Members who contributed to the debate, sometimes going way beyond what is in front of us, but still important to address. I thank the Chair and members of the Committee for their scrutiny of these matters.

I will pick up on a few issues that were raised. In relation to Mr Flanagan's comments about Bryson staff in Fermanagh, he will not be surprised to know that that is an issue I have been aware of. I raised it with the last DSD Minister, and commitments were given in relation to allowing those people in Fermanagh, who do an absolutely marvellous job from Fermanagh House, to stay in position until the new system came online in March 2015. I hear what the Member is saying about the readiness of that scheme in 2015. It is certainly something that I will be speaking to the new DSD Minister about.

He mentioned the boiler replacement scheme. One of the attractions of that scheme, which was a point also made by Mr Kinahan, is that there is a payment up front in relation to the domestic RHI, depending on your technology. You will get help initially and then be able to avail yourself of the seven-year tariff incentives.

With biomass boilers and stoves, you get an upfront payment of £2,500, which helps you to purchase the equipment, and then you get help for seven years. That is a good way to bring in the domestic RHI. It is done differently in Great Britain, which just has the tariff incentive but does not have the upfront payment, which I felt was needed.

I will not get into the wider issues about falling oil costs and upward price trends, because I am sure that the regulator will want to look at those issues herself. Suffice to say that I am not sure that the generators will agree with Mr Kinahan's view; it is not the impression that I am getting from them. It is important, however, that we have steady prices. The last thing we want with electricity prices are spikes and valleys, because they lead to a lot of uncertainty for consumers. The regulator has been trying to deal with those issues.

Mr Kinahan asked whether air-source heat pumps are included in the domestic RHI. Air-to-water heat pumps are included, but air-to-air heat pumps are not. Air-to-air heat pumps are not included because concerns were raised about their efficiency and use. They have not been included at this stage, but that does not mean that we will not include them later. Air-to-water heat pumps are included, and again there is an upfront payment of £1,700, followed by the tariff.

I have addressed installation costs.

Did we consider Ofgem to administer the scheme? We did, but we felt that DETI was better placed to deal with the Northern Ireland situation. I have to say to the Member that "agile" is not a word that I would use to describe Ofgem. I have had a number of complaints from people who have put solar panels in place through Ofgem and have not been paid yet.

Mr Wilson referred to the Carbon Trust loan. I am indebted to officials for allowing me to include that in the regulations. I felt that that was the best way to give clarity, because there had been a bit of toing and froing over whether it was state aid and how to deal with it. So I am pleased to have been able to help businesses that have had difficulty with that issue.

I very much agree with Mr McCrea that this is important legislation, which we have been waiting on for some time. I am delighted that we can deal with the issue today. If the regulations are agreed today, it is my hope that the domestic RHI can begin immediately.

I encourage the House to support the regulations. They will help us to have more fuel diversity in our heating market, allow us to be more competitive and to look to the future with confidence. I thank Members for their contributions and urge them to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Committee Business

Food Hygiene Rating Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 May 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA 41/11-16).

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Food Hygiene Rating Bill passed its Second Stage on 11 November 2014. It should, under the 30-working-day rule, complete its Committee Stage on 13 January 2015.

The main objective of the Bill is to introduce legislation that will make it mandatory for food businesses to display their food hygiene rating stickers, which will be supplied after inspection by district council food safety officers. That will ensure that consumers are provided with information about food hygiene standards in places where they eat out or shop for food.

The Committee, at its meeting on 5 November, agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals. Although the proposed Bill is likely to be straightforward legislation, a number of issues will need to be explored in more detail. The Committee feels that it is essential that it is afforded the time to exercise its scrutiny powers to the full. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I ask that the House support the motion to extend the Committee Stage to 8 May 2015.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 May 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Food Hygiene Rating Bill (NIA 41/11-16).

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat): As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until then.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFMDFM: Financial Cuts

1. **Lord Morrow** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what impact the recently announced financial cuts will have on the delivery of departmental services. (AQO 7216/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): The draft Budget proposals for OFMDFM include resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) allocation of £65.4 million, in comparison with the 2014-15 opening budget of £65.8 million. This is a reduction of 0.6%. The allocation includes £5 million which is ring-fenced for the historical institution abuse inquiry and an allocation of £3 million for the Victims and Survivors Service. The impact, however, on the remaining areas of the Department's budget is a reduction of £8.4 million or 12.8%. Additional pressures of £1.7 million have also been identified, and that gives a total estimated pressure for 2015-16 of £10.1 million.

While the draft resource budget will allow the Department to make progress on a number of priority programmes, there will be very significant pressures across the Department's activities, including its arm's-length bodies. To deliver those further reductions, the Department will scrutinise its entire budget, including staffing, administration costs, funding for arm's-length bodies and funding for programmes. Within the Department, reductions of this magnitude will require cuts in staffing, and the proposed voluntary exit scheme will be important in that regard. Action will also be required to constrain costs and reduce discretionary spend. Funding for arm's-length bodies and programmes will also be impacted upon, and the emphasis will be on ensuring that statutory responsibilities are discharged, contractual commitments met and Programme for Government and ministerial priorities progressed as far as possible within the available resources.

While the Department will seek to ensure that impacts on front-line services are minimised, it will not be possible to fully protect budget areas from the impact of the proposed budget reductions.

Lord Morrow: I thank the deputy First Minister for his reply. In relation to the historical institutional abuse inquiry, which, I understand, is not scheduled to report until 2017, is it likely that that report will be another that is shelved due to lack of funding?

Mr M McGuinness: The draft opening budget of £65.4 million for the Department includes an allocation of £5 million for the historical institutional abuse inquiry — funding which previously would have been received in-year. The historical institutional abuse inquiry has been operating since 1 October 2012. In April 2014, the chair asked for and was granted an extension of 12 months in view of the increasing complexity of the inquiry, and it is now, as the Member said, expected to report by January 2017. This has been, along with support for the Victims and Survivors Service, a huge priority for the Department. We recognise that the historical institutional abuse inquiry has an onerous task and huge responsibilities, and I think the fact that we have been in a position to prioritise support for both the historical institutional abuse inquiry and victims and survivors is a very clear indicator of how much priority the First Minister and I place on the outcomes of these important exercises.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Does he support the proposal for five-party Budget talks with Downing Street and the Treasury? Does he agree with me that these talks should take place now, this week, so that London will acknowledge once and for all the particular financial needs of people here in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I have long since recognised the importance of challenging the way in which our block grant in particular has been dealt with over the four and a half years that the coalition Government have been in power in London. It was at our initiative that we brought the five party leaderships together at a meeting in Stormont Castle during the last couple of weeks to discuss a joint approach to the huge challenges that all our Departments face as a result of the austerity agenda being deployed by the coalition Government. We recognise that, this week,

there is an opportunity to put directly — I think that it is much more powerful if it is done with the five parties represented, as opposed to just the First Minister and me — what we think is a very powerful case in relation to the particular, exceptional challenges that we face here. The problems that we face here are completely different from the challenges in the north of England, in Scotland or in Wales, and it has to be recognised that the strategy being adopted by the coalition Government is detrimentally affecting the work of our Executive and the Assembly.

The short answer is yes: it is much stronger if we are united. My sense of the discussions that the First Minister and I have been involved in is that we have a united approach among the five main parties in the Assembly.

Mr Kinahan: Does the deputy First Minister agree that all Ministers and Departments should agree to choose priorities or look at ring-fencing those services that each Department delivers that affect health and safety and, particularly, the risk of death?

Mr M McGuinness: The draft Budget, which is out for consultation, presents huge challenges for every single Department in the Executive. None of us is under any illusions about that. It is also very important to remember that, when people speak about the challenges that we face and talk about cuts from the Executive, the cuts are actually being made in London. The decisions are being made in London by the coalition Government, and they are dictating the ability of our Departments to deal with the huge challenges that we face across a range of issues. Of course, the Member will be very conscious that, prior to the last general election, the Ulster Unionist Party effectively signed up to what was a very negative, austere budgetary agenda that was coming down the tracks at the behest of the coalition Government. With the resources that are available as a result of the cuts from London, Departments will obviously have to decide how to prioritise to ensure that we deliver, as best as we possibly can, support for front-line services.

Corporation Tax

2. **Mr McQuillan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what importance they place on the devolution of corporation tax powers in achieving the Programme for Government 2011-15 target of rebalancing the economy. (AQO 7217/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Securing powers to lower corporation tax is a key priority for the Executive to promote the growth of the local economy. We believe that the devolution of rates-setting powers would enable us to rebuild and rebalance the economy towards greater private sector and output growth. Reducing the corporation tax rate should increase foreign direct investment and domestic investment, expand our economy and bring greater numbers of higher value-added jobs. There should be linkages to the wider economy through increased spending, growth and rising incomes, and this should result in a larger private sector.

Any future decision to reduce the corporation tax rate here will mean a reduction in the Executive's budget. The published autumn statement states that the Government will introduce legislation in this Parliament subject to satisfactory progress in the cross-party talks.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. What is he doing to achieve this and make sure that we do get corporation tax devolved?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that I have done quite a lot. I have been involved in all the discussions and have worked with the First Minister, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the previous and the current Finance Ministers. I think that it is clear to everybody that there is cross-party support in the Executive, certainly among the major parties. I know that there is one or maybe two discordant notes, but the overwhelming majority of Members recognise that the prospect of us being in a position to create anything in the region of 50,000 new jobs would be of tremendous benefit to our people. Even against the backdrop of a world economic downturn and lack of corporation tax powers, we have, over the past couple of years, managed to bring in more foreign direct investment jobs than we have at any other time in the history of the state. Just think what we could do if we had a lower rate of corporation tax. I know that there is a debate about it out there at this time, given the backdrop of the cuts that have come from London. People are talking about affordability, but, for us, it is about getting the power, and then our Executive will decide how we use that power.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer so far. In what circumstances does he feel it would be possible to make changes to

the corporation tax rate if, and when, the power is transferred to the Executive?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, the important thing at this point is to get the power transferred. When that is done, we can decide on how and when it can be best utilised. Obviously, we must be satisfied that the prevailing economic conditions are conducive to any change in the rate. In the current context of savage cuts to our block grant, it is clear that the issue will need to be satisfactorily addressed. Nevertheless, I am in favour of all powers being repatriated from London. I noted George Osborne's comments during his autumn statement, but it is the Assembly and the Executive who should decide the terms and conditions of when any changes to the corporation tax rates are made. It is a big issue.

As I said earlier, there is a big debate going on out there; many different voices have been raised. I think that is good; it is absolutely essential that people have a very clear understanding of what we are getting ourselves into. In any circumstance where a power is devolved, the ability to use that power in whatever way we want resides with the Executive. I do not think that the Executive that we are part of is going to be in any way foolhardy about how we would utilise such a power. I know that the big debate is around whether we can afford it vis-à-vis the way in which Departments have been cut over recent times, but we are going into important talks over the next couple of days. We are speaking with a united voice in relation to the need for David Cameron to recognise that, when he comes here, he does not come as someone who is facilitating talks, but as a player in the talks and one with a particular contribution to make.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the deputy First Minister as well. He made reference to David Cameron coming this week. Has any clarity been sought from the British Government, particularly with regard to their position in Europe and the implications it may have? The Irish Government have consistently portrayed themselves and the levers that they have at their disposal as being the gateway to Europe. One of those levers is reduced corporation tax. In the event of Euroscepticism prevailing, has the Minister made any assessment of its effect, positive or otherwise — I think it would be mainly negative, even with corporation tax renewed here in the North — in

that we would be a fortress and not a gateway to the rest of Europe?

Mr M McGuinness: Our focus, as always, is on how we can lower the unacceptable rate of unemployment that exists. Over the past 22 months, we have been very lucky that we have managed to lower the unemployment figures each month, but much more work needs to be done, particularly west of the Bann. The challenges that we face are challenges that require the support of different institutions. I know that when the First Minister and I have travelled for what has been a very successful exercise in attracting foreign direct investment from the United States, nearly all the major businesses that we have spoken to in the United States have talked about the importance of the relationship of this island with Europe. So, a debate in England on the prospect of a withdrawal from Europe is big stuff as far as we, Scotland, Wales and the South of Ireland are concerned.

My own view is to agree with Nicola Sturgeon, the new First Minister of Scotland, that, in the event of a referendum, the devolved Administrations should have the right to their own referendum. Speaking personally, I do not think that there is any doubt whatsoever how the people of the North would vote: they would vote for us to continue with what has been a very productive relationship in respect of foreign direct investment with the United States and also with the European Union, which has been very supportive of us for a very long time.

2.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I want to make the point that Members should put their question and be as direct as possible. Ministers have two minutes to answer, but Members do not have two minutes to get round to asking their question.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the deputy First Minister. The deputy First Minister rightly points out that there is tripartite agreement on getting corporation tax devolved, but there is probably no agreement as to what to do with it. In light of the First Minister's comments about the functionality of the Assembly and Bro McFerran's comments about whether Northern Ireland is ready for it, does the deputy First Minister feel that the Assembly needs to be reformed to make it ready and functional for corporation tax?

Mr M McGuinness: I know that the Member has his own, quite legitimate, agenda in relation

to his Bill, and he has discussed it with the First Minister and me, as well as with other parties in the Assembly. I hope for a successful outcome to the talks this week. It is vital for the institution, for the Executive, and for the people out there who are looking for leadership from their politicians to get an agreement.

In trying to reach agreement, we have already achieved considerable agreement, particularly around budgetary issues. The fact is that all the parties in the Assembly are in favour of having the power to decide on the level of our corporation tax. Do we have the ability to deal with that? Absolutely. I think that we have. However, the talks this week will tell the tale whether the institution goes forward or does not go forward in the medium and longer term. So, there are big challenges, but, in the context of knowing what to do with having the power devolved to us on corporation tax, I do not think that anybody in the Executive is under any illusions about how we need to take that forward. We have a plan that I think has the overwhelming support of the business community.

Equality Obligations: OFMDFM

3. **Mr I McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department's equality obligations are to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland. (AQO 7218/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, junior Minister McCann will answer the question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, together with schedule 9 to the Act, place a statutory obligation on public authorities in carrying out their various functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation. It is also between men and women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without a disability and between persons with dependants and persons without dependants.

In addition, without prejudice to that obligation, public authorities are also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group. The statutory obligations are largely implemented through equality schemes approved by the

Equality Commission and by screening and carrying out equality impact assessments on policies. All Government policy is developed in the context of the equality of opportunity provisions set out in section 75(1) of the NI Act 1998.

Mr I McCrea: Gerry Adams made disgraceful comments when he said:

*"The point is to actually break these b*****s... And what's going to break them is equality."*

Can the junior Minister, on behalf of the deputy First Minister, categorically state whether they agree with those sentiments?

Ms J McCann: Gerry Adams has already clarified his position on those comments. In terms of OFMDFM's responsibility, we are certainly committed to equality and will continue to work for the removal of any barriers that prevent it. That equality has to go right across the board. It is about social equality, economic equality and cultural equality. No one should be trying to put up barriers or to prevent equality legislation being brought forward in any way.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. One of the outstanding issues from the St Andrews Agreement is the single equality Bill. Will one be brought forward soon?

Ms J McCann: The Member makes a very valid point. At present, anti-discrimination legislation in the North, as I said, covers all the elements that I discussed in my previous answer. There is a lot of equality legislation out there, and there was a lot of support for a single equality Bill to be brought forward. That is because the idea of harmonising all the existing provisions into one piece of legislation through a single equality Bill and extending and updating it where appropriate seemed to be the best way forward. While it has not moved forward since 2006, I hope that there is still agreement to take that single equality Bill forward.

Mr Lyttle: Does the Minister agree that the politicisation of equality provision as a Trojan Horse is unacceptable? Will she take the opportunity to reject those comments?

Ms J McCann: I do not think that any politicisation of any issue on equality is acceptable. Equality is, as I said, a basic human right for people. I think that everyone should be treated the same. We should respect

and be tolerant of people and respect diversity. We need to be enforcing all equality legislation that is there now in any way that we can, and we need to ensure that it is monitored and that all equality legislation in central government, local government and, indeed, any public bodies is adhered to. I believe that nobody should use equality in any way for political reasons.

Mr Allister: Given the imperative and the guidance issued by the Minister's party president, does she really think that anyone will believe her protestations that she is not using her office to use equality as a Trojan Horse to advance the republican strategy? If she is not, will she repudiate, without equivocation, all those remarks?

Ms J McCann: I will say to the Member, as I said in my previous answers, that the equality agenda needs to be totally adhered to by all. I believe that it is only through the process and the equality agenda and, indeed, through progressing issues like a bill of rights for the North, where everyone will be entitled to equality —

Mr Allister: Another Trojan Horse.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms J McCann: Nobody should be putting up any barriers to bringing forward equality legislation and, indeed, the equality principles and the ethos of equality. In my view, it is the only thing that will challenge bigotry, intolerance and the disrespect that many people have for other people's culture, religion and sexual orientation. In my mind, it is the only way that we can ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity.

Gulladuff Hall/South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society

4. **Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department, or its arm's-length bodies, has provided or administered funding to Gulladuff Hall and the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society. (AQO 7219/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Neither the Department nor any of its arm's-length bodies has provided or administered funding to Gulladuff Hall or to the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society.

Mrs Overend: I thank the deputy First Minister — *[Interruption.]* Should I go ahead? Is that

fine, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker? I thank the deputy First Minister for clarifying that. Does he agree that the revelations in the BBC 'Spotlight' programme merit a serious investigation into just how that hall and the South Derry Cultural and Heritage Society were funded?

Mr M McGuinness: 'Spotlight' made an allegation that Sinn Féin was engaged in some form of fraudulent activity. That is not the case. Sinn Féin could have developed the site and rented it back to representatives, just like many other parties. In that case, local people, including Sinn Féin members, took the decision to develop the site for wider community use. That is a sustainable approach to community development. In the programme, three of the four trustees acknowledged that they, not Sinn Féin, owned the site. Of course, the BBC relied on one trustee, who is now a member of a so-called republican organisation, Republican Sinn Féin — a dissident group. That member, at a public commemoration in Derry city just a few short years ago, publicly called for my execution. I think that the attempt to smear Sinn Féin is very clear for all to see. That is not what we expect from impartial journalism.

Mr Allister: Who is getting the rent?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I will take action if people are going to shout from a sedentary position. The rules are very clear, and no one in the Chamber should be under any misapprehension about that.

Mrs D Kelly: I note that the initial question asked about arm's-length bodies, but will the deputy First Minister indicate whether any moneys from the social investment fund are being targeted in the geographical area where the two organisations are based?

Mr M McGuinness: How money is targeted in social investment fund areas is a matter for the groups that were established to prioritise the benefits to the local community through funds from the social investment fund being utilised for the purposes of support for that community.

I have been in Gulladuff Hall quite a number of times. The hall is used extensively. I was there recently, when a member of the local community had died. The congregation at the church went back to the hall, where they were provided with sustenance. I have been at many other venues in the south Derry area, such as GAA clubs, that provide a similar service.

It is very wrong for people not to recognise the massive contribution that those halls and

support services make to the local community. It is absolutely essential that those communities be supported and have people in them who are in a position to provide not just a venue but support for them, particularly at a time of grief.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that the original question dealt with allegations levelled in the 'Spotlight' programme, will the deputy First Minister give us his views on those allegations?

Mr M McGuinness: Many of the allegations contained in the programme were neither factual nor impartial. Take the Gulladuff centre as one example. As I said, of the four trustees, three said that the building was not owned by Sinn Féin and that Sinn Féin did not own the site. However, the BBC decided to rely on one trustee, who was on public record not so long ago, at a public event in Derry — in the cemetery in Derry, I think that it was — as calling for me to be executed. I think that that raises all sorts of questions about how impartial the journalism was in all of this. The BBC should correct that.

2.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the time for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

Ashers Bakery: Conscience Clause

T1. **Mr Dunne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they believe that, given the launch today of a private Member's Bill to include a conscience clause, the Equality Commission should now withdraw legal action against Ashers Bakery pending the outcome of the legislative process. (AQT 1861/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, junior Minister McCann will answer this question.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware that some discussions took place between the Equality Commission and the bakery prior to the civil case being taken. The main issue is the extent to which suppliers of goods and services can refuse service on the grounds of sexual orientation, religious beliefs or political opinion. I think that the civil case will determine whether any discrimination has taken place.

Mr Dunne: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the Equality

Commission should withdraw its legal action pending against Ashers Bakery at this time?

Ms J McCann: It is not up to OFDMFM to agree or disagree with the Equality Commission. It is its own body and it has an independent role to advance fairness and equality for all. It is also responsible for implementing legislation on all those cases and challenging discrimination. We have to leave it to the Equality Commission because, at the end of the day, that will be where it will see whether discrimination happened. I am sure that the Equality Commission will have taken whatever measures it could have before entering into that case.

Talks Process: Timely Conclusion

T2. **Lord Morrow** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how confident the deputy First Minister is that the present talks will be concluded within the timescale outlined by the Prime Minister, David Cameron. (AQT 1862/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The time frame for the talks was determined by more than David Cameron. It appears to me, from the discussions that I have been involved in, that there is universal agreement that, if these talks are not concluded before Christmas, there is little or no prospect in its aftermath of our finding a way forward. It is absolutely vital that we conclude these discussions. I would like to see that done by the end of this week and that is what I am aiming for.

The fact that the Taoiseach and David Cameron have announced that they are coming here on Thursday is a very clear indication that people recognise that we are coming to the crunch in relation to these talks. It is not as if we are coming at all of this afresh. We have been round the mulberry bush with this for the last year and a half with the Haass/O'Sullivan discussions and the progress that was made there. The issues are very clear for all the parties. We all know what the issues are. The added complication is obviously the budgetary situation; the austerity agenda embarked upon by the coalition Government, which has a dramatic impact on a society emerging from the sort of conflict that we have emerged from over the course of recent times.

If there is a will, there is a way to ensure that these discussions are successful. People outside are crying out for that and they are crying out for leadership. From our perspective in Sinn Féin, and in the course of the

negotiations that we were involved in with the DUP and other parties in the St Andrews and Hillsborough talks, the past record of achieving things has been good. The last two years have been terrible and we rapidly need to put an end to that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr M McGuinness: We need to ensure that we are all working very closely together over the next few days.

Lord Morrow: I have listened carefully to what the deputy First Minister has said. If the success of these talks depended on his revealing his past involvement in illegal activities, would he still be confident of success?

Mr M McGuinness: I am always confident of success, and I have been around the political process for long enough to know that the events of the last 30 or 40 years do not all come to my door. They come to the doors of many parties and participants, not least the British Government, previous Administrations in the North and those who supported the activities of the British Army, the RUC and British military intelligence. There was arms importation, collusion, manipulation of loyalist death squads, so it was down to many others. We must recognise, as we did during the Haass negotiations, the need for solutions and the provision of a menu of options for people to access so that they can find out the truth of what happened, for example, to their family. That is the big challenge for us all. We went into the Haass negotiations on the basis of our position on the three main issues: the past, parades and identity. We compromised, but, sadly, others were not able to meet us in that compromise, which provided a way forward. I made it absolutely clear during those negotiations that, if we provided mechanisms to deal with the past, I for one would advocate that republicans and, indeed, others should contribute to a successful outcome that would deal with the whole issue of the past.

Corporation Tax: Diverted Profits

T3. **Mr Lunn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the announcement by the Chancellor of an increased tax on diverted profits will impact on the new arrangements for corporation tax in this part of the country. (AQT 1863/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: All that remains to be seen. We are all conscious that the devolution of the power will mean that a very important discussion has to take place not only at the Executive but between the Executive and the powers that be in London, including the Treasury. As many Members will know, we have been involved in discussions on corporation tax over the last couple of years. Any complication that might flow from that will have to be addressed by the Finance Minister, the Enterprise Minister, the First Minister and me.

Mr Lunn: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Is it the intention that profits earned on production in Northern Ireland will be taxed in Northern Ireland, and, flowing from that, does he anticipate that we may have the option of an increased tax on diverted profits along the same lines that the Chancellor has suggested for Great Britain?

Mr M McGuinness: Power over taxation rests with the Treasury and other institutions in England. From our perspective, we are keenly interested to see how that will be dealt with. I will not go into the detail of the discussions that we have had with the Treasury and others in the course of this exercise, except to say that there is a debate about fiscal levers and how they could be utilised to our advantage. That does not mean to say that there is an accord between each of us on how to deal with it; that would be the subject of negotiations and there would need to be agreement between ourselves and London. One issue that has been raised recently is that if we managed to create tens of thousands of new jobs and put people into employment, the taxation raised from that would be the subject of considerable discussion on how we could benefit.

Talks Process: Outcome

T4. **Dr McDonnell** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they agree that the outcome of the talks process must be comprehensive and provide a conclusive agreement on the way forward for all the issues that are on the table, not just finance but the Haass bundle, the structures and functions and the unfinished business of the Good Friday Agreement. (AQT 1864/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: I absolutely agree with the Member. Any agreement short of a comprehensive one will be held up to public ridicule. We face huge challenges. As many people know, there are budgetary challenges, but there are also challenges in how we deal

with the past, the whole issue of identity and parades. We just have to look at what happened on the streets over the past two years. I certainly do not want that to be repeated. That was specifically over the flag protest and the protest over the whole issue of parades. I have a very strong view that all of us in these institutions have a duty and a responsibility to agree a comprehensive way forward on all these very difficult issues, which, if not dealt with, could conceivably jump up to bite us in the coming years. The community deserves better than that.

Dr McDonnell: I ask the deputy First Minister for his assessment of whether the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach are in a position to help us over the line, come Thursday, or will it take a bit more time?

Mr M McGuinness: We should aim to get this done for the weekend. I heard the First Minister say on BBC radio, just an hour or two ago, that, if enough progress was made and it took another day or two, we could live with that. I could live with that, but we cannot live with it going past Christmas, and that appears to be agreed by everybody. So there is a big challenge for all of us to get this done. One of the biggest challenges is for David Cameron to face up to the case that the First Minister and I, and other parties, have made in relation to the budgetary decisions that the Government have made and the austerity agenda that is impacting so negatively on our situation.

It is also important to say that the First Minister and I had a useful discussion on the margins of the NSMC meeting in Armagh on Wednesday: for example, when I raised the issue of the Irish Government's funding commitment to the A5 road scheme, I got a very encouraging answer, which I and, no doubt, the First Minister will continue to explore with the Taoiseach. He certainly gave a very strong indication during our deliberations in Armagh that he recognises that budgetary issues will have to be dealt with, by him and the British Government, during our talks in the next few days.

Social Investment Fund: Ring-fenced

T5. **Mr Spratt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the deputy First Minister will confirm that social investment fund money is ring-fenced and will not be subject to departmental cuts. (AQT 1865/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I ask junior Minister McCann to take this question.

Ms J McCann: We are dealing with Budget pressures because of the cuts to the block grant. Some £3.6 billion has been taken out of the Budget in previous years, and 2015-16, the last year of the four-year Budget cycle, will definitely be the worst year. We hope that the social investment fund will go forward. I know that 23 projects have already been signed off, and others are waiting to be signed off. They are projects that will make a big difference in communities and have been developed from the community side up. We are hopeful that we will be able to deliver those. However, unless we get the economic injection that the deputy First Minister talked about, we will face more economic constraints than we have probably ever faced before. While we are trying our best to ensure that the projects from the social investment fund go forward, there is a danger that a lot of programmes, projects and essential services for people on the ground — front-line services — will be affected.

2.45 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that question 14 has been withdrawn.

Fire Safety: Rural Areas

1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the proposed cuts to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service will increase safety risks in the community, particularly in rural areas. (AQO 7231/11-15)

Mr Wells (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): As part of the Department's planning process for 2015-16, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has been asked to develop a range of savings proposals that could deliver the best possible outcomes under three scenarios — 5%, 10% and 15% reductions. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service will be required to risk-assess and prioritise savings proposals on the basis of those that minimise the impact on service delivery before submission to my Department.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he believe that firefighting, very much a front-line service, should be classed as a front-line service and, therefore, be exempt from any cuts?

Mr Wells: The difficulty that I face is that the new budget for 2015-16 that I received as part of the October monitoring round has assessed firefighting and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service as a non-front-line service. I understand why the Member has great difficulty with that. Indeed, I know that those who work for the Fire Service have a very different view. The problem is that, whilst we were awarded an extra £200 million, we have to find £50 million savings in what are termed non-front-line services. There is actually a very small proportion of my budget where I can find that £50 million. If I were to accept that the Fire Service is front line and should not be subject to those reductions, it is extremely difficult to see where we would find the rest of those savings. Indeed, the Executive endorsed that definition as part of the draft Budget for 2015-16. The Executive believe that the Fire Service should not receive the same protection as front-line health and social care elements mostly delivered, of course, by the five trusts. That is consistent with the decision taken on other front-line services, such as the Police Service.

Ms P Bradley: What proportion of the Fire Service's costs are staff related?

Mr Wells: Eighty-three per cent of the total cost of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service are staff related, with the other 17% taken up with items such as training, uniforms, publicity, equipment etc. That makes the decision on how to achieve those savings even more difficult, because any form of staff reduction has a commensurate cost. Therefore, I accept that the Fire and Rescue Service has difficulties with that. Indeed, I am meeting the chairman of the board, Mr Joe McKee, this afternoon. I have already had discussions with the unions, and individual firefighters have approached me about this. I am under no illusion as to how difficult an ask this is for the Fire and Rescue Service, and I accept that it is causing severe problems. Mr McKee has made it very clear that some of what we are asking will be exceptionally difficult to deliver.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Has the Minister met members of the Fire and Rescue Service and members of the Fire Brigades Union? If he

has, will he detail the outcome of those meetings?

Mr Wells: As I mentioned in response to the previous question, I am due to meet the chairman of the Fire and Rescue Service Board this afternoon. I have had meetings with union representatives, and I intend to see other stakeholders in that sector to talk through the various options. There are suggested reductions that can be made on issues such as commercial contracts, temporary promotions, overtime and natural wastage but, beyond that, it is difficult, at the moment, to see how we can take things much further.

The difficulty is that I have to find the £50 million, as things stand, in my budget. I have only a very limited number of arm's-length bodies that I can approach in order to achieve those savings. Unfortunately, the Fire and Rescue Service falls into that category. It will be a difficult debate and discussion between my Department and the arm's-length bodies over the next three months. I do not want us to underestimate for one minute how difficult this will be to achieve. Other organisations such as the Public Health Agency and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council are also involved here. We have great difficulties, but we simply have no option but to balance the books for 2015-16 by finding this £50 million.

Mrs Dobson: Does the Minister agree that cuts to the Fire Service would have a more momentous impact than cuts to most other public services, especially on farms and in rural areas, where we have seen far too many farm deaths in recent years? What further scope for efficiency does he believe exists in the Fire Service without touching those vital life-saving front-line services?

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for her question; I know that she is basing it on her understanding of the rural community. At the moment, the Fire Service has a budget of £74 million. I assure her that whatever is agreed will be risk-assessed to make certain that we do not introduce any form of unsafe service in Northern Ireland. I suppose that the exercise at the moment is to see how far we can take savings without straying into that territory. I appreciate that, in rural areas, the Fire Service goes way beyond simply firefighting and vehicle rescue. For instance, it goes into situations where farm accidents with slurry tanks have occurred. We therefore value that work enormously. Again, I have to keep emphasising that we do not want to be here. We do not want to be asking the fire service to make these very

significant cuts. We will discuss with it how they can be done while maintaining public safety. That will be a very difficult balancing act.

Domiciliary Care: Northern Trust

2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the rationale for the restriction of domiciliary care packages in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQO 7232/11-15)

Mr Wells: The health service is facing significant financial pressures. I think that I should put that line before every answer that I give today. It is therefore important that trusts take appropriate measures to achieve financial break-even. In seeking to deliver this very challenging objective, there is a need to make some changes in domiciliary care spend based on reassessing current needs and reprioritising services. All trusts, including the Northern Trust, are reviewing their domiciliary care provision to ensure that highest-priority needs are met within the current resources. Day-to-day implementation decisions are taken on the basis of a professional assessment of individual need and associated risk.

Mrs Overend: Enabling older people to remain in their own home for as long as it is safe and possible is logical and saves huge amounts of money, not least to the public purse. Does the Minister not see the major flaws in the current proposals, especially in areas where he still allows a totally unfair ban on admissions to many care homes across Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: First of all, our commitment to the Northern Trust at the moment is to 4,778 care users, who receive 48,000 hours of care a week. That is quite a significant input. Indeed, overall in Northern Ireland, we now have 25,330 clients in receipt of domiciliary care services. That is 5% more than in the equivalent period in 2012. The commitment is very much there to continue the service.

I will answer the Member's specific question. During the October monitoring round, £8 million more was allocated to Transforming Your Care implementation for 2014-15. Those moneys will support a wide range of measures that will help to meet the care needs of our growing and ageing population. I can bring the Member right up to date regarding the Northern Trust specifically. In October 2014, 265 people in her trust area were awaiting full care packages, and 207 were awaiting part packages or transfers between providers. Funding has been sourced

for all those packages, and the commissioning process is ongoing. The issue that she has raised is being dealt with. There is a commitment to help the Northern Trust through the extra allocation.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he provide an update on the HSCB review of domiciliary care?

Mr Wells: As I mentioned, a review of domiciliary care right across Northern Ireland has been initiated by the Health and Social Care Board as part of TYC. I remain committed to TYC. As the Member will know, a fundamental part of TYC's recommendations is that care should be transferred, where possible, to the home, so that the home is the hub. The aim of the review is to obtain a better understanding of how the domiciliary care market operates and identify best practice in the various models of delivery to shape the future direction and operation of domiciliary care services.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister not recognise that this is yet another attack on the elderly and infirm? It comes on the back of the reduction of meals on wheels, particularly in rural areas. What he proposes applies to not just the Northern Trust but other trusts. It will end up with more of our senior citizens going into hospital, which is something that we are trying to avoid.

Mr Wells: I hear what the honourable Member for Strangford says. He is also campaigning against cuts being made to other parts of the budget under contingency savings. The difficulty is that, if, for instance, we were to protect Dalriada Hospital, which is in Mrs Overend's constituency —

Mrs Overend: No, it is not.

Mr Wells: Sorry, it is in the Northern Trust, not her constituency. If we are unable to make the £500,000 savings there, the trust is forced to look at other contingencies, which often means looking again at domiciliary care. This is not an attack on elderly people. My Department finds itself in the very undesirable position of having to save £70 million by the end of March out of a very small slice of the Budget. Staff wages, salaries and pensions account for 63% of my budget. Another 12% is contracts that I cannot break. I am left with a very small proportion of my budget from which to find significant savings in a very short period. One of the things that can be done is the slowing down of the delivery of domiciliary care packages. Do I like being in

this position? Definitely not. Is it counter-strategic? It is, but we have no option because of the difficult financial situation we find ourselves in.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Thanks to the Minister for his responses. One of the difficulties that I have encountered in the delivery of domiciliary care packages has been the capacity of some private providers to deliver. That is in circumstances where the finance existed, including a recent case of very complex needs, where, despite numerous representations to the trust, they simply could not get anyone in the private sector to deliver. Has the Minister or his Department done any evaluation of the capacity of private providers to deliver care packages?

Mr Wells: The honourable Member makes a sensible comment. We are experiencing staff shortages in parts of Northern Ireland. A current study has shown that we could be 500 staff short of what we need to provide domiciliary care in the next 10 years. Attention is being given to increasing training opportunities to encourage people to come into the domiciliary care market.

In most boards, about two thirds of provision is carried out by private contractors and firms that provide it on behalf of the trusts. It is surprisingly difficult, given that we are in a very difficult recession, to attract people into that essential service. We are looking at that as part of the review. It is a very important issue. As the economy hopefully continues to improve in the foreseeable future, it will become more difficult. In my constituency of South Down, it is proving more and more difficult, particularly over the Christmas period and the July holidays, to get staff to cover shifts. That issue is being taken seriously by the trusts and the Department.

Minor Injuries Unit: Bangor

3. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on the local community of the closure of the Bangor Hospital minor injuries unit and GP ward. (AQO 7233/11-15)

Mr Wells: As the honourable Member for North Down knows, I announced on 28 November 2014 that I have asked the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to ensure that the minor injuries unit (MIU) at Belfast community hospital remains open —

Some Members: Bangor.

Mr Wells: Bangor. Sorry. I have also asked the trust to keep — *[Interruption.]* Keep Belfast as well.

I have also asked the trust to keep the option of access to beds at the Bangor site under constant review. The trust has a range of intermediate care options available, but, clearly, if additional capacity is required in the future, reinstating beds in Bangor is one option that could be considered. I trust that the Assembly will understand that I am mindful that the matter is before the courts, and that limits very considerably what I can say.

3.00 pm

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer and, of course, congratulate him on his decision to keep the MIU in Bangor open. I am glad that some Ministers listen and take appropriate action.

Can he give us an assurance that, while the Bangor GP beds are still under review, the Ulster Hospital will have the resources to meet any rise in demand for such facilities? It is our main hospital, as he appreciates.

Mr Wells: As the Member is aware, I have allocated £5 million additional funding to address winter pressures in delivering unscheduled care. The money will be used to improve patient flow from emergency departments and to expand capacity as required over this winter period. The South Eastern Trust has taken steps to mitigate any impact that the temporary closure of the GP wards in Bangor Hospital might have. In addition to improving efficiency and increasing community services, the trust continues to monitor closely the impact of the contingency plans. The trust has been progressing plans to improve unscheduled care over the winter period and has started a review of the model of care for older people. The trust is also working, as part of an integrated care partnership, to develop new models of care in line with Transforming Your Care.

Mr Cree: Minister, although the decision on the minor injuries unit is welcome, it is regrettable that you did not show the same good judgement with respect to the intermediate care beds. Can you explain why you accepted the South Eastern Trust's proposal to close the MIU in the first place? When will the 20-bed unit be restored?

Mr Wells: I hate to sound negative in answering the Member's legitimate questions, but, as he is very aware, the issue is before the courts. Anything that I would say on that specific question might be used by one side or the other in that court debate. Therefore, on this occasion, I will have to present what is, in cricketing terms, a very straight bat and say that I cannot go any further on that specific question than the answer that I have already given.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his decision to keep open the minor injuries unit in Bangor. Obviously, a compelling case to maintain it was put forward. What changed between the initial decision to close the unit temporarily and his new decision?

Mr Wells: Again, this is only in relation to the minor injuries unit. I received quite a large amount of lobbying on the issue from Members right across North Down. One of the issues that I took into account was that, if we kept the MIU in Bangor available, that could relieve the midwinter pressures on other hospitals; for instance, Ards Hospital and the Ulster Hospital. It was done for that reason. However, I have to make it clear that the South Eastern Trust still has to find the savings outlined in the contingency plans. Therefore, the difficulty remains of finding the money that would have been saved through the temporary closure of the MIU. That money has to be found from somewhere.

Health and Social Care Board: Employees

4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current number of employees of the Health and Social Care Board. (AQO 7234/11-15)

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for raising the question, because it brings to the fore issues that have been mentioned in the media and by other MLAs. The Member will be aware from my previous correspondence with the Health Committee that the increase in staffing levels in the HSCB, as commented on in the media and by the Committee, is of concern to the Department. When our front-line health and social care services are under pressure to identify significant savings, it is imperative that the administrative support given to those services be subject to the same degree of scrutiny. For this reason I announced last week that I had asked my permanent secretary to conduct a fundamental review of the administrative structures in our health and

social care system. A particular focus of this work will be on the relationship and avoidance of duplication between the Department, the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency and the trusts.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. I appreciate and welcome the review that he intends to bring forward. Can he also accept that the number of people employed by the Health and Social Care Board has gone from 365 in March 2011 to 525 in March 2014? That is an increase of 160, and I know and he knows that those are purely administrative posts and represent an increase of around 30%. Bearing in mind that the annual budget for the Health and Social Care Board is about £20 million, 30% of that represents a substantial amount. Will the review look hard at that and at the issue around the Business Services Organisation, which has put on several hundred people, again on the administrative side? Those are issues —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Keep questions brief, please.

Mr McGimpsey: — that require urgent examination.

Mr Wells: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. For his benefit, I will read into the record the whole-time equivalents because I think that is the best way to compare like with like: 2008-09, there were 621; 2009-2010, 522; 2010-11, 427; 2011-12, 458; 2012-13, 483; and 2013-14, 549. In that, there are 80 temporary positions on fixed contracts. Once those contracts and work have been carried out, those individuals will leave the board's employment. When you factor in those numbers, it is not as dramatic as it seems. Indeed, the board has kept within its admin budget throughout the CSR period. We also have to be fair to the board and say that new projects such as Transforming Your Care, the integrated care partnerships and other functions have been transferred to the board, which is new work that has to be carried out.

I still accept the Member's premise that we need to look at every aspect of administration in the health and social care system. Mr Eastwood alluded to the painful decisions that will have to be made in the Fire Service. We have also heard about the stresses of domiciliary care. It is incumbent on us, when we are doing that, to make certain that the board provides the best possible value. We will look at every level of administration to see if there are efficiencies that can be made. I would say,

though, that the Health and Social Care Board has accepted a budget that will lead to a delivery of £600,000 of savings for 2014-15.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. Given that the Minister alluded to increased administration costs and, indeed, I think, the complexity of governance in the health system, does he intend to make any legislative changes in the review of health and social care?

Mr Wells: That is a legitimate question. The problem is that it is only seven or eight years since we had the last fundamental review of structures in health. We had the reduction from 18 trusts to five, we reduced the number of boards to one and we had the PHA, so we have had major change. I do not know whether it is an appropriate time to initiate another major structural change after such a short period. One argument that could be made is that the present structures have not had time to show whether they are an efficient model. We have to be fair to all concerned. Therefore, whilst it is vital that we look into the administrative costs of the board and other organisations, I do not think it is the right time for another fundamental review of the system, particularly with budgets being reduced so dramatically. However, it is a legitimate question, and I would want to satisfy myself, after the permanent secretary's report is issued, that all the administration that we have is money well spent. I would rather see that money going to the Fire Service, domiciliary care, the cancer centre or to all sorts of other procedures where there are so many competing demands for that income.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline the time frame he envisages for the review of administrative structures?

Mr Wells: We are placing quite a high expectation on the permanent secretary. We want his study to run parallel to the consideration of our final budget for 2015-16, allowing its findings to be factored into my determination of how funding is allocated to bodies in the health and social care system. We are talking about three or four months, which is extremely demanding.

Before we come back to the House with our views on the HSC budget for the incoming year, we have to be able to stand over the levels of administration. If there are too many layers of administration, we need to make proposals to deal with that. I remind Members that administration is 90% personnel. The vast majority of costs involved in administration come from the people who sit at desks carrying

it out. If you were to make any radical change in administration, it would mean voluntary redundancies. We have to have a system in place that allows that to happen. Even if the permanent secretary's report recommends fewer staff, it would be three years before we made any savings, because we would have to pay the affected staff their redundancy packages. That is our difficulty, particularly with administration. It is not the quick fix that most people think it is, because, under the present Civil Service and trust arrangements, asking people to leave is difficult and expensive.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, I am sure that you are aware of people who have taken their redundancy package and been re-employed within a matter of days, perhaps in a very similar job. Will you assure the House that any examination of the organisation or any structural change to staffing will look across all the arm's-length bodies and the trusts, the board and the Department to ensure that there is no duplication of service provision?

Mr Wells: The permanent secretary's study goes across the board, as it were, through all the organisations. Three years ago, the Health Committee decided to look at the administrative costs of the five trusts. We went in with great enthusiasm, and I remember — at the time I was the Chair — expecting to find vast layers of administration that we could take out of the system. When we looked at the figures, the position was not as it had seemed. We came up with a figure of 4.1% as being the average percentage of administrative expenses in the five trusts. That compared very favourably with trusts in the United Kingdom and throughout Europe, so the huge savings that we had anticipated were not there. We continue to pile on extra responsibilities — for instance, through Transforming Your Care. Somebody has to deliver those fundamental changes in the structure of health service provision; it cannot be done by volunteers.

I am content that, in many cases, we have the right numbers. Equally, I am certain that the permanent secretary will reveal areas where savings can be made. Even if those savings are radical, they will not meet the fundamental shortfall that we have next year from carrying forward £160 million of unmet need. We have no money, but we require about £110 million for the development of new services. Administration expenses are not the golden bullet; they are not the savings that can bring about a radical increase in available resources. We will have to look at much more fundamental issues.

Health: Budget

5. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the current counter-strategic measures adopted in relation to his departmental budget, for his assessment of the impact that these measures will have on future budgets. (AQO 7235/11-15)

Mr Wells: I thank the honourable Member for South Belfast for asking that question, because it is very topical and requires a public airing.

I accept that many of the savings proposals that are required to be implemented to secure financial balance in 2014-15 are counter-strategic. However, they represent the measures that are capable of being delivered on the ground in the remaining months of the financial year. I would not normally support such measures, but there are simply a limited number of areas where cash savings can be extracted from the system at such short notice. Indeed, I mentioned those areas earlier.

Many of the pressures in 2014-15 are also being addressed through non-recurrent means, such as monitoring round funding, which means that we roll forward those unmet needs into 2015-16. Those will have to be addressed next year. I do not think that Members really understand that, if you get £60 million in the October monitoring round to meet needs, that £60 million does not continue into the following year; it meets the need for that financial year, and you start from scratch the following year to find more resources to get the same £60 million in that year.

The draft Budget for 2015-16 is out for consultation, but, as things stand, my Department will need to deliver challenging efficiency savings of £160 million to meet the existing costs of service provision.

3.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have to apologise that we are almost out of time for listed questions, but, if you present your supplementary, it will receive a written answer.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you. Following the Chancellor's recent announcement of additional funds, will the Minister now undertake a fundamental review of contingency plans in the various trusts?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, Minister, but we are now absolutely out of time.

That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to topical questions.

Organ Donation Day

T1. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he supports Organ Donation Day, which will take place this Thursday. (AQT 1871/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am a very enthusiastic supporter of Organ Donation Day, which is due to be held on 11 December. This is a tremendous idea, and I was delighted to be at the launch last week. This is part of our Speak Up and Save a Life campaign, which encourages people to talk to family and friends about their organ donation wishes. I urge every Member of the Assembly and anyone who is listening to the debate to have that discussion with your family on 11 December. If you are minded to leave your organs for donation to help others, make that decision very clear to your family so that, should the worst situation occur, they are very clear about your decision.

I will give the example of a young gentleman from Coalisland who died in tragic circumstances in a car accident several years ago. He had made his wishes clear to his family, and six of his organs were taken for donation. Two of those organs saved lives, and the other four enhanced lives. It was a traumatic situation for his family, but at least they had some reassurance of knowing that the loss of their loved one had meant so much to many others.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Further to that, what progress does he consider has been made by the recent Public Health Agency (PHA) public information campaign?

Mr Wells: I am delighted to say that new registrations added to the organ donor register for residents in Northern Ireland increased by 1,300 in the last 12 months. At the end of September 2014, we had 597,144 people registered, including me, which represents an increase of more than 100,000 compared with five years ago. Real progress is being made, and I thank those who made the decision to allow their name to be entered on to the register. However, I say to all those people and to those who have not registered, make your views known to your family now so that, if the worst happens, you can provide life to others. Progress is being made, but we still have a lot to do, and there are still people dying needlessly in Northern Ireland because a donor

is not available. We have to do everything that we can to overcome that situation.

The Cottages Respite Care Facility, Derry

T2. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he will deal with the proposed cut to the vital service provided by the Cottages respite care facility for people with learning disabilities in Derry, a proposed cut that has attracted recent public criticism. (AQT 1872/11-15)

Mr Wells: I am very aware of the situation at the Cottages facility in Londonderry. Indeed, I have been lobbied by several MLAs and will have an emergency meeting this afternoon with MLAs, led by Mark H Durkan, to discuss this very important issue. As the Member will know, it is a six-bed unit that provides regular short-term respite for children aged five to 18 years with varying degrees of learning disability and associated conditions. The honourable Member for East Londonderry Mr Campbell has paid tribute to the work undertaken there.

The Western Health and Social Services Trust has advised that the nature of respite provision to families is changing and that new personalised provision is needed to meet specific and unique needs. To ensure this, the trust has to make certain that these services are designed accordingly. Coupled with providing services within the commissioned level of funding and the increase in demand, the trust is reviewing its respite services.

I am aware that this is a very difficult issue in the north-west and that a lot of folk are concerned. I became aware of it only very recently and am very keen to hear the views of MLAs, including the Member, as a representative for Foyle, on the issue. I see today's meeting as being the first of several dealing with this very important issue.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister. I was not aware of the meeting, but I will certainly take the opportunity to attend now. The trust indicated, in a meeting with me on Thursday, that the savings from such a reduction would be in the region of only £30,000 or £40,000 — quite minimal savings in the scheme of things. I suggest that, in light of that and the upheaval that it proposes to cause to families and their family members, the Minister now halt the reduction to the service.

Mr Wells: I do not know whether the lady has been invited or not; that is entirely in the hands

of those who called the meeting. She may be aware that the Cottages is a six-bedroom facility, but it has only four beds that are deemed suitable for children with complex needs. Avalon House, which is an alternative provision, has an eight-bed facility.

The trust is currently consulting staff at the Cottages, and that consultation will end on 17 December, so it would not be proper for me to make known any views about the service apart from the fact that many have indicated their high level of satisfaction with it. The trust will also be engaging with individual families and has been engaging with families over the past week. We are very much in that important consultation period. Now that it has been drawn to my attention by a number of Members, I will take a personal interest in it, but, as I said, at the end of the day, it is the trust's decision as to what is best for these highly vulnerable children and to make certain it has the best provision for them. I thank the Member for raising the issue, because I think it is very timely.

Alcohol: Minimum Unit Pricing

T3. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of recent University of Sheffield research into minimum unit pricing for alcohol. (AQT 1873/11-15)

Mr Wells: The survey is very timely and important. It shows that alcohol abuse in Northern Ireland is costing the Assembly and Executive £900 million a year; that £240 million of that is levied on the health service; that over 12,000 admissions to our hospitals every year are as a direct result of alcohol abuse; and that, sadly, 230 people die as a result of alcohol abuse in Northern Ireland. But much more shocking, I think, is the fact that alcohol is now 62% more affordable today than it was 30 years ago. We simply have to do something about the outbreak of binge drinking in Northern Ireland, which is leading to all these problems.

We as a society cannot afford to continue to pick up the bill for alcohol abuse. If I had that £240 million that is being wasted in dealing with alcohol abuse in my budget, my position would be much stronger today, and I would not be having all these painful questions being asked of me. Therefore, I welcome the report; it gives a scientific basis, and I am working with the Department for Social Development to ensure that we can implement a discussion paper to go to the Executive and then to public consultation on minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Northern

Ireland. My colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, all looking at the same research, have made the same decision.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. Will he outline the steps that would be required for minimum unit pricing to be introduced in Northern Ireland?

Mr Wells: The licensing of alcohol establishments and licensing policy fall between the Department for Social Development and the Department of Justice, but it is quite clear that it is possible to enact legislation that will make it a condition of one's licence, be it for an off-licence, a supermarket, a pub or whatever, that all promotions and all activities that sell alcohol below the minimum price, be it 45p or 50p or whatever, will be in contravention of their licence.

When one understands that 20% of the drinkers in Northern Ireland consume 70% of all the alcohol sold, one understands that there is something seriously wrong with a society that allows that — and also allows alcohol to be sold significantly cheaper than bottled water, or a two litre bottle of cider to be sold for £2. When that is happening, is it any wonder that our A&Es are clogged up on a Saturday or Sunday night by people who are heavily intoxicated? I believe this is a no-brainer. I believe the statistics show that we must do something about this, and I am depending on Members backing me on a policy that may not be particularly popular but which will bring real health and social benefits and, of course, help our police service in Northern Ireland.

Health: Community and Voluntary Sector Contribution

T4. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the role of the community and voluntary sector in filling the gaps left by very stretched health and social care public services. (AQT 1874/11-15)

Mr Wells: I think that I know the direction in which the honourable Member is taking the question. I must say that she asks very incisive questions for written answer of me very regularly and has ruined many a Saturday night as I tried to deal with her answers while watching 'Match of the Day'.

I am sure that she is concerned about the fact that, until this week, no decision had been made on the funding of the 68 voluntary bodies that are funded by my Department. I am glad to

tell her that the decision has now been taken. Funding will be reinstated and all those groups will be paid in exactly the same way as in previous years, and they can expect to receive the remainder of their payments very soon. That indicates just how important I see the role of the voluntary sector within health and social care delivery.

Ms Sugden: I welcome the Minister's response, because I too believe that the community and voluntary sector has a place within the public services. What does the Minister feel that its role in mental health will be in the future?

Mr Wells: We will have a fundamental review of how we fund the voluntary and charitable sector in Northern Ireland. It has grown up over the years with various ad hoc requests for funding. Various Ministers, including Mr McGimpsey and Ms de Brún, have acceded to various requests, but there has been no coherent policy to see how that is delivering the best value for money on behalf of the state. I believe that we give something like over £4 million every year.

Some of the organisations are large British-based charities with Northern Ireland offices and have quite high levels of resources and others are small charities that are entirely based in small communities in Northern Ireland. We have to decide what is the best use of a significant amount of taxpayers' money to complement the work of the Department. That is an ongoing part of our policy. However, I can assure the Member that, this year, none of the charities will notice any difference and will get exactly the same funding as in 2013-14.

Alcohol: Christmas Consumption

T5. **Mr Ó Muilleoir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he agrees that event organisers and the drinks industry could do more at this time of year to urge sensible drinking, given that we are coming to a time of year that is sadly associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol, which puts great pressure on our accident and emergency departments. (AQT 1875/11-15)

Mr Wells: It is an awful pity that we have had to go towards the implementation of minimum unit price legislation. It is very sad that the supermarkets and some club owners have not voluntarily decided to step in and say that enough is enough and that they are causing huge problems.

When we realise that, over Christmas, 80% of those who report to A&E at weekends after midnight are under the influence of drink and are there because of drink, we can see the huge problems that that is having for our health service. We then wonder why we have difficulty in getting middle-grade doctors to staff those late-night shifts, when they have to deal with the abuse that they receive from those who are intoxicated.

I ask pubs, clubs, off-licences and supermarkets to get their act together and introduce a voluntary minimum unit pricing structure, so that no one is being undercut, and to try to act responsibly. They should do that rather than sending lots of mainly young people out on a Saturday night with vast quantities of drink that they will consume through pre-loading or "prinking" as it is called — pre-drinking — and then go out to clubs or pubs afterwards. It simply cannot be accepted any more that we allow our young people to destroy their lives by binge drinking. We also have a huge increase in liver cancer as a result of that. To me, it all points in one direction: either the industry self-regulates and introduces minimum pricing or I, with the Department for Social Development, will do it for them.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Míle buíochas. Thank you, Minister. I know that Tennent's NI has voiced support for the minimum pricing of alcohol, and I know that many event organisers are very circumspect about how they organise events at this time of year. Will you take the opportunity to join me in commending our front-line staff in accident and emergency departments who are put through hell at this time of year, which is a time of celebration, by having to deal with people who present drunk at A&E?

Mr Wells: Indeed, I concur with that comment. I got a very supportive letter from the managing director of Tennent's Northern Ireland immediately after the announcement of MIU. Therefore, I would like to think that MUI — sorry, whatever it is, and that is me only on water. *[Laughter.]* I wish that other drink companies were as responsible. I am also waiting to hear from the small number of supermarkets in Northern Ireland that are still selling alcohol as a loss-leader: maybe at 35 pence or 40 pence a can.

3.30 pm

I pay tribute to those members of our medical staff who will face a very difficult Christmas. People will come in worse for wear, and those staff will take abuse, violence and extreme bad

manners. We as a society have to stop that happening. All the scientific evidence shows that, if you make the price per unit higher, demand and consumption reduces significantly, unlike what happens with cigarettes, where I do not believe that happens. Therefore, we have to do something to protect those health service workers who are having a very difficult time. If we do not do something, we are going to find it increasingly difficult to keep those A&Es open, because staff, particularly nurses, simply will not take on the role of being abused for several hours at the weekend.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the end of Question Time.

Assembly Business

Una Crudden

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. When the Health Minister is here, will he join the rest of us in offering our deepest sympathy to the family of Mrs Una Crudden who sadly died at the weekend? Every Member will know how Una fought gallantly. She was more often in this Building than some of the rest of us.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has been given some latitude. That is not actually a point of order, but I will allow the Minister to respond.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member is absolutely right. I should have paid tribute to the enormous contribution that Una Crudden made to the ovarian cancer campaign. I regarded her as a friend. She was a wonderful campaigner, and she achieved so much in her life to further the cause of those with ovarian cancer.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I think there will be agreement with those comments across the House.

Committee Business

Insolvency (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA 39/11-16).

I inform the Minister and the House that it is unlikely that the Committee will require the entire duration of the extension period to consider the Bill. However, given the considerable workload of the Committee, the extension until 13 March 2015 is being requested at this stage as a precautionary measure. Go raibh maith agat. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 13 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Insolvency (Amendment) Bill (NIA 39/11-16).

Private Members' Business

Children's Services Co-operation Bill: First Stage

Mr Agnew: I beg to introduce the Children's Services Co-operation Bill [NIA 44/11-16], which is a Bill to require Northern Ireland Departments to discharge their functions and cooperate with one another in order to contribute to the achievement of certain specified outcomes relating to the well-being of children and young people, and to amend the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Cost of Division

Mr Principal Deputy 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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the financial and economic impact of continued division in Northern Ireland; calls on the Executive to conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessment of the impact of societal division; and further calls on all Departments to actively encourage desegregation and promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.

I propose the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party. It maintains our call on all Executive Ministers to identify the financial cost of division to the public purse in Northern Ireland and to take decisive action to address that morally and economically unjustifiable waste.

The Executive and the Assembly know that the OFMDFM-commissioned Deloitte report, which was some time ago now and requires updating, estimated that the financial cost of division to the public purse in Northern Ireland could be over £1 billion a year. The extent of that financial cost is put into sharp focus by the scale of the current financial challenge faced by the Northern Ireland Executive. We have a Budget black hole in the region of £800 million, and we have Ministers briefing Committees and the media on unprecedented cuts and voluntary redundancies to public services, which will undoubtedly impact on the community and voluntary sector and the private sector.

It is clear that there is not only a moral but an economic imperative for Ministers to get serious about identifying and tackling the financial cost of division to each Department in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is an expressed commitment of OFMDFM's Together: Building a United Community strategy that an impact assessment of the extent to which all government policy contributes to tackling division be developed. I had hoped that we would hear today from a number of Ministers on progress in that regard, and I look forward to hearing from junior Minister McCann from OFMDFM.

Alliance Party Ministers in the Department of Justice and the Department for Employment and Learning have begun to implement that type of approach in order to ensure that all policies encourage sharing over separation.

The costs of division in Northern Ireland are visible at all levels of society. At individual and regional levels, we have seen lost lives, damage to homes, injury, illness, damage to physical infrastructure, restricted inward investment and a loss of human resources through emigration. Division has also led to duplication, or even multiplication, of service delivery for people who live side by side, with limited integration or sharing.

'A Shared Future', the good relations policy for Northern Ireland set out a vision of a shared and inclusive society and stated clearly:

"Separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically."

However, the costs of division remain. We have segregated housing, separate education, less-efficient public service provision, high policing and security costs, and opportunity loss. Some examples of that include the policing of civil unrest and security threats, which could be as much as £500 million a year. We also have duplicate goods, facilities and services for separate sections of the community. Those include prisons, schools, surgeries, jobcentres, community centres, leisure centres, and even bus stops and bus routes. Those costs are borne not just by the public sector but by the private sector.

One of the most significant areas of duplication is in our education system, where delivery is substantially distorted by division and separation. Some estimates calculate that we have in the region of 50,000 to 80,000 surplus places a year, which could cost in excess of £300 million a year. We have four teacher-training colleges in Northern Ireland for just 1.8 million people.

There is also a strong correlation between division, poverty, deprivation, educational under-attainment and economic inactivity. We have clear examples of the cost of division through housing segregation. That comes on top of issues such as interfaces, buffer zones and the security adaptation of properties, as well as blighted or segregated land. We also see additional public transport costs and an increased carbon footprint in Northern Ireland, which is the largest in the UK.

There are also opportunity costs. It is widely recognised that a region of 1.8 million people will require inward investment in addition to the promotion and support of indigenous enterprise and export in order to generate sustainable economic growth. The absence of political consensus, and civil unrest, have intermittently but undoubtedly limited investment and affected the economy, employment opportunities, skills development and life chances here in Northern Ireland. We need political stability and community cohesion to generate the sustainable economic development that we require to improve living standards and achieve the full potential of everyone in Northern Ireland. In a globally competitive economy, we need to avoid additional costs for our service industry and ensure that we attract visitor numbers and highly skilled labour to Northern Ireland.

Whilst it is true that the Executive's failure to reach an agreement on welfare reform has exacerbated the budgetary crisis, it is estimated that the penalties from welfare reform are responsible for around one third of the financial challenge facing Northern Ireland at this time. Previous Northern Ireland Executives have failed to fix the roof while the sun was shining, and the longer it takes to tackle the cost of division, the further the waste will be of our scarce public finances that are desperately needed for front-line services and economic recovery. It is essential that the Executive and Assembly acknowledge the financial and other cost implications of division in Northern Ireland and commit to addressing them.

We want to see all Departments conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessments of the impact of societal division. We want them to commit to presenting a practical and costed plan to tackle those issues immediately and embed them in the next Programme for Government.

Every single Minister has a key role to play in ensuring that their Department takes a proactive role in tackling our divided society and promoting a shared future. If we take action on this now, we will be able to better invest in public services and economic growth for the future. It is indeed an Executive-wide approach that is needed to tackling division and separation in our society, and we want to see a robust set of targets for implementation on those issues.

One of the most significant areas of duplication is in our education system, and we believe that there is a need for a shared and integrated education Bill to ensure that the public's desire

for integrated and mixed education is followed through by the Assembly. Indeed, shared education that commands sustained contact is also of great benefit to pupils.

Research consistently suggests that opportunities for sustained contact between people from different backgrounds can facilitate positive change and reduce division in our community. That needs to take place in shared organisations, shared buildings and shared physical space if we are to deliver the type of mixed neighbourhoods, mixed schools and mixed workplaces that the majority of people in our community want.

Creating a shared future is one of the greatest challenges that this society faces. We can ignore that challenge or we can get on with doing our best to just manage the division, divert scarce resources that could be put to much better use, and fall short of achieving our full potential. Or, we can tackle that challenge head-on and build a new Northern Ireland in which people can live, learn, work and play together in safety and in which we can deliver sustainable peace and prosperity for everyone in our community.

Mr Moutray: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate this afternoon. The DUP will continue working to break down the barriers that still exist between Northern Ireland's two main historical traditions. We will also strive to prevent new ones developing with our minority ethnic communities, who are an integral part of building a new Northern Ireland. Indeed, the House will be all too aware of the ongoing discussion this week at a high level to try to bring about real progress on the thorny issues that exist in Northern Ireland, and I sincerely hope that the efforts will not be in vain and that an agreed outcome will be achieved. I believe that the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy was merely a starting point and has been built upon by the Together: Building a United Community initiative in this Assembly term.

Immense savings can be made across the public sector by greater integration and tackling historical divisions. We believe that savings resulting from greater sharing should be reinvested in communities to make real differences for future generations. The 2007 Deloitte report, 'Research into the financial cost of the Northern Ireland divide', suggested that Northern Ireland could be spending up to an additional £1.5 billion per annum on its public services.

While we believe that that figure might be inflated and is realisable only in the longer term, clawing back even a fraction of that sum could have a massive impact on our shrunken budgets in these tough times.

3.45 pm

Facilities, services and goods, including schools, GP surgeries, job centres, Housing Executive offices, community centres, leisure centres and, as was said, even bus stops, are duplicated to accommodate separation. It is normal and appropriate for all children to go to a local primary school together, as they do to preschool. The opportunity to be educated together can play an essential part in a reconciliation process here.

We support the concept of shared spaces, but, as we saw in Portadown yesterday, shamefully, shared space has been denied for 6,000 days to the No. 1 District Orange Lodge by the Parades Commission. In north Belfast, the Protestant/unionist/loyalist community is told that it can use the arterial route to leave the area but not to return home. That section of the road has a health centre, a post office, a library and an ambulance station — a textbook example of what should be shared — yet the Alliance Party acts as a cheerleader for each and every decision of the Parades Commission that entrenches segregation. Perhaps, in the spirit and letter of the motion, it will audit itself and end its support for the atrocious decisions taken by the Parades Commission.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. A range of reports have been commissioned that seek to quantify the cost of division in our society. In fact, there are many cynics in the media who would say that a whole industry has been created doing just that. What we do know is that the case for greater investment in real initiatives aimed at tackling societal divisions needs to be made — initiatives such as T:BUC, the social investment fund, community relations and the range of services aimed at supporting victims of the conflict and dealing with legacy issues.

No one can deny that there are costs associated with division, but, instead of dealing with the symptoms such as cost, we must deal with the causes. They can be dealt with only by real leadership being shown by all our political parties in the current talks process as well as by key civic actors and influential voices. Comprehensive agreement via the current political talks process involving all parties will go a long way to tackling the costs of division. We

know that the causes of such costs include legacy issues, social and economic inequality and the failure of politics in not having key agreements implemented. Issues such as dealing with the past, contentious parades and parity of esteem for identity all need to be addressed and agreement reached. Long-standing issues of disadvantage and alienation also need to be dealt with as part of the process of tackling divisions in our society.

I welcome today's debate, because it gives me an opportunity to bring to the fore issues about the division of Ireland. Many of the reports carried out to date refer to costs incurred due to the unnecessary provision of services for communities that live side by side but do not integrate, but what about the costs of dividing our country? What about the cost of duplicating almost every public service on a small island containing fewer than seven million people? What about the cost of running two health services? What about the cost of running two education systems? What about the cost of running two police services?

The year-on-year cuts to the block grant by the Tory Government in London will in no way aid those whose mission is to deal with the causes of division genuinely and effectively and, in turn, the related costs to our society. Sinn Féin wants Ireland, North and South, to be self-sustaining for the economy and public services. We believe that the economy can and should grow significantly when the costs of partition are removed and the full potential of an integrated island economy is unleashed. A strong economy can support comprehensive public services. A new agreed and united Ireland will allow for the development of fully integrated public services throughout the island for the benefit of all its citizens. I ask the Alliance Party Members who tabled the motion to clarify whether they recognise the cost of partition as one of those embedded costs of division that need to be dealt with.

Tory welfare cuts will in no way assist us in our endeavours to tackle the causes of sectarianism and division in our society.

Investment in education and innovative training, well-paid employment opportunities and a social fabric that enriches the life experiences of the majority of our citizens are what will make a difference. I call on all Members committed to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent binding international agreements to redouble their efforts to advance the political work necessary to genuinely tackle the root causes of division.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Alliance Party for tabling the motion, which is, I think, a sensible one. It is important, at this time of budgetary constraint, that we analyse and interrogate all budgets. Had we been doing that for the last number of years, we might be in a better position. It is important that we do it with an eye to the cost of division and segregation, because it is clear that we are double spending in a number of ways. It is also clear that we have not come anywhere near as far as a lot of people would have hoped 16 years ago in breaking down some of the barriers that still exist in our communities.

The promise of the Good Friday Agreement was one that everybody, or at least the vast majority of people, bought into. They almost turned away from politics and asked the politicians then to "finish the job", as Bill Clinton said. Unfortunately, we have left people waiting for far too long.

We have continued a situation whereby our communities are divided, and I think that we send out the wrong messages from this place every single day. We have power-sharing structures, but I am not so sure that we have power-sharing in spirit. People see that and are fed up with it. The public want us to break down the barriers, not only in communities but in the House, in government and in politics. They get fed up when we constantly retreat to our own positions. We are all of us very good at demanding our rights, whether it is about parades, flags or anything else, but we are not always as good at living up to our responsibilities, and, in my view, rights and responsibilities go hand in hand.

Some of the language that comes out of this place, whether it is about rewriting Irish history or Greek mythology, or about holding up pots of yoghurt, does nothing for its image as an institution. Neither does it do anything for the image of the North of Ireland. I think that we have become a laughing stock. We often hold ourselves up as some kind of example for the rest of the world, but I think that we should follow the example that we set for ourselves in 1998, follow through and finish the job. There is an opportunity in the talks process this week to find a comprehensive agreement around these issues. It has to be comprehensive because, if we as politicians do not lead by example very soon by standing up and living up to our responsibilities, the public will have moved on from us and from this process. That would be a very dangerous situation.

I recognise the work done on the 'Peace Monitoring Report', which recognised a lot of

the good work that is going on in my city and yours, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. It spoke of the good work done on the City of Culture and the work done before that. It is important to recognise and remember that the City of Culture allowed an opportunity to give expression to a lot of the good work that was going on in communities and had been going on there for years, probably since the 1980s during the height of the Troubles, when we were power-sharing in Derry long before this place had even thought about it. That work, whereby you are able to have the biggest festival of Irish culture on the same street that held the biggest loyal orders parade in the whole of the North the day before, shows a city able to move forward. It is a city that is engaged in a culture of constant conversation, and that is a lesson that can be learned right across the North.

That same report also reminded us that peace walls have doubled in number since 1998. That is a very visible example of how we need to move forward and catch ourselves on, and it is a very stark message to all of us to make sure that we finish the job and get on with sorting out the issues here.

I have a couple of seconds left to mention that many minority ethnic communities have joined us in the North of Ireland, and we have not looked after them or welcomed them very well at all. Some of the same people who are going around attacking their houses —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Eastwood: — have been attacking members of different communities in this society for far too long.

Mr Cree: The Ulster Unionist Party fully supports the creation of a Northern Ireland that is prosperous and at peace with itself. We want to build a society in which all our citizens have a stake and in which they can live and work wherever they choose. The Ulster Unionist Party supported the Belfast Agreement because we wanted to open up a better path for the people of Northern Ireland. We wanted to end the decades of violence and offer the prospect of a new society, free from fear and suspicion, in which the people of Northern Ireland could make common cause in building a better society in which to live and bring up their families.

Whilst equality legislation has played a major role in ensuring that workplaces are much more

reflective of society, it is, indeed, a source of deep regret that 16 years after the Belfast Agreement we are still faced with so much segregation in public housing and with the ugly scars that peace walls leave across the landscape in many urban areas, particularly in Belfast. I note, following Mr Eastwood, that there were 88 such walls in Belfast in 2010.

We also face the cost of duplication of services, where community divisions have resulted in two sets of facilities being provided in close proximity, often at great expense.

We also need to recognise that certain political parties thrive on division. The last thing they want is for a united community to develop, because such a community would threaten their electoral support. The language of "curry my yoghurt" feeds off the idea that equality is being used as a Trojan Horse to break these b's. We have heard that very recently. Quite simply, the two big parties in this Chamber need each other. They gain electoral strength from their claim to represent the narrow, sectional interest of their side of the peace line. Neither the DUP nor Sinn Féin has any pretence of appealing beyond its own voting bloc.

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that the Union is for everyone, be they Protestant, Roman Catholic or anything else. We are a unionist party, not a Protestant party. We value the diversity of the modern United Kingdom and the multi-ethnic, multi-faith society that has developed since the mid-20th century.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, we believe that it is essential that the society of Northern Ireland evolves and proves itself capable of assimilating those who have arrived from other countries. We are convinced that the United Kingdom offers the people of Northern Ireland — all the people of Northern Ireland — the constitutional arrangement that best guarantees social freedoms and economic prosperity.

Sectarianism is a toxic legacy of the Troubles. It is not only morally wrong, but extremely costly, as other Members have indicated. Of course we should look at departmental budgets to see what can be done to ensure that increasingly scarce resources are deployed in the manner that ensures the most effective return. We are in government to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland. All waste and duplication must be eradicated as a matter of principle and urgency. The current economic climate and the expectation of further restrictions on government spending means that it is only prudent to trim any fat that can be found.

We need, however, to be mindful of the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves. Northern Ireland is a divided society. We endured 30 years of a serious terrorist campaign, and many urban areas were scarred by communal violence. This has left a legacy of fear and suspicion, and peace walls protect areas and people from attack. We must take care to encourage and support moves to end division and bitterness and to support cross-community initiatives, but we must ensure that we bring people with us.

For example, those who live closest to peace walls are often those most fearful about what will happen if they are removed. They have genuine fears that should not be underestimated and must not be discounted. We may not be able to make progress at the rate that we would like, but we must ensure that we do not lose sight of our destination. We are totally committed to building a genuinely shared future, but, for now, we need to persuade some people that we need to share the present.

4.00 pm

Mr D McIlveen: I will keep my comments as brief as I can. This is a useful debate. The tone has been set by one or two Members who have decided, unfortunately, to go down the road of finger-pointing, and that is regrettable. It completely misreads the spirit of the motion, and I think that it is fair to say that none of the main political parties in the House can say that their hands are completely clean in relation to how division has, at times, been handled in this society. I could give examples; however, that would be to fall into the very trap that I am trying to speak against. Those who have, at times, encouraged division know who they are, and they will have to deal with that.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

When it comes specifically to the cost, a point has to be made about where the cost actually emanates from. In my capacity as a member of the Policing Board, I have regularly questioned the Chief Constable and his assistant chief constables on parading and the cost of parading. Every assistant chief constable whom I have asked about the issue always gives me the same answer: the cost of policing a parade, in a general sense, is virtually nothing. A small amount of traffic policing is required, which is a relatively small cost to bear for a parade. However, when you come to a parade that is being molested, inhibited or protested against in a way that creates tension,

as we have seen in Drumcree and at Twaddell, the costs of policing mushroom.

In a roundabout way, I agree with Mr Eastwood. He said that the issue of parading was a balance of rights and responsibilities. In my view, the right of somebody to walk on the Queen's highway has long been set in our constitution and should always be guarded. However, with those rights come responsibilities, and I am the first person to acknowledge that. As a former member of the Orange Order and a loyalist band, I always sought to walk with responsibility when I was parading, no matter what part of Northern Ireland I was parading in. That is something that all lodges and bands should adhere to. When they go to an area where perhaps there are those who may not exactly be bought into the cultural identity that they represent, they should present themselves with dignity and respect. Certainly, they should not walk in a way that is provocative to any section of our society.

I find myself really agreeing with Mr Eastwood here. Like Mr Moutray, he touched on the myth of "both sides of the community" that we still cling to in Northern Ireland. When will we learn that, after 20 years of relative peace, we no longer have "both sides of the community"? We have a thriving migrant community from eastern Europe, South America, China, Russia and many countries. We can learn so much from that. Those communities welcome the fact that they reside in this part of the United Kingdom, but they also celebrate the fact that they have their unique identity. Why can we, in Northern Ireland, not learn from that? Why can we not get to grips with the fact that the constitutional position of this country is set in the St Andrews Agreement. It is not up for debate. However, anybody within that boundary who wants to celebrate their identity, whatever it may be, has every right to do so.

Very briefly, I will conclude on the issue of education. I went to a grammar school that was not a Protestant school. We do not have Protestant schools in Northern Ireland. I welcome and applaud the Roman Catholic families who stepped outside the mould and sent their children to my school —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr D McIlveen: — even though they were in the minority. Once that community gets its head around that issue and starts using the system that we already have, the cost of division will plummet.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo. I am pleased to support the motion. As we have heard, no party in the House denies the cost of division in our society. We must remember that the cost is not only in economic terms but, tragically, in the thousands of lives that have been lost here over the years and the attitudes that continue generation after generation and turn the problem into a vicious circle.

Unfortunately, the traditional lines of division have not been healed, and, as we have heard some Members say today, they have extended to racist attacks in our now multicultural society. One would hope that a shared future would enrich the life of everyone here and that it should be prioritised by each Department and collectively by the Executive and, perhaps more importantly, by every political party here not only in their policy documents but in what they say and do in public. Unfortunately, as we have seen in the past, that has not always been the case. A shared future should benefit our society individually, socially and economically, but we must not look on a shared future as something that is easy or simple. It is a difficult problem, and it will be difficult to resolve.

A cohesive and integrated society cannot be achieved simply by pretending that reducing the number of buildings that we have will solve the problem. A truly shared future cannot be achieved without coming to terms with our past. The barriers to a shared society are not insurmountable, although the scars of division run deep. They must be addressed in any strategy for a shared future, and it will fail if it restricts itself to a question of bricks and mortar. Divisions cannot be resolved simply by carving up funding for projects. A shared future must be supported and sustained by the necessary funding, which has to be underpinned by an understanding of the complex cultural and social landscape in which we live in this part of the world.

The lines of division must not ignore the invisible cultural and social underlying causes. As part of the current talks, we have the issues of the past, flags and identity. Those are all issues that we have to deal with, and it would be a welcome advance if the current talks were to progress those issues. It would send out a very positive sign to our society at the present time, a time when the currency of politics is not at its highest and, in fact, the reverse is probably true.

Social housing was referred to. The segregated nature of housing here is

regrettable. Unfortunately, it can ease the way for Ministers who would like to allocate housing on the basis of creed rather than need. We all know that people want to live in their own area, where they grew up alongside friends and family, where they were educated, and so on. We must —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: We must, to the greatest extent possible, help to ensure that there are shared housing projects and that people have the opportunity, if they so desire, to live in such settings. The clock has beaten me on this occasion. Gabhaim buíochas leat. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Kinahan: I am very glad to speak to the motion. It has been particularly good to hear indications from all parties that there are ways forward, although, equally, we have heard indications of the opposite. We all need to find a way forward to stop the waste of money. Today, I will concentrate on education.

The shared education Bill that we have been promised could be the acid test of whether the Assembly and its Executive are serious about desegregation and promoting cohesion, sharing and integration. In recent debates, some Members, particularly the signatories to the motion, have argued that shared education is a ploy or a ruse to avoid what they would see as truly integrated education. One is part of the other. As far as I am concerned, however, the jury is still out. The Ulster Unionist Party will wait to see the contents of the shared education Bill with an open mind. What is clear is that shared education must be a process, not an end in itself. We want a single education system in the medium to long term.

I will share some statistics that will counter comments about schools being just Protestant or just Catholic. Nearly half of Northern Ireland's schoolchildren are being taught in schools in which 95% or more of the pupils are of the same religion. In the 2011-12 academic year, 180 schools had no Protestant pupils on their roll. Another 111 schools taught no Catholic children. In the 2011-12 year, 493 schools educated almost exclusively — 95% or more — pupils of just one religion compared with 827 schools in 1997-98. Therefore, things are getting better.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, I will carry on, thank you.

In 2011-12, 20 controlled schools, the vast majority of them in the primary sector, had a Catholic pupil enrolment of more than 30%. Ninety-one per cent of Protestant primary-school children attended controlled — mainly Protestant — schools, and 88% of Catholic primary-school pupils were enrolled in Catholic maintained primary schools in the last academic year. At the same time, 88% of Catholic post-primary pupils attended Catholic maintained or managed voluntary schools. Eighty-nine per cent of Protestant post-primary children attended controlled schools. Total pupil numbers have dropped from 340,940 in 1997-98 to 311,559. In that time, integrated school pupil numbers have increased from 8,154 to 21,170. We do see that things are getting better, but we have a long way to go before we share properly.

If we look at area planning, we see that, so far, it has been an opportunity missed. There is no evidence that anyone has been looking at the bigger picture. In fact, a cynic would conclude that the various sectors have been allowed to rationalise their own estate, completely oblivious to the other schools in the area. Area planning has failed to follow its two guiding principles; namely, to identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross-sectoral basis, and to maximise the use and sharing of the existing schools estate.

How can the process even be described as area-based planning when the maintained sector has already planned its own future with little regard for shared education? There is continuing uncertainty in many parts of our divided education system, and very little leadership has been shown by the Department or its Minister. The current area-planning process has been fatally undermined since the day that it was announced. Not only has the process caused significant levels of anxiety and suspicion in schools across Northern Ireland, it has proved to be counter-productive, as some of our biggest education sectors have started looking inwards to solidify their positions rather than outwards to work proactively and strategically with all local schools.

4.15 pm

Shared education is undoubtedly the right way forward. My party's long-term policy for Northern Ireland to have a single shared education system, where all faiths are educated together, has to be the right way forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Kinahan: The motion refers to the financial and economic costs of division. Let us all try to work together to find a way forward. I would welcome an audit and review. We support the motion.

Mr Agnew: Sixteen years on from the Good Friday Agreement and seven years on from the Deloitte report, we can legitimately ask: "What progress has been made, and what assessment are we making of that progress?". I suspect that the answer would be, "Not very much", but we do not have the evidence either way, and that is of concern.

This should be a priority. It was seen to be a priority when we agreed the Good Friday Agreement and the majority of our people voted for it; but it is something that, to a large extent, has fallen off the radar.

If we need an example of the problem, the last time I discussed the Good Friday Agreement in the Chamber and said that the majority of people in Northern Ireland supported it, Mr Campbell, who is not here — and it can be checked in Hansard that he said this — asked whether I accepted that the majority of his community had not supported it. If ever anyone misunderstood the principles that people voted for in the Good Friday Agreement, it was that we did not have politicians who referred to their community as if that was what mattered and that any other community was separate. Mr McIlveen mentioned the fact that we have many communities in Northern Ireland. The language of the "two traditional communities" is as outdated as the division in our society. We need to move on from that language and, more importantly, from the way of thinking that it represents.

The cost of division, as was pointed out, is not just financial. Mr Eastwood hit the nail on the head when he talked about constant conversation. After the Good Friday Agreement, we stopped talking — not politically; we still have our debates in the Assembly: we stopped talking to our citizens. It became a purely political process. We have to remember that St Andrews, unlike the Good Friday Agreement that was endorsed by the people, was agreed three weeks after an election, so it never had public endorsement. Parties were going in with one wing saying, "We'll never go into government" and with the other wing alluding to the fact that they would. It was designed so that the electorate did not know what it was voting for. The St Andrews Agreement has no democratic legitimacy, unlike the Good Friday Agreement, which was endorsed.

That just shows the lack of will to tackle division in our society. Look at the shambles that was the shared future strategy. We were not going to take a document that was handed-down from the British Government that came in under direct rule; we would create our own. Many years later, it was only when the British Government came with the bribe of a financial package and told us to agree our shared future document, which was CSI at the time and is now T:BUC, that we got a strategy. It was a piece of PR. T:BUC talks about shared apprenticeships and that type of thing. That was clearly a planned economic measure rebranded as something to tackle division in our society. It was nothing of the sort.

We get the same again with corporation tax; Government say, "If you don't start coming to agreements, you won't get what you've asked for." That seems to be the only condition under which we come to agreement.

Finally, if ever there was an example of our failure, it is the Education Bill. The peace walls were mentioned. We politicians cannot take down the peace walls, and nor should we. Communities have to lead that process, facilitated instead of hindered by politicians, as is often the case. However, we as politicians absolutely can, should and must tackle the structural segregation in our society. The Education Bill and the area planning process were the opportunities to do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Agnew: Instead, through the vision of so-called shared education and the Education Bill that we recently passed, all that we have done is sought to underpin segregation in our society. We have done little to move it on.

Mr McCallister: The motion is like motherhood and apple pie: how could you disagree with any of it? Quite frankly, none of us has disagreed. Everybody has set about trying either to say nice things or to blame someone else.

At the risk of completely wrecking Mr Eastwood's career, I agree with a sizeable chunk of what he said. He talked about rights and responsibilities and how those applied. He went on to talk about how we have missed the promise of 1998. I was reminded of that today, as I had a work experience student with me who was born just a few days before the Good Friday Agreement. As an Assembly and an Executive, we have completely missed that

promise. We have not delivered anywhere near its shared future or shared space agenda. What have we been doing on that? We have actually entrenched more division.

I have to say, even to colleagues in the Alliance Party who tabled the motion, for which I am grateful: look at what you are doing from inside the Executive, having to increase the number of peace walls and build a fence through a church car park in east Belfast. In 1998, is that where we imagined we would be? Is that where you guys in the Alliance Party imagined you would be, even when you entered the Executive in April 2010? I suspect not, because it is effectively going backwards.

I listened to Ms McGahan from Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin's main focus is to blame the Brits for everything and blame the Tory Government for the cuts. May I remind Sinn Féin Members that the United Kingdom Government are still going to borrow in the region of £98 billion in this Budget year? The UK national debt is at £1.5 trillion, and we have not even seen the scale of cuts that the Republic of Ireland had to endure. Yet somehow, doing away with partition would magically fix the economic and Budget crisis. That is the politics and economics of la-la land. It will not work.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Certainly.

Mr Kinahan: I wonder whether the Member knows the amount of money that was given to Ireland to help it through its financial crisis.

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

Mr McCallister: I am aware of the bailout and the money that the British Government made available there. That was done to help, because these two islands and all the constituent parts either sink or swim economically together. Rather than blaming each other, let us take our responsibilities in the Assembly and get on with what the Assembly and the Executive were elected to do. We either reform this place, or it is going to fail. I agree with the First Minister that it is not fit for purpose. It either has to be reformed, or it will fail and collapse because of its own incompetence and because we cannot be trusted to deal with anything. We cannot deal with a shared future. We cannot deal with corporation tax or other tax-varying powers because we do not have a mandated Government that agrees on a common

Programme for Government to move its ideas forward.

That is why we are failing on shared housing and shared space on every measure. That is why the Alliance Party had to walk out of the original cohesion, sharing and integration talks. That is why we have never moved this agenda forward. That is why, nearly five years since the Alliance Party became part of the Executive, there is no progress on a shared future, despite much talk about it at that time.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: If I have time at the end, I will take an intervention.

Look at the language that many people around the Chamber use. We talk about a unionist forum, and I have warned about unionist unity being a dangerous concept in that it forces us into tribal division. Talk of a graduated response and a culture war and offensive and unnecessary attacks like "curry my yoghurt" damage the drive to end us-and-them politics, which is what the First Minister talked about. Such talk drives us into blaming the other side. When we talk about the naming of play parks in Newry, that is why we fail to deliver on shared space. These are difficult issues that cause offence, and we have not cracked the nut when it comes to how we deal with them.

When bad things happen, we have to, as Mr Agnew pointed out, get it into our head that they are happening to all of us instead of saying, "That doesn't apply to me, because it is happening to the other side."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McCallister: We have to remember that bad things are happening to all of our community. While I support the motion, the Assembly is in need of fundamental reform. Otherwise, it will fail.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the cost of division and the work that we are doing to address the many legacies of the past and to build a united, shared and reconciled community and a better future for all our people.

The cost of division research was commissioned on 29 March 2006 and, as such, was conducted and finalised during direct rule. It is independent research, and the

interpretation of and commentary on the data sets contained in the report represent the views of Deloitte and not those of the First Minister, the deputy First Minister or the Executive. The report does not form an agreed basis for future policy development.

The report cites £1.5 billion as the estimated value of additional annual expenditure as a result of division in our society. The research provides an upper limit of the costs of the divide by comparing the North's public expenditure as a percentage of GDP with that of other comparable regions. That comparison indicates a maximum additional spend in the range of £1.5 billion, but a wide range of other factors influence that level of spend, such as deprivation and demographics, not just the impact of the divide or the Troubles. The £1.5 billion figure is not the total of the costs that could be identified but a comparator with other regions.

The research characterised areas of spend as follows: direct costs arising from civil unrest; less obvious, but no less real, costs arising from the need to provide services separately to meet the needs of the two communities; costs due to additional expenditure on a variety of activities, including community relations work and promoting the North as a tourist destination and an inward investment location; and the lost opportunity cost of underdeveloped economic sectors, such as tourism.

The key outcome of the research confirmed that there is a strong economic case for promoting sharing over separation. However, we in the Executive are convinced that building a united community should not be based only on economic imperatives. Addressing the challenges left by a legacy of division is a strategic priority for all of us and vital to building a stronger, more united and diverse community. We need to address the causes of division: the attitudes, the prejudices and the behaviours that manifest themselves as sectarianism and racism on our streets. Reducing costs will not be a sustainable exercise if we do so simply by closing a particular facility or service in a specific location without addressing the circumstances that created the duplication in the first place.

The Executive's commitment to tackling division and building a united community is clear. One of the key priorities in the draft Programme for Government is to build a strong and shared community. That can be achieved only when we work to reduce segregation and separation. That is why the First Minister and the deputy First Minister announced the publication of

'Together: Building a United Community' in May last year.

4.30 pm

This strategy reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. Tackling issues of segregation and identifying opportunities for the development of shared spaces and services across the region is a key objective of 'Together: Building a United Community'. The strategy outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation. It provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance whilst seeking to address division, hate and separation.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I listened to what the junior Minister is saying, and it all sounds wonderful, but when we cut to the chase and get down to reality, like recently when I questioned the Social Development Minister about Together: Building a United Community and the shared neighbourhoods that were announced under that scheme. I was told that there was no chance of actual sharing, because the allocation of the housing would be done on the same basis on which the Housing Executive currently allocates property. Therefore, there was no genuine ability under Together: Building a United Community, in those new housing projects that have been identified, to build that very same united community. There is no mechanism in place to allocate housing on a shared basis rather than on the current Housing Executive's plans.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I remind Members that interventions should be brief.

Ms J McCann: Can I just finish off, and then I will take your point at the end? Is that OK?

This is an Executive strategy that places responsibilities on all Departments. The Executive are committed to meeting the aims and objectives that are outlined in the strategy. OFMDFM remains committed to continuing to provide leadership and drive forward this important agenda in order to achieve positive good-relations outcomes and build a united, shared and reconciled community. However, we recognise that OFMDFM cannot achieve that alone. The actions required to achieve

real, meaningful and positive change across our society demand the commitment of all Departments, statutory agencies, district councils and the community as a whole.

The implementation of a strategy of this depth and scale cannot be undertaken by one Department or agency, and effective delivery against the targets and commitments will depend wholly on a collaborative approach across all sectors in our society. Therefore, the strategy provides for the establishment of a number of structures that, together, will make up the delivery and implementation architecture to oversee progress in achieving our vision of that united, shared and reconciled community.

As a means of harnessing that collective commitment across government, the ministerial panel, which comprises all Ministers of the Executive, sets the strategic direction for improving good relations across our society, oversees the delivery and implementation of the strategy, and monitors progress through a robust action planning and reporting process. Each Minister is required to report against the actions and targets attributed to his or her Department and show how and to what extent departmental policies are achieving the objectives aligned to this strategy. To reflect our commitment to collaborative working, the membership of the ministerial panel will also include high-level representation from statutory agencies and the voluntary and community sector.

Thematic subgroups will also be established under the auspices of the ministerial panel to reflect the key priorities of the strategy. The membership of each of these subgroups will comprise representation from statutory organisations, alongside community representatives and key stakeholder groups. The chairs of these subgroups —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for giving way. I thank her for the detailed update. How many times has the ministerial panel met in the last 18 months?

Ms J McCann: I am not aware of the individual panel — we have met, I think, about three times; that is when I have been at meetings. But there are also thematic subgroups.

Just to answer your colleague's query, I know about the shared neighbourhoods. We are of a firm belief that allocation of housing should be based on need. That is how all housing allocation should be delivered. I have worked with people who have moved into particular shared neighbourhoods, if you like, and the

difficulty is, that when people move into neighbourhoods where one section of the community has been living rather than it being shared, sometimes they can be frightened by incidents.

For example, I know of one neighbourhood where flags went up when people from a certain religious background moved in. We have to break down those sorts of attitudes and prejudices. It is about looking at the causes and not just treating the symptoms. I do not know whether that answers your question, but I will come back —

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I understand what the Minister is saying, and I appreciate the constraints that she is operating under. However, remember, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister made a promise to the American president, and it was on the back of that that things were allowed to be moved forward. She has not come forward with any creative ways of dealing with this. In order to allow families and communities to share, you have to prepare for it. What programmes are in place to prepare for people who want to live in shared housing?

Ms J McCann: I take your point. I will not stand here and say that those programmes are there. We need to look at that and at building towards doing that. As I said, I know people who had to move out of a shared neighbourhood, having moved into one, because of the conflicts that were there. I take your point, and I think that a lot more work needs to be done. That is all that I can say. As I said, I am just working within the constraints of what I am saying today, but I know that a lot more work needs to be done in that area.

The good relations programme board comprises senior officials from all Departments, who will act as senior responsible officers for the various aspects of the strategy's delivery. The programme board will operate under the strategic direction of the ministerial panel and will report to it on delivery and performance.

At the outset, there was a total of 59 interface barriers, 22 of which were owned by the Housing Executive. The joint agency approach to the removal of interfaces, led by the Department of Justice, has resulted in a reduction in the number of interface barriers from 59 to 53, and engagement is ongoing with 40 of the 53 remaining areas.

I know that it has been said in the debate, but it cannot be the case that people just go in and remove the barriers. A lot of work has to be done in the lead-up to that. We also have to try to build a more reconciled community that is tolerant and that has respect. It is about changing attitudes. That is one of the key areas that we have to change first before we try to make any practical changes. Sometimes, it is people's mindsets that prevent more shared spaces and people coming together in shared housing, shared education and all that. We need to change those attitudes and, in a sense, that is one of the biggest challenges for us when we are looking at tackling the problems and building a united community.

I want to touch on some of the issues of public expenditure. The challenging public expenditure environment does not preclude us from striving towards our vision. We continue to work proactively with Departments to identify opportunities to build on existing work through greater collaboration.

One of the things that could be done at an Executive level to develop it into something that we could use in the next Programme for Government is to use the framework for Delivering Social Change. Instead of individual Ministers from different political parties working in silos in their Departments and to their narrow political mindsets, we could work collaboratively between the Departments and deliver much better for all the people in our community.

People have quite rightly said that it is about the whole community. We are a more diverse community and are not just the two communities any more. We are more diverse and have more and more people coming here to live and work. If we base our policies and strategies on equality of opportunity, tolerance and respect, we will go a lot further when we take those forward. I am very conscious of the time.

We want the North to be seen as a place where people want to invest because we have a truly shared, inclusive and vibrant society, which, as I said, is based on equality. That society needs to be committed to providing a better future for all our people, and combating division is a vital first step to achieving that. Building a united community that is based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and the promotion of reconciliation is important for us not only as we move from conflict and division, but in shaping a modern, diverse and sustainable community that is better equipped for the future.

I want to make one concluding remark. Politicians cannot do it on their own. We need to work more collaboratively with people in local communities. A lot of good work is going on at the grassroots. Someone said earlier that there was always a lot of good work being done in peace building and reconciliation at a grassroots level in local communities. That happened years before we entered into a peace process. I think that we need to develop that more, and we need to make sure that the programmes and projects on the ground that work are resourced and funded in the way that they need to be. I also think that we need to look at civil society. We need to look at the voluntary sector and the community sector, and we all need to work together with the statutory sector in local government and central government, because the only way in which we are going to make those changes is by ensuring that everyone comes together and decides that that is the future that they want for their children and grandchildren. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this discussion.

Mr Dickson: I would genuinely like to thank my colleague Chris Lyttle for introducing the debate and, indeed, all those who have contributed to it. For many decades, the Alliance Party has been highlighting the cost and the damage of division in society. It is not a financial legacy of just the Troubles and beyond. It has had a deep and lasting impact on the way society is structured and the way in which we deliver our public services. That is particularly pertinent, as a number of Members have made reference to, in light of the current Budget pressures.

Members across the House have highlighted examples of the cost of division. Stephen Moutray talked about the work that is needed to bring down barriers. Bronwyn McGahan talked about the cost of division in dealing with the past. Colum Eastwood told us that this was a sensible motion and that the Budget was an element in that. Leslie Cree told us that his party was fully supportive of a prosperous society. David McIlveen highlighted the cost of parades and the rights and responsibilities in respect of that and made particular reference to the role of new and emerging migrant communities in Northern Ireland. Dominic Bradley told us that no party denies the cost of division. Danny Kinahan told us that we need to find ways to forward shared education. Steven Agnew commented on something that I intend to move on to. He questioned what progress had been made in respect of the matter and spoke of the urgent need to move on. He also made reference to the Good Friday Agreement and made the very pertinent point that perhaps it was at that point that we stopped

talking. John McCallister challenged those of us who are in the Executive on what we were doing. Reference has been made to the number of peace barriers and walls; they may have increased, but only one Minister has actually taken any down, and that is David Ford, the Justice Minister.

It was particularly interesting to hear the junior Minister. I thank her for her contribution this afternoon. She told us that OFMDFM did not accept a report that was written in 2007 by one of the world's leading economic houses. If you did not accept it in 2007, what have you been doing between then and 2014 to correct the report? What have you been doing to write your own report? It is a damning and scandalous indictment of OFMDFM that you took this report and ignored it. You have failed to challenge it, except in a soft debate here this afternoon. That is simply unacceptable.

4.45 pm

An example from that report that particularly strikes us concerns health, where it is stated that the erstwhile North and West Belfast Health and Social Services Trust commissioned research on the physical location of service delivery. It accepted recommendations to locate new health centres in locations that would be acceptable and accessible by separate communities. That was written in 2007. I do not hear anybody coming back challenging that, yet the report was rejected. That rejection resulted in the development of four health and well-being centres instead of the two or, at the very most, three that would have been required if the decision had been taken purely on the basis of population, deprivation patterns and the services to be provided. In short, additional health facilities have been built to accommodate division. The practical outworking is there on the ground for us all to see. It is a disgrace to think of the millions that have been, and continue to be, spent propping up a dysfunctional system in the context of the current closures of minor injuries units and the threat to, for example, the unit at Dalriada and the widespread pressures on our health budget. I accept that there are no instant fixes for those matters, but you have had the report since 2007.

The most obvious costs are the direct costs to our policing service in dealing with security situations, but it is also clear that there are costs to services such as our schools, health centres, leisure centres, local government and housing. There is duplication all around us. It is scandalous that we have in excess of 60,000 empty school desks across Northern Ireland. It

is scandalous that we have segregated, not integrated, education. Mr Kinahan made the comment that the jury is out on shared education. He must have missed the fact that the jury came back in with academic research last week to tell us that we need integrated, not shared, education.

The report, despite being rejected, is an invaluable resource. It estimated the cost of division at £1.5 billion then. We do not know how that figure has changed since. However, given the role of inflation and increased tensions, it is very likely to have increased. The current Budget black hole that we are dealing with should put into perspective the scale of the challenge. I understand that not all the savings can be realised immediately, but it is clear that the Executive must have had some plan to make a start. That is why the departmental assessment is so important and why we need to have accurate information. It is only then that we can develop departmental plans to desegregate our society and begin to see the financial benefits of that. A robust, cross-cutting Executive could play a significant role in making our budgeting and financial processes sustainable. We often think of the consequences of the legacy of the past in terms of the human and social cost, and we should never underestimate that, but the financial costs are quite often forgotten. In tackling them, we can divert funding towards public services and economic development and to trying to have a genuinely normal and shared society in Northern Ireland. Tackling the cost of division is an important part of that, and I urge Members to support the motion. Finally — this applies to me and all Members in the House, as well as to all those who have spoken — it is time to stop talking about what divides us and to take some action to stop that dividing continuing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the financial and economic impact of continued division in Northern Ireland; calls on the Executive to conduct formal audits of their budgets and publish their assessment of the impact of societal division; and further calls on all Departments to actively encourage desegregation and promote cohesion, sharing and integration within their policies and spending plans.

Adjourned at 4.49 pm.



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