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Contents

Assembly Business 1

Speaker's Business 1

Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage 2

Private Members' Business

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together and 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care' 2

Sporting Events and Activity-based Tourism..... 21

Oral Answers to Questions

Infrastructure..... 23

Justice..... 32

Private Members' Business

Sporting Events and Activity-based Tourism (*Continued*)..... 41

Assembly Members

Agnew, Steven (North Down)
Aiken, Steve (South Antrim)
Allen, Andy (East Belfast)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Anderson, Sydney (Upper Bann)
Archibald, Ms Caoimhe (East Londonderry)
Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)
Bailey, Ms Clare (South Belfast)
Barton, Mrs Rosemary (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Bell, Jonathan (Strangford)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
Boyle, Ms Michaela (West Tyrone)
Bradley, Maurice (East Londonderry)
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)
Bradley, Ms Sinéad (South Down)
Bradshaw, Ms Paula (South Belfast)
Buchanan, Keith (Mid Ulster)
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)
Bunting, Ms Joanne (East Belfast)
Butler, Robbie (Lagan Valley)
Cameron, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)
Carroll, Gerry (West Belfast)
Chambers, Alan (North Down)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dillon, Ms Linda (Mid Ulster)
Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne (Upper Bann)
Douglas, Sammy (East Belfast)
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Eastwood, Colum (Foyle)
Farry, Stephen (North Down)
Fearon, Ms Megan (Newry and Armagh)
Ford, David (South Antrim)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Girvan, Paul (South Antrim)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)
Hanna, Ms Claire (South Belfast)
Hazzard, Chris (South Down)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)
Hussey, Ross (West Tyrone)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kearney, Declan (South Antrim)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)
Little Pengelly, Mrs Emma (South Belfast)
Lockhart, Ms Carla (Upper Bann)
Logan, Phillip (North Antrim)
Long, Mrs Naomi (East Belfast)
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Lyons, Gordon (East Antrim)
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)
McAleer, Declan (West Tyrone)
McCann, Eamonn (Foyle)
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)
McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)
McCrossan, Daniel (West Tyrone)
McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGrath, Colin (South Down)
McGuigan, Philip (North Antrim)
McGuinness, Martin (Foyle)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McKee, Harold (South Down)
McMullan, Oliver (East Antrim)
McNulty, Justin (Newry & Armagh)
McPhillips, Richie (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)
Mallon, Ms Nichola (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (West Belfast)
Middleton, Gary (Foyle)
Milne, Ian (Mid Ulster)
Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mullan, Gerry (East Londonderry)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Newton, Robin (Speaker)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
Ó Muilleoir, Máirtín (South Belfast)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
Overend, Mrs Sandra (Mid Ulster)
Palmer, Mrs Jenny (Lagan Valley)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)
Ruane, Ms Caitriona (South Down)
Seeley, Ms Catherine (Upper Bann)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Smith, Philip (Strangford)
Stalford, Christopher (South Belfast)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (North Down)
Wells, Jim (South Down)

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 November 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Ms Armstrong: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Minister for Infrastructure has issued a written statement, the content of which is embargoed until after 12.00 noon tomorrow. There will, however, be questions to the Minister for Infrastructure at Question Time today. That means that Members are unable to scrutinise the Minister on something of regional significance and public importance, contrary to Standing Order 18(2). On several occasions, the Alliance Party has attempted to get the Minister to give a formal statement on the matter and has today tabled a question for urgent oral answer to your office for consideration. I ask you to confirm what action you will take to defend the right of the Assembly to scrutinise the work of Ministers, particularly on matters of such public importance.

Mr Speaker: The Member is aware that, on a number of occasions, I have indicated to Ministers, including by writing to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, that statements, when possible and convenient, should be made to the Assembly. I have followed the matter up with the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Attwood: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, which was well made, we have a situation in which Ministers do not attend debates in the Chamber and do not make statements to the House on critical matters and when issues have been raised about questions for oral answer being put to Ministers on the Floor. In those circumstances — this is why I welcome the meetings that you will have with party leaders — is there not a strategic issue with the Assembly's ability to fulfil its legal and statutory functions and a danger that it is being prejudiced and damaged? That needs fundamental consideration by you and the House.

Mr Speaker: You mentioned that we will be having a meeting with party leaders, and I accept that that matter is a potential one for the

agenda. You also know — I said this to Ms Armstrong — that I have encouraged Ministers to provide information in a timely way to the Assembly so that it can operate in an effective manner over the mandate.

I am sure Members are aware of the other channels of communication that they have, and I urge them to follow those channels.

Mr Swann: Further to that point of order, as Question Time for the Department for Infrastructure is up today, how will the Speaker or Deputy Speaker rule if the Minister is questioned on that issue?

Mr Speaker: That is a matter for any Member asking a question of the Minister, and it is for the Minister to decide how they feel able to respond to that question. I leave it with the Member for future consideration.

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further to the issues that have been discussed, at what stage will you run out of patience with those Ministers who will not come to the House? You indicated that you asked them to come. At what stage will you exercise your power to make them come?

Mr Speaker: I do not have the power to make a Minister come to the Chamber. That is at the discretion of the Minister. I indicated to you that I have written to Ministers asking them to come to the Chamber.

Speaker's Business

Mr Speaker: Before we commence the agenda, I want to briefly say that it has been disappointing that, of late, Members have been frequently breaching our procedures by challenging standard procedural decisions, my authority and that of the Deputy Speakers, both inside and outside the Chamber. Indeed, I have had occasion to write to two Members about challenging the authority of the Chair following last week's business.

As I made it clear to party leaders in a letter of 21 October, Members who challenge the authority of the Speaker or the Deputy Speakers, whether inside or outside the Chamber, need not expect me to be sympathetic towards them in future business. I have discussed this with the Deputy Speakers, and I am increasingly concerned about this and about Members seeking to involve us in issues that are properly for Ministers or, indeed, party political debate. Many points are being raised with us at the minute, but I warn Members that we will be proactive in relation to any abuse of procedures towards the Chair.

Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Eastwood (The Chairperson of the Committee for Communities): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 23 February 2017, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA 02/16-21).

At the outset, I declare a family interest in this issue.

The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill was referred to the Committee for Communities on 28 September 2016, and its Committee Stage is due to conclude tomorrow, 15 November 2016. The Bill has generated considerable interest, not least because it is generally accepted that our licensing laws need to be updated. While the Bill has been long awaited, it is important that the Committee takes the necessary time to get it right. We have received over 30 submissions and taken oral evidence from 18 stakeholders, with further evidence sessions planned. However, the issues are complex, and it is only proper that we scrutinise the Bill as comprehensively as we can. Therefore, at its meeting on 20 October 2016, the Committee agreed to table a motion to extend the Committee Stage to 23 February 2017 but with a view to dealing with the Bill as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

On behalf of the Committee, I therefore ask the House to support the motion.

Ms Gildernew: I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on the motion.

The Committee has been busy scrutinising the Bill and the submissions it has received and speaking to stakeholders. While we are delighted to get the opportunity this early in the mandate to discuss the legislation, and we are keen to deal with it as quickly as possible, it is only right that we take the time to do it properly and end up with good legislation. I am happy to support the Chairperson on this and ask for an extension of the Committee Stage.

Mr Eastwood: I am grateful for the widespread support from right across the Chamber. *[Laughter.]* We look forward to carrying on our important work on the Bill.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 23 February 2017, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA 02/16-21).

Private Members' Business

Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together and 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care'

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to two hours for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the amendment and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mrs Dobson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the publication of Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together and 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care'.

I welcome the opportunity to move this motion — the first opportunity that Members have to make substantive comments on the issue. I welcome, as I and my colleagues did on 25 October, the publication of the findings of

Professor Rafael Bengoa and his panel. We had the opportunity to meet the panel at the health summit in the Stormont Hotel in February, and again for 45 minutes at the beginning of June.

The commitment of the expert-led panel was resolute, and I am sure we can all thank them for their many months of work. We welcome their conclusions, which, it must be widely noted, are similar to the findings of the three previous major health reviews in advocating a shift from acute to community care. The one thing that we can, with certainty, learn from history is that we never learn from history. I remember putting it to Professor Bengoa at the summit that reforming the health service was a little like repairing an airplane in flight. He and his panel have provided the Executive with the direction of travel. Therefore, the job of carrying out that reform lies with them.

The publication of Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, and 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care', marks just that: the publication of two documents. That is why the devil is in the detail, and, as yet, we have not been provided with that detail. I was somewhat surprised just how high-level the Minister's response was. She had the Bengoa findings for 10 weeks, yet even some of her more detailed actions referred only to further exploration and consultation. For instance, action point 12 announced the establishment of a transformation oversight structure by November. However, the Minister should really have been in a position to tell us, when launching the action plan, who was going to sit on the panel, how they would be selected and their terms of reference — an example of uncertainty and delay that could have so easily been avoided.

I still believe, however — and it is a point I have heard made several times since the publication of the documents three weeks ago — that it was galling that the very first action was, by January next year, to:

"Develop a comprehensive approach for addressing waiting lists".

I know that many were surprised at that.

No one disagrees that there is a problem, but most will have been shocked to learn that the Executive did not already have a plan in place to deal with it. Throwing money at it in-year, as happened in recent years, has not worked. Remember that £18.5 million of the £40 million last year was not spent on tackling waiting lists,

because health trusts were not given enough time to spend it.

12.15 pm

Following the publication of the two documents last month, there has been some focus on the centralisation of services, so let me make the Ulster Unionist Party position crystal clear. We agree with localising where possible and centralising where medically necessary. What does that look like in reality? It means that we support some services that are being delivered in an unsustainable and unsafe manner coming together when there is a clear and compelling medical case for them to do so, but we will not support the word "unsustainable" being manipulated to suit the Department's agenda, as clearly happened with paediatric congenital heart disease services in Belfast.

One example of a service that we want to see kept as it is is the provision of emergency departments. There are nine type-1 sites in total, including the units at the Royal Victoria Hospital, and they are all under immense strain as it is. We do not need to think back too long to remember what happened at Belfast City Hospital. In the year before the closure of its emergency department (ED) was announced, the hospital had 45,000 attendances, yet, after it was shut, there was only a minimal increase in capacity at the Royal and the Ulster Hospital. No wonder the four-hour A&E performance in the Royal was only 69%. In the July before the City Hospital's A&E closure, it was 78%.

I will give an example of where the present decentralised service relieves pressure on the main specialised unit. That is in nephrology. From personal experience, my son was treated in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and then latterly in the nephrology unit at the City Hospital. That is a successful unit. Indeed, last year, it equalled the UK record for transplants performed in a single unit in a single day. Once successfully post-surgery and into a management regime of drugs, Mark was repatriated to the care of the Southern Trust at the nephrology unit in Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry, under the expert care of consultant nephrologists Dr John Harty and Dr Neal Morgan and their team. As a family and from our experience, we found this to be an excellent positive change for Mark. It also took pressure off the consultants and their team at the City Hospital, because, when we were attending the clinics in Belfast, immunosuppressive patients were effectively lining the walls waiting on their appointment. That is not a safe environment for patients who are susceptible to infection.

If the Minister is going to come forward with the business case, the funding and a plan to establish a centralised — I give this as one example — nephrology service, those plans will need to be funded and carefully planned, and the impact on patients, in the short term and the long term, will need to be taken into consideration. I give that as an example of precisely the level of detail that was missing from the Bengoa report and the Executive's responses. The principles are well established and widely supported, but the how, the when and the where have not been brought forward.

I will give a further example. When I was lobbying earlier this year on behalf of a constituent who needed an appointment with the regional immunology service, the Belfast Trust confirmed to me:

"With demand outweighing capacity, the current waiting time for an adult allergy appointment is up to 22 months."

That is 22 months during which patients risk coming to harm. Indeed, the latest information, from July, shows that 1,094 patients were waiting longer than 52 weeks for an allergy appointment, and that is already a centralised service. Workforce planning, long-term budgeting and actions are required to fix a broken service.

So far, we have a 12-month timeline for a 10-year plan, with budgets at worst for one year and at best for three to four. If I could make one plea to the Executive today it would be this: bring forward the detailed, costed plans for reform and back them up with long-term budget, as in other regions.

There was initial disappointment that the announcement of the Executive's plan was not met, on the same day, by an injection of funding through the October monitoring round. Officials have since confirmed that the 18 actions are being managed within existing resources. I would, however, be grateful for clarity from the Minister on the comments of her officials at the Health Committee last week. They indicated to me that no monitoring round had been commissioned for January and that, given the overcommitment of the Executive, they did not envisage getting any additional allocations in January.

Stable budgets are one thing, but a departmental culture that embraces change and nurtures, rather than suppresses, the talents of healthcare professionals will achieve the best outcomes. As I put it to Dr McBride at Committee, back in June, the Department must

loosen its iron grip. Accountability, certainly, but a stranglehold that stifles individual thinking will ensure that real and meaningful change simply drips down slowly — far too slowly. The Minister stated last week that it will take strong leaders to take forward transformation, and I agree. I do not envy for one minute the task of repairing the airplane in flight.

In conclusion, the future holds many challenges for our people, not least type 2 diabetes, liver cirrhosis, lung and heart disease and, of course, cancer, but the past shows a litany of failed opportunities to support and strengthen our health service. We welcome and will support the amendment from the Alliance —

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

Mrs Dobson: I therefore urge the Minister to tell us the how, the when and the where to lift that uncertainty and to begin tackling the issue.

Ms Bradshaw: I beg to move

At end insert:

"; further notes that these reforms are based on expert analysis and must be implemented in a holistic manner without delay; and calls on the Minister to provide a detailed action plan for the implementation of the proposed reforms over the current Assembly term."

I rise to propose the amendment and to support the motion. I welcome the Health Minister's presence in the Chamber for the debate.

It is important to put on record that the Assembly needs to get behind the principles of the transformation process. To make an obvious but important point, reform is a complex matter. It will be natural for people to oppose aspects of it, but change is always uncomfortable. It is not enough merely to say why change is necessary but that does bear repeating. First, there is the financial issue, which is often referred to. If we do not reform, we simply will not be able to afford our health service, which is free at the point of access, in 10 or 15 years' time. Secondly and more importantly, the system is in some ways broken; it needs to be mended. We need to centralise specialised services, as my colleague Mrs Dobson said, to maximise available expertise. We need to ensure that more is done at the point of entry to the system, notably within primary care, to direct people to the appropriate places. We need to invest more in health and well-being through preventative work, not least

in mental health, to support people to manage their own health and the health of those they are caring for.

Our amendment calls on the Assembly to recognise the value of reform and the need to support it in principle and without reservation. Otherwise, the health service simply will not be viable, and the brilliant and very committed people working in it will not be able to deliver the results that they want to.

I have said before, and I say again, that if the Minister proceeds with the transformation process, she will have my party's support, even where measures are challenging. This does not mean that we will commit to support the Minister in everything she does, because we have not had a chance to see what exactly it is that she proposes. Her announcements so far have lacked full detail, but that is not unreasonable at this stage. However, we do want more meat on the bones in the very near future. It has been said that the transformation process will take two Assembly terms. Again, that is very reasonable. However, it should not be an excuse for not making considerable progress in the current Assembly term. We need clarity in the form of a full action plan. Where are the resources, and who will be responsible for different aspects of delivering reform? Not everything will run perfectly, but we need an action plan that we, as Members of the Assembly, can assess to make sure that the reform process is taking place. We also need to remember that this is not just about MLAs in the Chamber; this is about the general public and the people who use the health service. The general public are the most important aspect of this.

What should be in the action plan? First, we must have absolute clarity, which, to be fair, the Minister has already indicated she is prepared to give, as to where the differences are between her own road map and the report of the expert panel chaired by Professor Bengoa. I echo the comments of Mrs Dobson: it was truly an expert report, and we would be foolish not to follow it. I certainly put on record my thanks to Professor Bengoa and his panel for their work on it. The Minister has said that hers is the only road map in town. That may be wise, but we do need to be clear as to what that relates to with regard to the expert panel's report.

Secondly, we need a clear indication of the resource requirements for the transformation. It is not just about financial resources but about personnel and the use of facilities. We need clarity, too, as to the resource that will be

required throughout the Assembly term and beyond it. We need to recognise that it is necessary to know where it is coming from and that it has been guaranteed.

Thirdly, we need a series of actions and a commitment to clarity on how and, indeed, whether they will be delivered. Not everything will run smoothly, as I said. The implementation of the Transforming Your Care strategy was set back by uncertainty about what had been implemented. We know that things were implemented, but it was just not recorded very well. There was never any doubt that implementation was needed, but, as I say, people in the service were not sure what was happening a lot of the time.

Finally, we need clarity on who will be responsible for management of the transformation. Who will head up the transformation board that provides oversight and what level of expertise will be on the board? This issue of assigning responsibility goes further. We also need a recognition in the plan, in line with the report of the expert panel and indeed the Programme for Government framework, that this will not be solely a matter for the Department of Health. Children's health, the role of welfare and housing in health, well-being in the workplace and so on, fall to other Departments. Of course, many aspects of health, particularly health promotion, fall outside government altogether.

I think that this transformation is possible. However, it will take commitment, courage and clarity. Where those exist, my party will support the process every step of the way. Where they do not exist, my party will provide constructive challenge. I commend both the motion and the amendment to the House.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the proposers of both the motion and the amendment, especially the proposer of the amendment on her very positive contribution. It is good to see that. I always think that I am the only optimist in the room; it is good to see that there is more than one here. I also thank her for the amendment because it puts a little bit more meat on the bones of the motion. We will also support it.

I welcome the commitment by the Executive in their unanimous support for the implementation of the Minister's plan for the future of health and social care. As Chair and a member of the Committee for Health, in recent months, I, along with others, have had the great pleasure of meeting many groups, whether that be the BMA or the RCN, all the various AHPs, social workers, and other people who work in health

and social care. During that journey over the past few months, I have seen a real difference and optimism in all those disciplines in health and social care.

On Friday afternoon, I attended an event here for the College of Occupational Therapists. It was launching a report on reducing the pressures on hospital admissions, which is something that we very much want to look at in the future of health and social care. It showed us again the innovative work that is happening day and daily amongst allied health professionals here in Northern Ireland. At times, we look at health and social care and say that we have not done anything or that it has been at stalemate. As someone who came from that background and has not worked in it for over five years, I think very differently. I see so much innovative work taking place every day across primary and secondary care.

A couple of weeks ago, I had the pleasure of hosting a physiotherapy event. We heard from service users, who are probably the most important people to hear from in all this, especially with regard to self-referral in the South Eastern Trust, where, as I think that I have said here before, over 7,000 people have now used that initiative.

I would like the Minister to comment on rolling that out further. We have heard also in Committee about the pressures facing our GP services, and all our primary care services, and about how that vision for the future can make a real difference.

12.30 pm

I want to pick up on a few points. I was glad that Ms Bradshaw said that change is often uncomfortable. I think that that is one of the major dilemmas that we, as an Assembly, will have as we go forward in this mandate, and in future mandates, when it comes to health and social care. Mrs Dobson talked earlier about the closure of EDs; she said that she did not wish that to happen. It is very comfortable for me, as a Belfast MLA, to look at everything else around the rest of our Province and think that we could do something better, that we should close or move something, or that we should make somewhere a special hub for something. I can say that with great comfort because I know that I have absolutely everything on my doorstep here in Belfast. I am so glad to have that. However, I know from my DUP colleagues on these Benches that we will face problems. I think that the Minister will also face problems from her colleagues. We have tough decisions

to make; there are really tough decisions ahead of us. However, I think that there is momentum and will; I have heard from everybody in the Chamber that they want to see change and want to effect it.

As I said before, I am glad that Ms Bradshaw brought forward her amendment, because there needs to be an implementation plan. That uncertainty will lead to some people becoming cynical, and not just Members but service users and those who work in the service. We need to see progress; we need to have something more stable in place. That goes for the budget as well. We had a witness session last week at the Health Committee to do with the budget. Quite frankly, it was not good enough. We need to see more and to have more ideas written down.

As I said earlier, I know from meeting people who work in social care and many service users over the past five or six months that there is an appetite and a hunger for change. There is also an appetite and a hunger in the Chamber for change. I add my support to the Minister for her long journey ahead —

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

Ms P Bradley: I support the motion and the amendment.

Ms Seeley: I thank my colleagues in the UUP for bringing forward the motion, as it signifies a mature enough approach from them. Over the last number of weeks, that party has failed to embrace the report and the Minister's vision, despite the fact that it has been welcomed and embraced right across the sector as well as in the media and, most importantly, by patients, carers and staff. This is the mother of all opportunities, but opening comments from the UUP suggest the same old negativity and, of course, a lack of any viable alternatives. The same old glass-half-empty approach will get us nowhere. We are extremely appreciative of the efforts, commitment and dedication of Professor Bengoa and his expert panel. Whilst our amendment reflecting that was not accepted, the Alliance amendment in some way attempts to acknowledge the expert analysis.

Bengoa's report administered a harsh dose of reality. In his report, he describes the health service as being on a burning platform and warns that change is inevitable. We have no choice but to implement change, but we have a choice as to the circumstances in which it is implemented: now, at a time when we can

manage change whilst double-running our health and social care service, or later, following a system collapse, when we will be managing change in crisis.

The amendment states:

"reforms ... must be implemented in a holistic manner without delay; and calls on the Minister to provide a detailed action plan for the implementation of the proposed reforms over the current Assembly term."

The Minister has acted without delay: she has outlined the plan for the next 12 months and will build on that plan in January, and she has committed to reporting to the House every six months. It makes you wonder whether the parties sitting outside the Executive have been listening. That said, given that the Minister is already doing what the amendment calls for, we have no issue with supporting today's amendment as well as the motion.

Our demographics have changed so drastically in the last 20 years, yet our health and social care service has remained static. People are living longer but with much more complex needs. Therefore, it is vital that our health and social care service responds to that. The vision that the Minister has outlined aims to tackle waiting lists, improve access to GP services, achieve parity of esteem for mental health, raise the attainment of looked-after children, reform adult social care and support, develop a workforce strategy, fully realise the potential of community pharmacists, as well as avail itself of the many invaluable community services and good practices that are already out there. Her plans are ambitious; but then they need to be.

Professor Bengoa, in comments to the Committee, suggested that the implementation of the Minister's vision had the potential to result in the delivery of a world-class health and social care system. He said that the Minister had gone further than any other equivalent European Minister he had ever worked with. These words should inspire confidence across the political divide. Of course, there have been opportunities for change in the past, but change is a brave choice. It can be slow and frustrating and it is certainly not populist. That is why it is vitally important that we do not play politics with this. Countless Members will speak today and each of them will note the pending crisis in our health service but a Minister alone cannot deliver the change that is needed; we must all put our shoulders to the wheel. As politicians, we must lead this change and engage our communities early, most of whom are already ahead of us.

I urge Members to consider what is more important: populism or patient well-being; convenience or quality; cheap headlines or action. If we are serious about improving patient outcomes and tackling health inequalities, then we need to get behind this vision. In the short term, we must allow the Minister the space to engage meaningfully with health and social care staff and patients so that, in partnership, her vision can be built on, advanced and grow and develop to ensure that the end result is a world-class health and social care system that will be the envy of the world.

Mr McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to discuss the important motion today and the fact that my Ulster Unionist and Alliance colleagues have brought it to the House. Maybe the first thing to note is that in the interests of openness and transparency — something that this Executive is not particularly good at — it has taken an Opposition party to bring the substantive discussions here today.

Any effort to improve the health of people is essential and is required. I worry about reports that are published and then become bookends or dust gatherers. We have had Delivering Better Services, Transforming Your Care, the Donaldson report and now the latest, the Bengoa report. This series of reports is only useful if it provides a concrete blueprint for what must be done for the future of our health services and then our actions. It has been said that this report is more a direction of travel than defined proposals. I hope that it will not be interpreted as a report of wishy-washy aspirations and, instead, is something that will deliver.

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGrath: I will, very quickly.

Ms Dillon: The Member is right that we have had all those reports but none of them were under this Minister. I think that the Member will agree with that.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Member for her contribution. We are discussing the report, not the Minister, so we will stick to the topic.

I welcome many elements of the report but, again, it would be difficult to argue with any elements in the report. We want a healthy population, of course; we want people to live longer, of course; we want people to access proper, decent expert healthcare when they need it, of course; we want people to avail themselves of services at home where possible

and not in hospital, of course; we want to challenge the root cause of many illnesses presenting to our health service by challenging poverty, dealing with obesity and improving a healthy and fit lifestyle, of course. Who would not?

I am a little concerned that this report tells us much of what we already know and not very much of what we have not yet got. What is it that we need? We need to see ambulance response times improved in rural areas; they get you to the hospital. We need emergency departments that can cope and do not have long queues. Maybe you could reopen the Downe accident and emergency unit, which would help. We need to stop seeing trolleys in the corridor as acceptable healthcare. We need more consultants who can screen and direct patients to the care that they need. We need beds available for patients who need them. We need elective surgery waiting times slashed. We need outpatient appointments in a reasonable time.

We need proper community care for people at home, not a 10-minute dash-and-run service that leaves our elderly bewildered rather than cared for. We need to treat staff with dignity and decency, pay them a fair wage and reimburse them for the costs of their work. It is not fair that some people in our health service are out of pocket when they go to work. I could go on and on.

I read the report and worry that Bengoa has said much, but I wonder whether he really said anything at all. Where are the concrete outcomes? Where are the timescales? Where are the measurables? Are they financed? Are they ready to go? I do not envy you your work, Minister; you have a mammoth task ahead. Help was sought and it produced this report, but I wonder whether it is really the help that we need.

I hope that we will not just be kicking problems down the line and that we have the plans to deal with them. It has taken years to build up, but to take 10 years to sort the problem out is a bit long. It is a disservice to our people and their healthcare workers to say that it will take that long, and we need something quicker in the short term.

The lack of clarity on the financial element of the report is also of concern. There is a complete lack of an estimate of the costs associated with the process and/or an indication of where the money will come from. With no money being requested by the Department of Health in the October monitoring

round to deal with the urgent waiting list crisis that we are facing, the lack of detail on the costs of delivering the much-needed action plan promised in the report is a bit worrying.

I conclude by echoing the sentiments of my colleague Mr Durkan on the launch of the report and by reaffirming the SDLP's commendation and support of our healthcare staff on their vigorous work providing healthcare across the North. The work and effort of our healthcare workers is second to none, and it cannot be put on them that their efforts do not translate to a first-class health service. We remain optimistic that the process will begin to resolve the problems faced in Health and Social Care, and we look forward to seeing an action plan and detailed costs going forward. Of course we pledge to work constructively with the Minister.

Mr Middleton: I welcome the opportunity to speak today. I also welcome the publication of the reports from the expert panel and from the Minister. I thank the expert panel for the work that it carried out, and I also thank the Department for setting out a pathway for implementing this change.

The expert panel's report has a clear statement:

"The choice is not whether to keep services as they are or change to a new model. Put bluntly, there is no meaningful choice to make. The alternatives are either planned change or change prompted by crisis."

The Chair touched on the fact that, as members of the Health Committee, we meet with various groups weekly. Last week, we had a stakeholder event with a wide representation of groups. They made it very clear to us that they recognise the change that has to happen. It is very disappointing that, so far, the tone from the Opposition parties — I do not include the Alliance Party in this — has been very negative. The report has been out only for a matter of days, and they have not given it a chance. When you reflect on that and get behind the public and professional opinion —

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for giving way. I am somewhat surprised that the Member mentions our tone. We welcome the findings of the Bengoa report, but we are asking for the details of a costed and funded plan. Surely you agree that that is essential in putting patients first.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Middleton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. That is not the point that I was making; I was referring to the negative tone. It is unfortunate that there has been a knee-jerk reaction to the publications; we have seen it in the media. Unfortunately for some Members, they should reflect on the position of the media, get real with the facts and wait for a response from the Minister.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Middleton: No, I am going to try to make some progress. The expert panel's report makes the challenges very clear, and it also makes it clear that we need to draw on the experience of those who already deliver care and take on their expertise to build on the existing foundations. We have to remember that much positive work is already happening in the health service, and we should not be running it down. We are here to make sure that the work continues while also reforming it and making it better. We need to communicate the plans, of course, and the Minister has done that so far by outlining the 12-month vision and the need for additional transitional funding. The transformation board will see all this through.

12.45 pm

Innovation was touched on by my colleague, the Chair of the Health Committee, and I think that it is no longer acceptable that we keep doing things as they were, just for the sake of it or for the fact that we have been doing it for 20 years. We need to look at innovative ways of doing things and we know there is much innovation within our health service at this minute in time.

We need to address elective care performance, and we know that a strategy is going to be released in January on how we address that. Of course, the difficulty will be trying to address the waiting times and ensuring that we push forward with the transformation. That is where we need clear leadership, not only professional or clinical but political leadership. The Executive have given a clear commitment to showing that leadership, and we also need to see that from others outside of the Executive.

To keep staff on board, it is vital that the Minister keeps ensuring there are conversations happening with the staff and that they feel valued and are kept up to speed with the changes that are required. With all of the recommendations in the report, the clear outcome is that there is a willingness among the staff to make the change that is required.

The Health and Wellbeing 2026 vision outlines the pathway and how we are going to make these changes.

We must recognise the challenges of population change and the health inequalities which exist within our communities. It is no longer acceptable that, if you live in a certain community, your access to services is going to be different or you are going to be disadvantaged. We know that, in some communities, you are twice as likely to die from smoking or you are three times as likely to die from suicide. These health inequalities are no longer acceptable.

These reforms will see that our communities get the health service that they deserve. We have to recognise that finance alone will not solve this. We need to fully implement what the report says, and we look forward to working with the Minister to ensure that it happens.

Mr Milne: I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion and in support of the tabled amendment. I commend the Minister, Michelle O'Neill, on launching Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, a 10-year vision to transform the North's health and social care system. As we know, this is an opportunity for a fresh start supported by the Executive and is not just the will of one Minister or Department.

Minister O'Neill's vision was compiled after considering the report, 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care', by a panel of experts led by the highly esteemed Professor Rafael Bengoa — a report which has received considerable support for the need for change from vast numbers of people working in our health and social care sectors, including the BMA and AHPS, who signalled general approval.

Our Health Minister has stated on previous occasions that the system itself is now at breaking point and facing a number of challenges, not least the demographic changes and considerable health inequities which continue to persist. It is well past the time to organise services in a way which does not constrain transformation or our ability to provide a higher-quality service. There can be no doubt that we need to support people to keep well in the first place and that, when we need care and support, services should be safe and of the highest quality.

I agree with the Minister that our focus must move from one which is based on action-based targets to one based on patient outcomes and

co-production of services. Healthcare professionals and staff across the relevant sectors are working harder than ever to deliver high-quality care and support to patients and carers, but they have to work in a health and social care system designed to meet 20th-century needs that does not work in the 21st-century world.

Changing the health system is the right thing to do, this is the right time to do it and it is much needed by service users. Change must be planned, managed and incremental. It will not happen overnight. This will take time, resources and the support of staff as well as everyone who uses the health and social care services.

We must avoid playing politics with health. We all need to support evidence-based decisions when presented.

Mr Beggs: I, too, support the motion in the name of my colleague Jo-Anne Dobson and others and, indeed, the amendment proposed by the Alliance Party.

Health is not just about statistics; it is about real people's lives and how we must act to improve the quality of those lives. There are recommendations in the Health and Wellbeing 2026 report that are aimed at helping to stabilise, reconfigure, improve and transform the health service, but what we need is a much more detailed action plan on how that will be delivered and improved rather than just this high-level strategy. Until that is seen, there will not be a clear picture that will give the public the confidence that it will be followed.

The very first recommendation is to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing waiting lists. Why have our Executive allowed our waiting lists to deteriorate to such an extent? Totally unacceptably long waiting lists are causing stress and anxiety to constituents. Undue delays in patient treatment can sometimes mean greater likelihood of an individual coming to harm, with many facing a short-term adverse impact on the quality of their life, and there may even be longer-term impacts because of delays in treatment. There are additional visits to A&E and costly unplanned admissions to hospital. I can think in particular of one constituent who recently contacted me about her 111-week waiting time. She is a relatively young person who was working successfully and saving a little money, but, as a result of waiting for an operation, she has had to stop working and is unemployed. She is living life in pain, and, instead of contributing to

our society, she is on a 111-week waiting list. That is unacceptable.

Going forward, we must learn from previous strategies. I look back in particular to the period 2011-15, when Minister Poots led with the Transforming Your Care proposal. I can see much of the content of that running over into the new document, which has the same general ideas. However, Transforming Your Care did not materialise in the way that was envisaged. New and improved services were often not supported and delivered. There was a significant proposal through invest to save to make new money from the Department of Finance available for improvements, but under former Ministers Edwin Poots and Simon Hamilton that money was diverted from those improvement schemes into the normal, run-of-the-mill activity. I want to know what the detailed action plan is. How can we ensure that, unlike Transforming Your Care, the improvements are deliverable and this is not just another high-level strategy?

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member giving way. He paints a stark picture of the situation confronting the health service. I am sure he will agree that the problems he identifies began way before 2011.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: The Member is right: Michael McGimpsey warned that, when the Executive were inadequately funding our health service, there would be problems. Exactly as he indicated, in the latter part of the last Assembly in particular, there were difficulties, and that is exactly when the waiting lists got out of control. The Member is right: it was predictable, and the Executive were warned about it by Michael McGimpsey.

I am aware that the Bengoa report aims to look at new models of care, and we eagerly await further details. Clearly, there is a need to improve local care in the community. Certainly, I am aware of difficulties with the current funding arrangement, with constituents frequently having difficulty getting support to allow their loved ones to live safely in their own home. I suspect that is largely because of the funding arrangements, whether imposed directly by the Department or ignored, which are unable to attract new staff into the agencies that provide that support.

In my constituency of East Antrim, we are, to a degree, bereft of secondary care. We do not have the support that exists in many other

locations. East Antrim does not have an accident and emergency unit, a minor injuries unit or any of the new all-singing, all-dancing health and well-being centres. There is a need for investment in capital and resource to ensure that the new multidisciplinary teams that are being talked about can be delivered locally so that all health professionals can work closely together and improve the service. I hope that that will be delivered as a result of the proposal, but we need the detailed plan.

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

Mr Beggs: I urge Members to ensure that it will be delivered and not just talked about, as previous schemes were. We need delivery, not just strategies and consultations.

Mr Sheehan: I could spend the whole of my five minutes talking about all the negative aspects of the health service, but there is no point in doing that. I prefer to accentuate the positive. Everyone in the House knows a good news story about the health service and of someone who has been helped. Sometimes we hear of almost miraculous recoveries of people who have had to be dealt with by the health and social care system. I can think of nothing more important than the health of our citizens, and that includes the delivery of health and social care to them. I pay tribute to all those who work in the health and social care system: the clinicians, the nurses and all the ancillary staff. The staff and the great work that they do is one of the most positive things that we could talk about.

In a sense, there is nothing really new in 'Systems, Not Structures' from Bengoa. There have been other reports — we have heard mention of the Donaldson report and Transforming Your Care — but none has been implemented, whether because the will, the resource or whatever else was not there, but what those reports do, along with the new report, is create a framework or route map through which the health service can be transformed. On this occasion, it is clear that there is a commitment to implement change and follow the direction of travel prescribed by Professor Bengoa. That commitment is evident from what we have heard from the Minister and the Executive.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I want to tease out the implications of what he says. He said that there was now support from the DUP on the Executive for delivering this version of reform, but he also

said that the report was very similar to other, previous reports under DUP Ministers. By implication, is he saying that Sinn Féin is at fault for failing to support the DUP Ministers and that we have missed the opportunity to get on with this over the past number of years?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Sheehan: I thank the Minister for his intervention. I am not so sure that that is the case. However, I do not want to hark back to the past. The Minister —

Dr Farry: Member.

Mr Sheehan: The Member was on the Executive as a Minister, so maybe he is more informed on those issues than I am.

Professor Bengoa said in Committee a couple of weeks ago that many other regions and countries were trying to bring about change in their health system. Some are doing that by throwing resources and funding at it, while others are doing it by trying to transform the system while not providing resources. Professor Bengoa said that this region was unique, in that we are intent on having transformation and providing additional funding. If that is not a measure of the commitment of the Minister and the Executive, I am not sure what is.

1.00 pm

I represent a constituency that has some of the worst health inequalities across these islands, and, unless there is transformation, those health inequalities will continue to grow, waiting lists will get longer and the percentage of the block grant going towards health and social care will increase. There is only one solution, and that solution is transformation.

Let us all draw a line here today. I have listened to a number of speakers so far, and I did not detect any opposition to the need for radical transformation of our health and social care system. In fact, health, in a sense, is a unique issue. Every one of us sitting here today and every person listening to the debate will be affected by ill health at some time, whether it is them, members of their families, their friends and so on. As I said in the debate last week, ill health does not discriminate along party political lines.

I make this appeal every time I talk about a health issue in the Chamber: let us all work together. This is an issue that affects all of us.

It is absolutely right that the Minister should be held to account, as every Minister should. There is absolutely no doubt about that, but health is unique in that it affects us all, and, if we all work together, we can make more progress, not for ourselves but for the people out there whom we represent. I will leave you with that thought. Working together is the best way to resolve all these problems.

Mr Durkan: I rise in support of the motion and the amendment. Mr Sheehan said that he did not detect any opposition to the need for radical transformation: that is fair enough, and it is because there is none. I do not think that anyone in here or anyone anywhere could oppose the notion that our healthcare system needs to be reformed. We see that every day, we hear that every day in our constituency offices, we might hear it around our kitchen tables and we hear it over the air waves.

Many people have to live with the fact that the healthcare system that we have allowed to evolve is far from perfect and is not fit for purpose, but, for some time, we have been promised a magic bullet that will cure all the ills in our health service. It is fair to say that, since May, any criticism or question that has been levelled at the Department of Health or, indeed, the Minister — I do not think that there has been much in the way of criticism of the Minister — has been responded to with almost a stock answer that the Bengoa report will sort that out.

Mr Stalford: I appreciate the Member giving way. He will also want to reflect, I presume, on the comments of his Opposition colleague Mr Beggs, whose stock answer any time the problems that existed prior to 2011 are pointed out is, "Michael McGimpsey asked for more money". The beauty of the Bengoa report is that it is institutional reform plus additional investment.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the intervention; I am not sure that I thank him for the extra minute that he has got me, right enough. I concur with his view that there is more to this than more money. It is about how we do things differently, not how we spend more money on doing the same old things.

A lot of expectation, anticipation and suspense was allowed to build up around Bengoa and then, when it was published, the fact that it was so similar in many respects to reports that we had received, read and seen before meant that

there was almost a bit of an anticlimax. I found that to be the case very much among the media, in that they were almost searching for negativity in reaction or response to the report. I have to say in response to Mr Middleton's remarks that they did not really get much negativity from me nor, I believe, from my Opposition colleague, as he described Mrs Dobson. We asked questions around the lack of detail in the report, and it would be a dereliction of duty not just of us as Opposition MLAs but of any of us here, as MLAs and public representatives, not to ask questions about how the plan will be implemented and delivered and how it will improve healthcare for those out there who need it and those of us in here who, undoubtedly, will need it someday.

The problem with the past reports to which this is so similar has been the failure to implement them. Mr Farry made an interjection highlighting the fact that we have been told a lot that it is different this time because this is a report that the Executive fully endorse. I do not recall the Executive not endorsing Transforming Your Care, for example. Let us make sure that it is more than the Executive endorsing this plan.

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. One of the most bizarre things about our system of government is that the issues regarding health reform were not brought to the last Executive. There was zero discussion on any occasion around Transforming Your Care or Donaldson; the discussion was purely around money. It is perverse in a society like ours that we do not discuss the big issues. Only the transactional business is brought to the Executive, and nothing strategic was ever discussed.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I assure him that it will be different this time, now that we have done away with those pesky parties.

A Member: Hear, hear. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Durkan: We have certainly expressed a bit of concern about the lack of specifics in the report. The amendment calls for more meat on the bones, as I did on the morning of the report's publication. It is important that we see that soon and give certainty to people and to places that might have concerns about the future of facilities in their area. I think that that is inevitable, given the reconfiguration of services that is necessary and will, ultimately, whatever way it is dressed up, lead to the closure and withdrawal of services from areas.

While Bengoa will form the foundation of the Minister's vision or the Minister's policy, we will not allow Bengoa to be a fig leaf for every difficult or unpopular decision that has to be taken by the Minister or any health trust, wherever it may be.

There is a need for so much. We spoke about the reconfiguration of services. There is a need for improved care in the community, improved primary care, an enhanced role for GPs and an enhanced role for community pharmacy and allied health professionals. Those enhanced roles have to be matched by enhanced resources.

I am conscious that I have not that long left, so I will touch on one more thing. On the morning of the Minister's statement, she said, in response to a question asked by Mr Carroll, that she was working towards a position where we did not need to use the independent sector. Is that applicable across the board? I think that she answered that on dealing with elective surgery and waiting lists, but is it applicable in social care too? Is it applicable to nursing homes and residential homes, where statutory provision is extremely poor and is currently being closed by stealth?

Mr Carroll: I thank the Members who brought the issue to the Assembly. In the aftermath of the publication of the strategy, there has been a lot of discussion about the Bengoa report itself. We all know that the health service is in crisis. We know that our hospital waiting lists are dangerously long. People wait years to be seen by a specialist or to be operated on; indeed, my nieces and nephews have, unfortunately, been sick in the last week and have waited long hours to be treated in the children's hospital. Recently, I was contacted by a father whose five-year-old child had been waiting for 18 months for an important operation on her mouth. That is completely unfair and unacceptable, but, unfortunately, it is a widespread problem that people have to wait long periods of time.

It is a shocking indictment of the current state of affairs that we have a postcode lottery whereby, if you are from an area of high deprivation and poverty, you have to wait longer to be treated. If you live in a place like West Belfast, you will wait longer than those in other, wealthier areas in the North. It is a shocking disparity that needs to be tackled. The reason people are stuck on the waiting lists is that we have seen systemic cutbacks over the last several years. We saw the City Hospital's A&E close, putting huge pressure onto the Royal. We saw a reduction in the number of beds available for

patients. We saw a privatised recruitment selection problem, where there is a long and often complicated process to recruit staff.

Indeed, the shortage of staff is leading to the closure of the Meadowlands unit in Musgrave Park Hospital, which has been in the news recently.

Cutbacks and not enough staff are leading us down the road where services are being reduced or stopped altogether. Some say that it is intentional, others that it is bad workforce planning. Staff are doing tremendous work; they are the lions in our health service, but they are under huge pressures. Many health workers are working against the clock, working long hours and not taking breaks just to provide the service that they are so committed to. We are also seeing people retiring and either not being replaced at all or, increasingly, replaced by agency staff. This casualisation of the workforce must come to an end. Paying tens of millions of pounds to recruitment agencies, which are making an amazing fortune out of this process, needs to come to an end; it needs to be tackled immediately.

Millions of taxpayers' pounds should be put into the health service and not into the pockets of recruitment agencies or private companies for that matter. Just last week, we saw Richard Branson, a multimillionaire, get his hands on a huge section of the health service. We have to be clear that private companies that are designed to make profit at all costs should have absolutely no role in our health service. We have to ask this question today: will this strategy and the implementation of this document proposed by the Minister and backed by the Executive address the problems that we are experiencing, or will it lead to a further cutting back of our health service and a further encroachment —

Ms Dillon: I thank the Member for allowing the intervention. I accept what you are saying, and using private healthcare is certainly not the answer that we want to see. However, do you not accept that the child whom you spoke about who is having to wait 18 months will have to wait a lot longer if the Minister does not use these methods in the short term in order to reduce waiting lists?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Carroll: I thank the Member for her point. However, the point is that the money should be redirected back into the health service and not into the hands of private companies. Recruit

more staff into the health service and reduce waiting lists.

In the general debate, there has been much talk of the experts and the expert panel. Those people are no doubt highly qualified in their fields, but who knows better how our health service runs and can be improved than the people who work at the coalface? The trade union movement has been excluded from the process. It spoke at the Health Committee and said that it has had no representation on the expert panel. It is shocking that organisations that represent tens of thousands of healthcare staff have not been front and centre in this process. We hear the talk of the rationalisation of our health service. You can butter it up whatever way you like, but, for me, this is code for cutbacks. How can we improve our health service and cut waiting times by cutting our health service? It cannot be done. We need to put money in to defend our services. The underlying language in much of this report follows an NHS template from England, where we see daily reports of organisations —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not.

We see daily reports of organisational meltdown, financial crisis and privatisation surrounding these new structures, and that should cause us great concern. Nye Bevan, one of the key architects of the NHS, said that the NHS will survive if there are people around to defend it. I hope that, over the next few weeks, the people will get out and campaign to defend our NHS. They will have support from People Before Profit in that process.

Mr Allister: There is probably no sector more afflicted with all the buzzwords that have become fashionable, like "transformation", as if that is going to cover up the failures of the past and deliver a new utopia. We have to ask more probing questions. For example, did the previous Executive lead us in the right direction of providing basic healthcare by reducing the number of hospital beds by over 10% and then being surprised at the logjams — the near traffic jams — of people on trolleys in the corridors of our hospitals? The answer to all that now is, "Let us grab some nice buzzwords like 'transformation' and 'improving outputs'", from the very people who delivered much of the shambles that we have been afflicted by in recent times. I have to say that I see, essentially, in the Bengoa report and in the consultation document of last Friday, a stratagem for stripping out services from many

of our hospitals that they presently provide, and it is being done on a well-trying template.

The consultation document is a perfect example and model of this. In order to obtain the preordained outcomes of reducing and stripping out facilities in hospitals, you have to build a case — as they built, sometimes in a quite phoney way, in respect of the Belfast City Hospital emergency department for example, the closure of which was meant to be temporary but which was to avoid a consultation. The words used were "It's not safe" and "We can't get the staff". We had an experience with the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine when it was going through a dark patch. There were those who were trying to diminish it, and the claim was, "We can't get the staff". Of course, that was rectified, because it could be rectified. However, very often, when the Government wants to do something, they set up the various criteria to fit into where they want to get to. That is why these criteria are so much about safety and about being clinician-led, as if that is the answer to everything. Most clinicians want a handy time in terms of if they can all work in the greater Belfast area then they will all choose to work in the greater Belfast area.

1.15 pm

So, devising the consultation document in those ways is geared, I suspect, to producing a stratagem of stripping out services in many hospitals. Where that concerns me the most is in respect of our rural community. This is the Minister who, when she wore the agriculture hat, brought the Rural Needs Bill to the House. She told us during the debates on that that:

"The key principles of the Bill mean that rural issues will be embedded, as a matter of course, in the development and delivery of all government strategies and policies; ... government will take a joined-up and collaborative approach in taking account of rural needs when designing public services."
— [Official Report (Hansard), 8 March 2016, p13, col 2].

It sounds great. Where did rural proofing come in the consultation that was issued on Friday? It was tucked in as a little afterthought on page 20. It was tucked in in terms in which it is quite clear that, "Yes, we will go through the motions, but we will not pay any heed", because it contains the key phrase:

"fully engage in consulting rural communities before finalising the service change."

In other words, "We are going to make the change, then we will consult with the rural communities, and then we will finalise the change.". Where is the embedding that was promised by this Minister in respect of rural proofing?

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

Mr Allister: Indeed, where is the rural proofing in Bengoa's report? Did he ever even consult with rural interests? So, I fear that all of that is feeding into a reduction and diminishing of services for many of my constituents who live in rural areas.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up. I call the Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, to respond to the debate. The Minister has up to 20 minutes.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am a bit hoarse, so bear with me. I thank the Members who have contributed in a positive and constructive way today. I am very keen to keep talking and to keep coming back to this conversation as we transform our health and social care. The prize at the end of that transformation will be better patient outcomes, and that is the prize that we all need to work towards.

I very much welcome the fact that the Alliance Party has brought forward an amendment, because it puts a bit of meat on the bones, as the original motion merely notes the publication of the report. I will correct the Member who proposed the motion and said that this is the first time we have had the opportunity to debate the issue. I think you will find that it is not. I have been to the Health Committee — I know you were in China at the time — but we discussed it then, and we discussed it here on 25 October, the day that I launched the report.

I launched my ambitious 10-year approach to transforming health and social care, Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, as well as the expert panel's report, 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care'.

I am grateful, as I said, for the opportunity to set out once again the key elements of the approach. Many Members have read and had time to digest both documents over the last number of weeks, although I question whether some Members have read the report in its entirety. I have heard some of the contributions and comments, and I very much doubt that they

have, because a lot of people are missing the point. I will take the opportunity again today to rehearse some of the key issues in order to make sure that Members are fully briefed and absolutely understand the direction of travel, but I will not rehearse all the detail that I have gone into on previous occasions.

We all agree that the case for change has been very well made. An ageing population is good news for us all and is testament to the hard work and dedication of all those working in our health and social care system, but it also presents capacity and demand issues. Our system was designed to meet the needs of a population in the 20th century, so it is logical that it is struggling to cope with 21st-century needs and expectations. Waiting lists have continued to grow — I have always said that that is totally unacceptable — but that is only a symptom of the problem that we face. Health inequalities, which some Members referred to, continue to divide our society. In 2016, it is absolutely unacceptable that our socio-economic status dictates our health outcomes, whereby those living in the centre of this city can expect to live nine years less than those who live a few miles up the road.

Like those who came before me, I have invested in front-line service development and improvement initiatives. While that has alleviated some of the pressure on the system, it has by no means fixed the underlying issues. Current delivery models continue to have a negative impact on the quality and experience of care across the North. Those models of care are not only outdated but unsustainable. If we continue to do more of the same, by 2026 the HSC will need 90% of the Executive's budget merely to stand still.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way; I asked Mr Carroll from West Belfast to give way, but he would not. Does the Minister agree that, if you are going to stand and say that we should be investing millions more in the health service, it would be helpful to the debate if people gave us figures for the level of additional investment that they want to see?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, I totally agree with that. It is very easy to stand on the sidelines, chirp away and say, "This is what we should be doing", and write to me all the time about waiting lists and how unacceptable you find them. However, if we do not have real and meaningful transformation or concrete plans to transform the piece, we will not be able to assist all those people — mothers, daughters, sons — who find themselves waiting to be seen by our

health service, so transformation is absolutely key.

It is not my intention to paint an overly pessimistic picture of health and social care, but I want to emphasise to Members that, if transformation does not happen, we can expect to see health and social care services in further significant decline. Health is a basic human right, and I believe in a universal health service based on need and free at the point of delivery. My overriding ambition is for all of us to lead long, healthy and active lives. I want a future in which people are provided with the necessary information, education and support to enable them to keep well in the first place. When care is needed, it should be safe and of a high quality. Those who use services and, indeed, those who provide them should be treated with dignity, respect and compassion. I listened to Mr Allister's comments about quality and safety. Patient safety has to be paramount and the first consideration in any service that we provide. I will very much be guided by that principle.

My vision, and the transformation journey that we have embarked on, is ambitious — rightly so. It will require whole system transformation across primary, secondary and community care, and a radical change to the way in which we plan, design and provide services. Holistic transformation will allow new and innovative ways of working and for patient-centred models of care to flourish. Moving away from a model of activity-based performance to one of performance measures based on patient outcomes will allow health and social care staff to provide the right care at the right time and in the right place. We will explore where all-island services can be further developed to bring mutual benefit for patients on this island. We have already initiated a programme of work with counterparts in Dublin to explore all-island services, including transplantation, rare diseases and perinatal mental health services.

By implementing new models of care and increasing our regional and all-island networks for specialist services, we will not only deliver better outcomes for patients but alleviate pressure on vital acute services. That will include reducing hospital admission rates, speeding up hospital discharges and reducing the lengths of stay for those patients who need to go into hospital. To begin this journey, I have already set out some key actions. I have agreed to increase the number of GP training places to 111 — 12 next year and 14 the year after that; commissioned five training places on the advanced nurse practitioners programme; and continued investment in practice-based

pharmacists. I am also reviewing the role that physician associates could play in our system.

I am committed to investing in the workforce of the health and social care system. Our staff are our greatest asset, and I recognise that they are under significant pressure. I have witnessed over the last number of months the outstanding work of HSC staff and the positive impact they have on people's lives. I am, therefore, committed to developing a workforce strategy by spring 2017 and a range of other immediate actions to start to address some critical workforce challenges. However, I recognise that some of the long-term systemic workforce issues we face will take time, leadership and sustained effort to resolve.

Securing better health and well-being outcomes for patients and other people who use health and social care services will be at the centre of the transformation programme I have announced. The experiences and needs of service users and their families will, therefore, be at the forefront of shaping our new service model. I am committed to ensuring that the HSC works in partnership with service users to design and implement the lasting and meaningful changes we need to improve health outcomes for our population. That is what I mean by the term "delivering together".

This new way of engaging patients is built on the principle of co-production. That will underpin how we engage service users in the future in designing new services and treatment pathways or at the point of care. Patients and service users have a vital contribution to make to transformation. I have already embarked on a period of engagement with those who use services and with staff right across the HSC to listen to their views on the future of health and social care services.

We need greater collective clinical and professional leadership throughout the HSC supported by skilled and able managers. That is why I have asked my officials to develop a system-wide HSC leadership strategy to be produced by next summer and why resources will be invested to support staff and leaders to develop the necessary skills and behaviours that will be crucial as we move forward.

We must all accept that the role of hospitals will fundamentally change. Hospitals are not always the most appropriate place for all care to be received, and, where it is safe to do so, people should expect to be treated in a setting closer to home. For some, attending medical appointments or receiving treatment can be a daunting and sometimes stressful situation.

There is strong evidence that concentrating specialist procedures and services in a small number of sites produces significantly better outcomes. It is the opposite in our current system, where emergency and planned care services are mixed together because they are located in the same facility. That perpetuates our long waiting lists, and system-wide backlogs are created. By further developing ambulatory assessment and treatment centres, we will allow health and social care professionals to assess, diagnose and, where appropriate, provide same-day treatment to patients. Elective care centres will be developed to carry out less complex planned treatments right across the North. The establishment of those dedicated centres will be a resource for the region, and the way they operate will be designed around patients. It is well-evidenced that that type of configuration of services can reduce waiting times and prevent the system backlog we experience today.

I want to see a health and social care system that is efficient and sustainable, where best practice is the norm and investment is made in areas that will positively impact service users. We should have a system that encourages innovation, and, where there are good pockets of work that are co-produced and show high-quality patient outcomes, we should be able to scale those up at pace.

I am determined to realise the potential that modern information technology provides. Making better use of technology and data is essential if we are to move forward to a model focused on service users, utilise our entire information resource to better inform the treatment of patients and free up health professionals' time to care.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: it is a privilege to be the Minister of Health, and I am committed to this programme of transformation and the principles of co-production. I am determined that Delivering Together should not be put on a shelf and forgotten about but is used as intended, which is as the road map for transformation. As the Health Minister, I will lead this work with energy, passion and pace. Last week, I launched the public consultation on the criteria for assessing the sustainability of health and social care services as recommended by the expert panel in its report. The consultation will run longer than the normal eight weeks to take account of the Christmas period and will include a series of consultation meetings right across the North to allow as many people as possible to contribute. Further information on the dates, venues and invitation

arrangements for those meetings will be announced shortly.

This week, I will be launching my Department's paediatric hospital and community-based services strategy and the paediatric palliative and end-of-life care strategy. Those documents will set out the approach for further improving the delivery of services over the next 10 years, subject to securing the transformation investment required to implement the strategies. Both strategies will be taken forward fully aligned with the priorities and objectives for transformation set out in Delivering Together, with the clear aim of delivering better health and well-being outcomes for children in the North.

1.30 pm

Later this month I will launch a new diabetes service framework that will realise a vision of care designed to transform services for people living with diabetes or at risk of developing diabetes, subject to securing the necessary investment. I will launch a public consultation on proposals to modernise the delivery of pathology services. That will involve building a sustainable, high-quality pathology service designed to support the vital area of diagnostics well into the future.

I have been really encouraged by the positive response that I have been receiving to the vision document 'Delivering Together', but I want to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say on the criteria for the sustainability of services, which, if adopted by my Department, will be at the heart of informing future decisions about reconfiguring services. Since the launch, I have spent considerable time engaging with staff and service users across a range of locations and settings, including Craigavon Area Hospital, the Ulster Hospital emergency department and Old See House, an integrated community mental health centre. Their reaction to my vision and the expert panel's report have been overwhelmingly positive, and they tell me their appetite for change has never been stronger. That is only the beginning, as I plan to ramp up this type of engagement.

I have committed myself to chair an advisory board that will provide the strategic leadership and oversight required to deliver the transformation. Membership of the board will be drawn from the field of independent experts, unions and user representatives, along with the permanent secretary of my Department. The structure will also include a transformation implementation group responsible for driving forward the transformation programme led by

my permanent secretary. I will continue to work with Executive colleagues and Members to secure the additional funding necessary to facilitate transformation, manage backlog and maintain current services. I reaffirm my commitment to update the Assembly every six months on the progress of the transformation process. We must all realise that change cannot happen without investment. Investment not only takes the form of pounds and pence but is about political and system-wide leadership, finding the time to change and making a conscious effort to break down silos to move to regional and all-island approaches where necessary.

All of us have an important role to play as we embark on this journey. I will not shy away from the difficult conversations and decisions. I ask all Members to match my resolve. In Delivering Together we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to transform our HSC into a world-class service. I look forward to working constructively with all Members who want to deliver better positive health outcomes for all who may need our health and social care systems in the months, years and weeks ahead.

Dr Farry: I thank the Minister for her comments and her commitment to work with the Assembly and give frequent reports to the Assembly and the Committee, setting a positive example in that regard. If we are to see this generational change in our health and social care system, we need to find as wide a political consensus as possible because there are some difficult decisions coming down the line.

I want to echo what my colleague Paula Bradshaw said at the start: we in Alliance are not interested in being simply opposition for opposition's sake. We are always constructive, and we are willing to support the Minister and Executive in delivering the new vision and ensuring that we see positive change in our health system — provided, of course, that the reports are followed through and expert advice is given its proper place and guides us in the way forward. I note the comments from Catherine Seeley, I think it was, about Sinn Féin opposing populism in this regard. That is an important statement, and we look forward to that being the way forward.

As many people have said, the current approach is not sustainable. That lack of sustainability applies in two respects. One is that we are not getting the best outcomes and results in the system. It is not as good as it could or should be. Secondly, our finances are in a difficult and challenging situation. On the

basis of the current configuration of the health system, we are looking at healthcare inflation in the region of 5% to 6% per annum, which is well in advance of the ability of the Executive to invest resources. Therefore, we need to have a proper discussion of finances.

The need for the 10-year implementation plan has been well received by the Assembly — we certainly welcome and endorse the response — but it is important that we recognise the financial issues, which have not perhaps been teased out as much in this debate as I would have liked. We need to focus a bit on the finance. We have to accept that there is a need to invest further in our health and social care system in order for it to become more effective and sustainable. We have to invest in that transformation process, but how much it will cost and where we find that money are the key issues that will face us. Christopher Stalford and the Minister were right to challenge Gerry Carroll on how much he wanted to see invested in the health system, but, equally, they have a duty to spell out how much the transformation outlined in the reports will amount to and where they intend to find the money.

The DUP and Sinn Féin went into the last election with a commitment to spend an additional £1 billion on health by 2021. That is a nice round number that takes into account healthcare inflation, but we need to know today whether that commitment still stands and how they intend to separate that commitment from the wider financial context that we face. Even in the current financial year, in which the health system got, I think, a 2% increase, that still fell short of healthcare inflation, so the system is already facing challenges this year. Even that modest increase in health spending came at the expense of virtually every other Department facing a cut. We know that, over the mandate, our block grant is set to flatline at best, but we are now faced with the effects of Brexit, and the impact on the UK's public finances are very uncertain; indeed, there are warnings of an even bigger black hole opening over the coming years. The implications for Northern Ireland are unclear.

We also have the potential wider implications of funding a lower rate of corporation tax to help transform our economy. We may need to invest further in agricultural subsidies locally if that funding is cut off from Westminster. One thing is clear: we will not get our share of the £350 million a week repatriated from Brussels. There is also the uncertainty around the current in-year situation, in that healthcare inflation is running at 5% to 6%, with a budget increase of 2% and very little in monitoring round bids.

That indicates the potential for a black hole to open during this financial year pre-reform, and we need to consider how we will manage it in-year.

Finally, in looking ahead to implementation, it is important to bear it in mind that this has to be a cross-cutting issue —

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

Dr Farry: — that touches on all Departments. At this stage, the implementation plan solely deals with health issues. We need to see a lot more cross-cutting activity for all Departments.

Mr Butler: I welcome the opportunity to wind on the motion brought to the House by my party colleague Jo-Anne Dobson. I find it encouraging that there has been such a wealth of debate today. That shows a real appetite to tackle the problems in our health service.

All of us in the Assembly agree that the health service needs to change for the better. Standing still is no longer an option. There are too many people on waiting lists, and those who are on them wait far too long. The absence of a strategic workforce plan is contributing to a building over-reliance on locum staff and to targets being stretched. The implications are felt across the board, whether in A&E or care in the community. The people of Northern Ireland deserve a fully functional health service that not only delivers but is sustainable, accessible and affordable. For those reasons, I am encouraged that the Executive appear to be moving to address the issues with a high degree of priority.

I will focus on a number of points. First, I am encouraged by the content of both reports that we are discussing today. That is at odds with a number of Members' points. The outworkings of Health and Wellbeing 2026 have the potential to become the basis of a new framework of sustainable healthcare provision in Northern Ireland. The Minister has heard us call for more detail, and I hope that, over the coming weeks and months, that detail will be forthcoming.

The Minister will not be surprised to hear me raise the issue of mental health again.

Northern Ireland, as we know, suffers from a disproportionately high level of mental ill health compared with other parts of the UK and British Isles. Not only do we suffer unduly high rates of mental illness in our more deprived areas,

but there is significant evidence to show that the legacy of the Troubles has significantly contributed to our mental ill health. The Ulster Unionists have been campaigning for and championing adequate mental health care provision for many years, and so I am particularly pleased with the commitments in the report to tackle mental health issues, including the commitments to additional funding for mental health interventions in primary care and to make available early support services, such as mental health hubs.

I agree with the sentiment espoused by the Minister that mental health care should have parity of esteem, but I urge her to start putting in place some measures to actually deliver it. As a starting point, I once again call on the Executive to recognise the merits of appointing a mental health champion. I recognise that the Minister has said that she is prepared to take up the role of a champion, and I commend her for that, but the gravity of poor mental health is so severe that we need an independent champion to ensure that the Minister and Executive are genuinely responding to the need.

On page 15 of the health and well-being report, the Department rightly identifies acute care at home as a service ripe for reform. With advancements in technology and telemedicine, it is much easier than even a few years ago for patients to remain in their own home. I urge the Minister to stick to her word and better integrate care at home with social care in the next three years. My main point in this respect is that the trusts must ensure that staff on the ground have not only the support but the time to deliver that service. Specifically, I remind the Minister of the report last year by the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland, which recommended that the NICE guideline NG21 be embedded into the standards for the delivery of domiciliary care, and that calls of less than 30 minutes' duration should not generally be used.

The Minister rightly identifies practice-based pharmacies as a means to alleviate some of the pressures facing general practice, but I urge her and her officials not to overlook the increasingly important role that community pharmacies can and do play in delivering a fully integrated service. Last week, I and many Members visited local community pharmacies, and we saw at first hand the role they play in, and the support they offer to, our communities. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Minister is not minded to follow the reductions in community pharmacies proposed in England. When they were recently debated at Westminster, members of the DUP surprisingly

sided with the Government, which understandably raised some concerns in our constituencies.

Over the weekend, the Minister once again stated the importance of consultation and the necessity to take members of the public along on the journey with any proposed reforms. I urge her, however, not just to consult for consultation's sake, as Mr Allister said. I use the Lagan Valley Hospital as an example of when the local population was not treated with the respect it deserves. During summer 2011, Lagan Valley had its accident and emergency service reduced to daytime and weekends. At the time, staffing concerns were cited, and the people of Lisburn were assured that the decision was only temporary. Despite the supposed concerns of the Minister at the time, the opposite has happened, and the services have been further reduced. I use this only as an example of how —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Butler: Yes, indeed.

Mr Allister: Does the Member recognise that saying something is temporary is a wheeze by the Government to avoid consultation? When a permanent closure is proposed, there is a formal consultation process; when they dress it up as temporary, they avoid that. That is what happened at the City Hospital and at Lagan Valley.

Mr Butler: The Member's point is well made; nobody in the House could argue differently.

At this point, I will recap some of the comments made by other Members. I commend my party colleague Jo-Anne Dobson for proposing the motion. A number of points stood out, none more so than her personal account as a mother of her family's experience of using today's overburdened and overstretched services, and the risks that sufferers and service users are exposed to. She talked about who, where and when, and the plan must get us to that level of detail.

Paula Bradshaw, in her amendment, called for recognition that care should be free at the point of access and that the service is broken and needs to be fixed. I agree. Paula also mentioned "the three Cs". I think that that is worth noting, especially by the Minister. She talked about commitment, courage and clarity. I can assure the Minister that she will get the commitment and courage from the House; all she needs to do is bring the clarity and detail.

1.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Will the Member give way?

Mr Butler: Yes indeed, Minister.

Mrs O'Neill: Does the Member agree with principle of co-production and co-design and actually listening to service users and patients and ensuring that we give them ownership of the care pathway that they take?

Mr Butler: I absolutely do. The core of this must be putting patients first. Nobody in the House will disagree with that. On the point about consultation, patients need to be listened to. That was the point that I made in my address.

I will pay very little time to this next bit, Mr Speaker. Two Members of the House wasted two of their five minutes to attack the Opposition. I thought that it was petty and very disappointing. I just wonder whether they wrote their speeches together: it could be another way in which the Executive are working collaboratively behind the scenes. It is incredible. That is all that I am going to say about those two Members.

Mr McGrath talked about openness and transparency — two fantastic words. They are turning into buzzwords, really. We have heard about buzzwords. We really do not want to be faced, in a grown-up, modern-day Assembly in 2016, when we have moved so far in the past 18 or 24 years, with having those words being beat about the House. I would be really disappointed if, at the end of these four years, never mind 10 years, we are still talking about openness and transparency.

Another good one that was raised by Mr McGrath was ambulance response times. There is a disparity in the provision of healthcare in this country depending on where you live. We talk about the postcode lottery. I would keep a particularly close eye on that with regard to response times and how that is addressed. Thank you, Mr McGrath, for that one.

Gary Middleton — no, I will not go there. *[Laughter.]* What I will actually do is go on to Pat Sheehan because what Pat said at the start of his comments was that he was not going to waste his five minutes. I commend him for that. He did not waste any of his five minutes. He got straight to the meat. I commend him for that. He talked about transformation. He talked about detail, which we all know.

Mr Durkan, thank you. I always like listening to you. You can do it without reading, which is admirable. That will come with experience. Mr Durkan talked about failure to implement in the past and reiterated Stephen Farry's earlier point about previous reports sitting on the shelf and not really addressing the issues. We must indeed learn from the mistakes of the past.

I am sorry that I did not mention anybody else. There were plenty of other good speakers. In conclusion, we have heard many good points being raised on the motion, some critical and some commendable. I put it to the Minister of Health that, whilst nine or 10 years might seem like a long journey, the reality is that without clear signposting and clear measurable targets, I fear that the time will slowly slip away —

Mr Speaker: The Member must conclude his remarks.

Mr Butler: — like my time is slipping away now. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the publication of Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together and 'Systems, Not Structures: Changing Health and Social Care; further notes that these reforms are based on expert analysis and must be implemented in a holistic manner without delay; and calls on the Minister to provide a detailed action plan for the implementation of the proposed reforms over the current Assembly term.

Sporting Events and Activity-based Tourism

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

I call Mr Gordon Lyons to move the motion. Sorry — a change of order: I call Mr Gordon Dunne to move the motion.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is confusing; there are too many Gordons.

I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the success that the Executive have had in attracting major sporting events in recent years and attracting visitors engaged in sports tourism; notes the high-value economic benefit that can arise from events-based and activity-based sports tourism; and calls on the Minister for the Economy, through his Department, agencies and the new tourism strategy, to promote and encourage growth in this sector.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion. Event tourism has been a real success story for us in Northern Ireland, with a host of high-profile prestigious sporting events being successfully held over recent years. The opportunities to bring events and people to our shores have increased dramatically with the normalisation of life in Northern Ireland. The Executive must be commended for helping to bring about the success stories that we have had of sporting events here in recent years. We all recognise the very real opportunities that now exist through our long tradition of sport and culture, which must be exploited and developed to ensure that we reach our full potential to bring tourists to Northern Ireland.

Sporting events and activity-based tourism can bring significant economic benefits to our country and economy. They can help to transform communities, regenerate areas, deliver much needed employment and inspire future generations. Although we have had considerable success in that sector over recent years, we must never be complacent. We must continue to strive for more events, bigger audiences and, ultimately, more investment in our economy.

To continue to attract top-level events to our shores, we need to ensure that the conditions are right and in place, and one of the key ingredients is getting the right infrastructure in place. We need to continue to invest in our road network, air links, ports, accommodation and telecommunications. Event tourism needs more affordable accommodation in close proximity to planned events. We have 13,560 beds available through the various accommodation sectors, with 7,860 of them in our hotels. It is most encouraging and very

positive that there are nine new hotels and two large extensions planned in the Belfast area, which will create an additional 1,500 beds. In my constituency of North Down, a new 85-bedroom Premier Inn is planned for Bangor. It will be ideal for visitors, particularly competitors using the Aurora aquatic centre. It is still in the planning stage, and I urge the Planning Service and the council to make it a priority.

Some of the very successful high-profile events that have been held over recent years include the Irish Open golf tournaments, the World Police and Fire Games, the Giro d'Italia, the Circuit of Ireland rally, the North West 200 and the Gran Fondo, to name but a few.

Mr Douglas: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dunne: Yes, I will.

Mr Douglas: Does the Member agree that the Giro d'Italia coming here in 2014 not only brought tourists but encouraged families and communities to get involved in cycling, which brings great health benefits?

Mr Dunne: I agree with my colleague, who, as I am sure you all know, is a great ambassador for cycling. I see him cycling around, particularly in his constituency of East Belfast.

The positive PR gained from those events for Northern Ireland plc cannot be overestimated. The television coverage and the live streaming beamed across the world from those events, which showcase some of our spectacular scenery, are very valuable and can act as a real magnet for tourism for the years to come. All those events attract competitors from right across the world, bringing them, their families and their teams to our country, often for the first time. Those visitors often go away with fond memories of having competed in a fantastic event, with top-class facilities and a magnetic atmosphere. They are also often touched by the warmth and enthusiasm of our people. They go home with fond memories and an experience that they can share around the world.

The ongoing success of our national football team is also a real success story. The fantastic performance of Northern Ireland in the European Championship, when they made their way through to the last 16, helped to put this country on the world map. The impact of the team and the fans was incredible, and many people across the world now know where Northern Ireland is for the right reasons. It is capable of doing something positive that we

can now build on. The team's success can have a ripple effect across our community for years to come in inspiring young people and increasing participation in sport whilst attracting tourists here to help build our reputation.

Golf tourism is another growth sector. I welcome Tourism NI's strategic review in the sector, which aims to grow the value of golf tourism from £33 million to £50 million by 2020. We are the home of champions, and I know that many golf clubs have taken the initiative to build on the success of our home-grown golfing superstars. Holywood Golf Club, in my constituency, is an example of this. It has enjoyed great interest from tourists around the world — many from the United States — eager to see and play on the course where our own Rory McIlroy learnt his skills. I have no doubt that the investment in future Irish Opens and the Open, which is coming here in 2019, will help to further grow this sector.

Motor sport is another area where we have a proud and proven track record, not only in hosting top events but in producing top talent capable of taking on the world from Paddy Hopkirk to Kris Meeke in the present day. Rally Ireland had the honour of being a round of the World Rally Championship in 2007 and 2009, attracting huge interest in this country. We have real opportunities to build on the success of events like the Circuit of Ireland Rally in recent years, or the European Rally Championship and to once again host the premier World Rally Championship in the future.

Events like the North West 200 and the Ulster Grand Prix also build on our proud tradition of road racing and attract thousands of spectators and competitors every year. Both events bring a great boost to our area and to our economy. I am aware of the exciting plans for a new hotel and visitor centre close to the North West 200 track, which I welcome and which can only benefit the local economy. There is also potential to develop our local racetracks like Bishopscourt and Kirkistown in order to, once again, attract top-level championships like the British Superbike Championship and the British Touring Car Championship.

There is no doubt that we have enjoyed considerable success in recent years in hosting major sporting events and attracting visitors through sports tourism. However, I believe that we have even greater potential in the sector and must continue to invest strategically to attract even more great events that will help to build and develop our country. I call on the Minister to recognise that and ensure that a

new tourism strategy continues to promote and encourage growth in the sector.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Justin McNulty to move the amendment.

The debate stood suspended.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): It is now time for Question Time, but, before I call the Minister for Infrastructure, Members will be aware that he has issued a written ministerial statement, which is embargoed until 12.00 noon tomorrow. I am aware that there is a listed question today on a related topic. Should it be reached, in light of previous rulings and the Speaker's response to Mr Swann's point of order at the start of this sitting, Members may ask questions and should take their steer on the extent of the embargo from the Minister.

I also remind Members of the Speaker's ruling on supplementary questions. Supplementary questions should contain no more than one enquiry, be brief and relevant to the lead question and not be read out. I hope that that is clear.

Infrastructure

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): It is time for questions to the Minister for Infrastructure, and we will start with listed questions.

Rivers: Pollution Safeguards

1. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the action taken by his Department and NI Water to safeguard rivers from pollution by water treatment plants. (AQO 626/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): My Department provides the necessary funding and investment to enable NI Water to carry out its water and sewerage functions whilst protecting our environment. The Executive's current one-year Budget for 2016-17 has

allocated, through my Department, £147 million for investment in water and sewerage services.

Since the creation of NI Water in 2007, continued investment in waste water treatment has resulted in significant improvements in the level of compliance with environmental discharge standards. NI Water is very mindful of the important role it plays in the protection of the local environment and operates an environmental management system to minimise the risk of chemical discharges from its assets.

Targets for reducing the number of high and medium pollution incidents are set by the NI Authority for Utility Regulation as part of the price control process, which involves consultation with the Environment Agency. Year on year, progress has consistently been delivered by NI Water in this area, outperforming the targets set. NI Water has invested nearly £500 million over the last three years specifically to improve the sewerage network system and waste water treatment works. With ongoing investment, NI Water will continue to improve waste water services for the people of the North.

Ms S Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. Considering that there have been at least three incidents of river pollution, one in the constituency of South Down, which I am proud to serve, will he outline whether NI Water has inspected all water treatment plants? Is he satisfied that the level of fines imposed on NI Water is adequate?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question. I was in China at the time of the spill that you refer to. I liaised closely with the Department's officials on what sort of clean-up programme was put in place, and I met NI Water officials on my return to find out.

Following NI Water's detailed investigation into the pollution incident at Annsborough — obviously, we are both alluding to Annsborough waste water treatment works — NI Water has undertaken to examine the dosing pipe arrangements at all other waste water treatment works where liquid storage units are being used and replace plastic pipe fittings with stainless steel fittings as appropriate. NI Water has also checked the spill protection provision at all sites where processed chemicals are used. If additional capacity or alternative arrangements are required, it will carry out any remedial work required. The company has also undertaken to survey drainage plans at waste water treatment work sites where processed chemicals are being used to ensure that the pipework

configuration enables all spillages to be contained within the site.

Mr Chambers: I refer to the Cotton river in my constituency of North Down, which is suspected of being the source of pollution in Ballyholme Bay and causing the beach to fail to reach required standards. I understand that there is a waste water pumping station at Cotton and that Northern Ireland Water was recently fined £2,000, I think, for a pollution incident in that river. Does the Department have any plans to eliminate the problems with emergency overflows directly into the river?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for raising this. Whilst I am not specifically aware of the particular site and river the Member is referring to, I am more than happy to correspond with him about it. It is very clear that whilst we have had a huge decrease in these instances over the years, we must do as much as we can, and certainly go as far as we can, to ensure these types of pollution incidents do not occur, and we need to take all available steps to do so.

Dr Farry: The Minister talks about the amount of money he is investing in improving the infrastructure, but does he also recognise that the nature of governance in NI Water actually constrains the ability of the Executive to invest as much as possible, given that NI Water does not have borrowing powers? What plans does he have to address this, bearing in mind that the Assembly recently was very concerned when the Office for National Statistics (ONS) tried to reclassify housing associations and take away their borrowing rights?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member. Certainly, as a former Minister, he will be well aware of the need for all Departments to look at and explore the ways in which we can increase the potential and ability of our arm's-length organisations and government companies to do what they can to deliver. There is no doubt that there are huge challenges, especially on the resource side, for a number of our bodies right across government, not just in my Department. We need to be innovative and creative around how we go about doing this.

NI Water has ambitious capital plans, not just for the city of Belfast but right across the North, which will take it into the hundreds of millions if not billions of pounds over the next number of years. I have started discussions with NI Water officials to see how best we can meet those demands in the years ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): We move on to the next question. Before doing so, I advise Members that question 12 is withdrawn.

Parking: Pakenham Street

2. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will include Pakenham Street in Donegall Pass in the plans to provide residents' parking schemes. (AQO 627/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that my Department is actively working towards introducing residents' parking schemes. As you may be aware, earlier this year I announced the start of a consultation period with residents in the Rossville Street area of Derry for a residents' parking scheme. You will also be aware that my Department has proposals for schemes in the lower Malone and College Park Avenue/Rugby Road areas of Belfast. I hope to make an announcement on these schemes later this week.

Transport NI officials are aware of a number of requests for a residents' parking scheme in Pakenham Street and have recently discussed this issue at a meeting with the Member and the Donegall Pass Community Forum and local residents. A scheme for the Pakenham Street area is dependent on the successful implementation of the initial residents' parking schemes outlined before.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. The Minister will be aware that the residents of Pakenham Street are living on the doorstep of a huge student accommodation development that is taking place. If anywhere meets the criteria for a residents' parking scheme, it is that part of the town. I urge the Minister to work closely with not only the residents of Pakenham Street but also the other areas that he has named to progress this issue that is really wanted in south Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Was there a question there?

Mr Hazzard: I agree entirely with the Member. I am disappointed, as the legislation was introduced in 2007, that at this stage, nine years later, we are looking at the situation that we are only on the verge of introducing our first parking schemes. We need to do more. Certainly, I have set my officials the task to do more and to approach this in a problem-solving mood. We need to overcome objections, not just simply shelve something because of objections.

The figure for Donegall Pass was around a 14% response to initial consultation, with Pakenham Street being about 18%. We need to see a greater consultation and engagement with local communities. Of course, political reps have a role to play in this; to be out front and to lead it. I am aware the Member is trying to do that in that particular area. We want to see more of that. We need to see leadership from local political reps to drive some of these particular schemes forward.

Ms Hanna: Can the Minister advise what he sees as the next steps for the lower Malone and College Park/Rugby Road schemes, and are there any plans to review the consultation process, which currently can be derailed by one objection from people who do not even live, or have an interest, in the area?

Mr Hazzard: The next step is that I will make an announcement later this week. Without prejudicing what I will say later this week, I will leave it at that. As I outlined to the previous Member, we need to do more. Objections can stall some of these projects and literally put a dead hand on them, and that is not just with regard to parking schemes but also significant safety upgrades such as the A26.

We need to find a way to engage properly, of course, with objectors and to listen to people, but we need to find a way to move forward, especially with residents' parking schemes. From 2007 until now is far too long to wait for some of these schemes to come live. Certainly, I will be doing all I can in the years ahead to ensure that we move forward with something. I would rather try something and have it not work, and go back to the drawing board and try again, than sit with nothing because we cannot get total agreement on the way forward.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answers up to now. Will he give us details — I do not want him to pre-empt his statement later in the week — of any free residents' parking schemes that he may have in place?

Mr Hazzard: The policy for the introduction of residents' parking schemes was introduced in 2007 by the then Department for Regional Development. Since that time, despite considerable effort, no schemes have been implemented, due largely to a lack of local support from the residents concerned. Despite that, my Department is developing residents' parking schemes in Derry and Antrim as well as the two Belfast schemes in the College Park Avenue/Rugby Road area and lower Malone area. In line with the current budgetary

constraints faced by all Departments, those schemes will generally have to be introduced on a full cost-recovery basis that will require a charge to be levied for a parking permit. The exception to that is any scheme lying either wholly or partially in a neighbourhood renewal area, which will be exempt from the permit charge. Where there is a charge levied, that has been set at £30 per resident's permit and is intended to cover the cost of the scheme design and the enforcement needed to stop others from outside the area parking there.

Mr Smith: Does the Minister agree with me that decisions relating to parking are best decided at a local level, and does he therefore support the devolution of those powers to councils?

Mr Hazzard: I see what he has done there. No, I think that, when it comes to parking especially, instead of having a patchwork approach to it by councils, central government still needs to take a strategic view of parking policies. When we take into account that on-street parking especially can have such an impact on traffic flows and congestion and that my Department is responsible for a strategic way forward on that, it is important that we have all the tools at our disposal. I certainly think that, working alongside local government, we can come up with policies that are fit for purpose.

Greenways

3. **Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the development of greenways, including cross-border greenways. (AQO 628/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Last week, I published 'Exercise Explore Enjoy: A Strategic Plan for Greenways', which sets out my vision for:

"a region where people have ready access to a safe traffic-free environment for health, active travel and leisure."

The plan provides a framework to assist councils to develop their own local schemes as part of a greenway network for the North. It proposes a primary greenway network and a secondary greenway network that link together the entire region. It also includes cross-border links from Derry to County Donegal, Enniskillen to Sligo, Armagh to Clones and Newry to Dundalk. That is the first step towards creating a world-class greenway network that will be a welcome investment in rural development and active travel, providing for leisure and recreation, creating long-term employment and

entrepreneurship opportunities and enhancing opportunities for tourism.

The strategic plan is not just about words and intentions. Alongside the plan, I announced 20 small grants to councils under the small grants programme for greenways, whereby I am providing a grant of up to £8,000 towards the cost of a greenway feasibility study. Providing support to councils in the development of greenways helps to increase safety for people using bikes, which is a key objective in the bicycle strategy. The use of active travel is also an aspiration in the Programme for Government, and better designed greenways are important in laying the foundations for longer, healthier, more active lives.

Mr Murphy: I thank the Minister for his response. He will know there has been widespread welcome for the initiative that he launched last week, particularly in my area, where the greenway alongside Carlingford Lough, which he will be familiar with, will connect with an bealach glas, which goes from Carlingford to Omeath, creating potential linkage right the way from Portadown to Carlingford. So, it is a very welcome scheme indeed. What total resource has the Minister set aside to deliver the project?

Mr Hazzard: The first element of funding is the 20 schemes that I have supported through a small grant of £8,000 towards the cost of a feasibility study along each route. So that is £160,000. Following receipt of the feasibility studies, up to four of the highest-quality proposals will be offered a grant of up to £25,000 to develop the detailed design further. Although that is only a small amount of funding, it will help councils to start the work of developing their local schemes within the framework for the strategic plan for greenways. The strategic plan sets out a vision for the next 10 years, and there is a need to develop scheme plans over the next two or three years.

Funding for greenways is also available through the INTERREG programme, and I expect that a number of the cross-border projects may well be successful in securing financial support. For future years, I have some capital funding in my departmental plans, and I will seek to secure capital funding on top of that. There is no doubt that money is tight, but we must ask ourselves this question: can we afford not to invest in greenways? Although roads projects very often hog the limelight, greenways and other active-travel initiatives are truly transformative projects for communities, as well as personally for individuals.

2.15 pm

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that information. In fact, it would be nice to see some greenways across the constituency of Mid Ulster. Will he consider supporting the extension of a cycle-hire scheme to outside Belfast to allow for a greater usage of greenways?

Mr Hazzard: Absolutely, if there is merit in doing so, and I have no doubt that there probably would be merit in doing so in a number of locations. One of the great strengths of greenways projects is that we connect all parts of the North to our large towns and cities. As I said, they can be truly transformative projects and community spaces for individuals and communities across the North. I do not have any particular plans for bicycle-hire schemes outside Belfast — they are an item for Belfast City Council — but I am more than happy to look at them if the Member wants to bring plans forward.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will be aware that the Committee for Infrastructure recently visited the Connswater greenway, and I very much praise what has been an excellent example of joined-up government through input from local government, regional government and outside funders. Does he agree with me that further collaboration between councils, in particular through rural tourism partnerships in which councils come together, is a way forward in providing the economies of scale that can allow schemes perhaps not on the same scale as but along the lines of the Connswater greenway to be developed across Ulster for the benefit of our constituents?

Mr Hazzard: Absolutely. If I take my part of the world, south Down, two of the proposals would link the highly sought-after tourism area of Newcastle and the Mourne with the Connswater area. I have no doubt that the local council, working alongside Belfast City Council, will want to develop tourism potential along that route. That was the route used by the old Belfast and County Down Railway. It was a highly popular route for tourists to travel by train, not just to the north Down coastline but, as I said, into the Mourne area. I have no doubt that that type of project will be able to reawaken some of that tourism value in the area.

We only have to look at what is taking place in the west of Ireland with the Great Western greenway, which brings in tens of millions of euros to local communities that, until this point,

were on their knees economically — small regional towns that are now coming back to life. There is no reason that we cannot do the same in the North.

Ulster Canal

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the Ulster canal. (AQO 629/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) has agreed a phased approach to the restoration of the Ulster canal. Phase one of the restoration of the south-western stretch of the Ulster canal from Lough Erne to Clones is under way and covers the 2.5 kilometres from Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson. That is expected to be completed in 2017. It is planned to issue a tender shortly for the next stage involving the construction of Derrykerrib bridge and the canal section. That will enable commencement of construction in spring 2017, with an estimated contract period of 18 months.

The Member will also be aware that, as part of 'A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan', the Executive and the Irish Government agreed to undertake a review to identify options for jointly developing future phases of the Ulster canal restoration project. In line with that, officials from my Department and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are finalising a paper for consideration by Ministers at the NSMC plenary meeting to be held in Armagh on Friday. The paper will set out options for further development of the Ulster canal restoration project.

To inform the process, I, alongside Minister Humphreys, established the Ulster canal advisory forum to explore and examine ways in which to support and help advance the Ulster canal project; to examine possible funding options for the project, including the existing funding streams that are in place in public bodies and EU schemes that are open for applications for funding; and to consider the potential for private sector investment and patronage from philanthropic societies. The forum consists of representatives from local councils, sponsor Departments and Waterways Ireland. Interested stakeholders from other organisations will be invited to attend future meetings of the forum as appropriate.

The inaugural meeting, which Minister Humphreys and I chaired, was held on 23 September.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for his answer. To follow on from that, the Minister mentioned the advisory forum. Will he indicate who the stakeholders are on that forum or who he intends to invite on to it?

Mr Hazzard: The following stakeholders are represented on the Ulster canal advisory forum: both sponsor Departments; Monaghan County Council; Fermanagh and Omagh District Council; Cavan County Council; and Waterways Ireland. Each council will be represented by two elected representatives and one official. Interested stakeholders from other organisations will be invited to attend meetings of the forum as appropriate. Those include but are not, of course, confined to Fáilte Ireland; NI Tourist Board; the Strategic Investment Board; the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government; SEUPB; and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

Mr McPhillips: Will the Minister give us an update on the total spend to date in and around the Derrykerrib/Newtownbutler area on the project?

Mr Hazzard: I am sorry; I do not have those details in front of me, but I will correspond with the Member.

Mrs Palmer: I also thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will the Minister give an assessment of the impact a reopened Ulster canal would have on income derived from tourism to the area in comparison with the regeneration and maintenance costs?

Mr Hazzard: Such analysis will be very much part of any business case and the economic impact of such works going forward, but there is no doubt — this is the case especially when you speak to Waterways Ireland and look at the development of blueways in particular, as well as our greenway potential, right across the island of Ireland — that there is huge potential in the restoration of the Ulster canal. That is why we have given it the focus we have. We touched on this with the greenways as well, but, very often, the old canal lines and our old railway lines are sleeping relics of the past. I use that phrase all the time. Bringing them alive will have a massive impact on local communities, especially many in those areas that have been devastated by the economic recession. It is the likes of tourism that can breathe new life into them. I think it will have a hugely positive effect on local communities. If you take a town like Clones, which was once a bustling market town that people came to from

all corners, you can see that there is great potential for the Ulster canal to breathe new life into it.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind Members wishing to ask a supplementary question to keep rising in their places.

Schools: Road Safety

5. **Mr Beattie** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the measures he intends to take to safeguard children during term time in relation to safety on roads adjacent to schools. (AQO 630/16-21)

10. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how he is improving road safety near primary schools. (AQO 635/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 5 and 10 together. My Department has a statutory duty to promote and improve road safety and it does that through a wide range of rolling road safety educational activities and engineering initiatives. Children and young people are amongst the most vulnerable groups using our roads and, as such, must be taught how to use our roads safely in the vicinity of schools and beyond in the wider community.

Given that over 95% of road traffic collisions where someone is killed or seriously injured are due to human error, my Department challenges driver behaviour through the road safety campaigns, reminding drivers of their responsibility to themselves and other road users. Various protective engineering interventions have also been developed over the years through a range of initiatives that have culminated in the production of Transport NI's policy and procedure guide that traffic engineers can draw from when assessing safety at individual schools. Those measures include provision of enhanced signing and road markings; central islands; lay-bys; and traffic calming features such as road humps. The enhanced signing largely incorporates flashing lights programmed to operate during term times at school opening and closing times.

A more recent innovation has been the development of part-time 20 mph speed limits at schools, especially at schools on roads where the national speed limit applies. The speed limit at those schools is reduced to 20 mph at school opening and closing times during term times. I am particularly keen on this approach. However, the initial schemes have been expensive to provide. I have, therefore,

asked my officials to consider refinements of the measure and to seek a more cost-effective approach that would facilitate an increased provision of a 20 mph limit.

I remain committed to continuing to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads, especially amongst vulnerable road users such as schoolchildren. I recognise the continuing challenges of preventing road deaths and serious injuries, and, as such, my Department will continue to address the issues using all practicable methods.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Minister for a very clear and full answer. Many Members are concerned about our children outside of schools. In my constituency, we have a rural school with a 40 mph speed limit outside in a dangerous area, and outside our urban schools, parking causes near gridlock. Will the Minister consider promoting a society mindset change by creating a 20 mph speed limit outside all our schools as standard and making clearways in front of our schools at the start and end of the school day?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comments, not just his question. I will certainly continue to do all that I can to promote the message that we must take care around our schools. On having a 20 mph zone around urban schools, traffic calming is very often in place in urban settings, and, because of congestion also, traffic speeds do tend to be quite low around urban schools. We have seen to date that, particularly on rural roads where the national speed limit applies, there is a danger. Of course, I have to operate within the legislation. It is not enough just to say this; I have to set down a process that fits in with the law. It is not enough just to have a speed limit if there is no legislative weight behind it. We have to find a way that does both. I have absolutely no problem championing the message, and I and my Department take any opportunity to say to people, "Take care around schools. Be aware that there are vulnerable people accessing that". There is a responsibility on all of us. Where death or serious injury is caused by a road traffic collision, 95% of the time it is because of human error. It is up to us to make the change.

Ms Ní Chuilín: On a similar theme, a Aire, can you give us a brief outline of some of the initiatives on road safety that are under way in schools?

Mr Hazzard: My Department provides a range of resources and schemes to be used by teachers to enable them to improve and embed

road safety behaviours in children and young people. Among the others, these initiatives include the road safety teaching-aid calendar, a copy of which hangs on the wall of every classroom and nursery in the North. The enhanced cycling proficiency scheme is delivered in schools and, to date this year, approximately 320 schools and 7,500 children have been trained. The junior road safety officer scheme continues to grow in popularity, with more schools registering to join the scheme. Education packs are available in both hard copy and electronic version on the teachers' ICT network, C2K. These recent initiatives have been well received and, for the most part, early indications show a positive response.

Mr Dunne: Does the Minister recognise that, in the divisional offices, there are lists of proposed remedial works outside our schools that have sat and moved nowhere for many years? Does he now recognise that funding needs to be a priority to move forward these schemes?

Mr Hazzard: To be frank, there are lists in all of our divisions of particular works. Divisions prioritise on a number of criteria, prime among which will of course be road safety. The pot of money is only so much. I am aware of some divisions where there are of dozens of schemes that, if money allowed, we could roll out. We have to continue to assess and to spend our money appropriately, but there can be no doubt, certainly in my time in the years ahead, that road safety has to be paramount. It certainly has to be prioritised to be top of the list.

Mr Mullan: Minister, I am aware that, in my constituency, there are many families who live just outside the three-mile threshold for free bus passes and, because of that, they have to walk across very dangerous roads to get to school. Will you consider looking at the criteria again in that regard?

Mr Hazzard: Free school bus passes certainly do not fall within my remit.

Mr Lyttle: What level of investment will the Minister be making in the Safe Routes to Schools programme? Will he introduce level 2 on-road cycle training for all P6 and P7 pupils in Northern Ireland to encourage active travel choices to school?

2.30 pm

Mr Hazzard: I will look at both in the time ahead. As we enter this budgetary period, it is

probably not right for me to put a figure on the amount of money that I will spend. Safer routes to school and improved road safety around schools, especially our primary schools, will be very much part of my considerations. I have believed in higher proficiency for cyclists for a long time, and I will touch on it with the Education Minister in due course. If we can build that into a child's learning at an early stage, even if the child does not go on to be a cyclist on the road, they will, when they are driving, have a better awareness of all road users. It is something that we can build into the school curriculum at an early stage.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Jim Allister for a quick supplementary followed by an equally quick answer.

Mr Allister: Can the Minister expand on what he was suggesting about the 20 mph limit? Is he minded to make that easier to attain? There are many rural schools — I was thinking recently of the Diamond Primary School near Cullybackey — where that is an issue, yet there seems to be a funding blockage.

Mr Hazzard: Yes, that is exactly what I am saying. I want the national speed limit to apply especially for primary schools in a rural setting. I want to make it easier to achieve the 20 mph status on rural roads. I want to do it in such a way that the speed restriction carries legal weight and is not simply a suggestion but a requirement for the driver to drive at that speed at school opening and closing times.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Fuel Duty Rebate: Translink NI

T1. **Mr McGrath** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he plans to restore the fuel duty rebate for Translink NI, which is the only public transport operator in the UK that does not receive such a rebate. (AQT 456/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As I mentioned in response to a previous question, it would be inappropriate, ahead of the Budget process over the next number of weeks and months, to delve into policies such as that. However, it is something that I have discussed with Translink officials and the union in recent weeks, and it will be part of discussions.

Mr McGrath: The Minister will be aware that some of the ways to offset Translink's budget deficit may be to stop senior smart passes, cut bus services or raise fares. Would it cause the Minister concern if that happened?

Mr Hazzard: There is no doubt that all my arm's-length bodies are coming under increasing pressure. When we look at the effects of Tory austerity over the last five years or more and listen to the words coming out of the Tory conference and the mood music from London, we know that we face another decade of austerity. That will put huge pressure on our budgets, especially on the resource side. Whether it is Translink, NI Water or Transport NI, there are huge pressures there; we know that. We know that, in Transport NI, we have a structural maintenance backlog of £1 billion over the last number of years. We have to address that, but I have to be sure to do it in such a way that I do not rob Peter to pay Paul and that I can balance my resource budget right across and deliver the services that we all need in our society. We certainly do not want to leave people in rural areas, many of whom already suffer from a sense of isolation, more isolated.

Drinking Water

T2. **Mr E McCann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how he squares the answer he gave earlier to Ms Sinéad Bradley about the adequacy of funding for Northern Ireland Water with the evidence given last week by the Northern Ireland Water CEO, Sarah Venning, to the Infrastructure Committee when she said that, without significantly increased funding, Northern Ireland Water is unable to guarantee the future quality or adequacy of drinking water. (AQT 457/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comments. I will check Hansard for this, but I do not think that I have ever uttered the phrase that the sums are adequate. I outlined the hundreds of millions of pounds that NI Water is investing in some of these capital works, and, while that is to be welcomed, we need to see much more investment. However, as per my answer to the previous question, our budgets are coming under huge pressure from Tory austerity in London. We know the impact of tens of millions of pounds being taken out of the block grant. Those reductions have had to come from somewhere. I want to give as much money as I can to organisations such as NI Water. We rely on good water and good waste-water services, and we need to maintain them.

Mr E McCann: In light of that, Minister, I will send you the Hansard report of the exchanges between Ms Venning and me. I will underline, if you allow me to, the point at which she agrees with me that without significantly increasing funding she cannot guarantee the quality of drinking water, the continuation of the supply or the management of waste water. Are you not being a wee bit complacent here, Minister?

Mr Hazzard: I am sure that Ms Venning would love to have plenty more money. I wish I had more money to give to Ms Venning, but, unfortunately, that is not the situation we are in. As I said, I will continue to work with NI Water and the regulator so that we get as much resource as we can afford to NI Water to deliver the service we have. NI Water ranks comparably with the vast majority of water providers across Europe and does an outstanding job. In fact, the improvement in NI Water over the last number of years has been a huge success, and we should put that on record.

Parkgate Quarry

T3. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has had an opportunity to look at the significant vehicular impact that the proposed quarry development on the Connor Road in Parkgate village will have, given that, according to the application, hundreds of HGVs will access the site on a daily basis. (AQT 458/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have not had an opportunity to look at that. I have no doubt that the planners will take all those circumstances and likelihoods into account when making a ruling, as they do with any planning application. The Member is right: much as we want to promote and encourage growth, especially in rural areas, we need to ensure that towns and villages are not affected by a mass increase in industrial traffic. I am sure that this is something that the planning process will take full account of.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. The application is not being dealt with at a local level; it is being dealt with at departmental level. As a consequence, I would like to know the Minister's view on the inclusion of what are termed "passing bays" on third-party land that the applicant may not have control over. Is it proper to do that in a major application?

Mr Hazzard: It would probably be more appropriate for the Member and me to correspond on the issue so as to not prejudice

any final decision that I and my Department make on the application.

Rural Roads Initiative

T4. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the rural roads initiative. (AQT 459/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As the Member is aware, following the additional capital funding prioritised by the Executive for structural maintenance as part of June monitoring, I listened to concerns about the deterioration in rural roads and earmarked £10 million for the resurfacing of rural roads across the North. The rural roads initiative is a significant investment and is helping to address the rural roads in the worst condition, thereby helping to reduce a backlog of rural road resurfacing and repairs. The improvements target many short lengths of rural road in particularly poor condition, and it is estimated that around 1,000 locations on the rural road network will be improved. Transport NI divisions have finalised their programmes, with work well under way in most areas. As of the end of October, approximately 400 schemes had been completed across all divisions.

Mr Milne: Mo bhuíochas fosta leis an Aire. Thank you, Minister. Does the Minister agree that maintaining rural roads is as important as maintaining the main network?

Mr Hazzard: Absolutely. Maintaining the structural integrity of the entire road network is essential for social and economic well-being across the North and is a high priority for my Department. In this difficult financial period, it is, of course, necessary to prioritise resources, but for too long rural communities have dropped down the priority list. The rural roads initiative goes some way to addressing that imbalance and dealing with the maintenance backlogs that have developed over recent times. Rural constituencies across the North will soon see the benefits. The initiative will not, of course, solve all the problems on our roads, but it is a very positive measure for addressing a clear need in our rural communities.

Chinese Delegation: Meeting

T5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to update the House on his meeting last week with a high-level delegation from China. (AQT 460/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: We had visitors from the China Investment Corporation — Chairman Ding and

his team — which followed on the back of my visit to China, where, in Beijing, I had the pleasure of meeting President Tu of that investment agency. We met the delegation with the deputy First Minister and Invest NI, among other people. I am delighted to say that it was very positive. The Executive have taken great steps in recent years to develop links with China. To continue to develop them in the years ahead will be very important, especially on the back of the opening of a consulate in Belfast and an Executive office in Beijing. It is important to do that. To date, the message from the Chinese has been very positive. We touched on not just infrastructure projects but the great desire in China to trade. The Chinese see the quality of our organic and agri-food businesses in the North. It was a very positive engagement, which I hope will continue far into the future.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he envisage that there will be further contact with the Chinese regarding investment?

Mr Hazzard: As Minister for Infrastructure, I intend to take every opportunity to discuss that with colleagues from everywhere and anywhere who want to look at what we do. It is not just about investment but about learning from experiences. Some of the agencies that we spoke to in China recently wanted to learn about car parking and traffic congestion. We were keen to learn about active travel initiatives. There is great positivity. The First and deputy First Ministers will travel to China next month, and Michelle McIlveen, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, has just returned. As I said, China is fast becoming a global superpower, and it has been for some time. It would be remiss of us as Ministers not to engage with such a power.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Autumn Statement: Funding

T7. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he is anticipating any funding from the Chancellor's autumn statement. (AQT 462/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: We are all probably anticipating a bit of funding from the Chancellor's autumn statement. As the Member indicates, there has been much speculation that some infrastructure stimulus will be announced. However, any notion or commentary on such an idea would be pure speculation at this stage.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Aire. Thanks very much, Minister. Has your Department or anyone acting on its behalf engaged with the Chancellor's office with a view to anticipating or putting together a request for such funding?

Mr Hazzard: As the Member is probably well aware, the Department continually engages with Administrations right across the devolved areas and with the Treasury, certainly on any issues coming out of Brexit. My Brexit unit in the Department is continually engaged with officials in London, and that will continue. As we move forward from the statement to our own budgetary process, it is important that we get as much money as we possibly can into my budget lines because we know that infrastructure is vital in growing a regionally balanced economy.

Rural Bus Routes

T8. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what action his Department is taking to secure rural bus routes. (AQT 463/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Member refers to rural bus routes and the Department's relationship with Translink. I have had regular engagements with Chris Conway, the chief executive of Translink, since coming into post. As we enter into the budgetary process, those engagements will, obviously, increase as we look to set a budget line for Translink that can sustain bus routes, not just in urban areas. I am aware that, in recent times, there have been big announcements relating to the Belfast transport hub and rapid transit for Belfast city centre, but it is important that our rural services right across the North are protected and that we do all that we can to get vital, adequate funding into Translink to deliver them.

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that rural bus routes help to maximise social inclusion where individuals do not have access to their own vehicles?

Mr Hazzard: Yes, absolutely, that is what public transport is all about. It is very important that we continue to see an increase in the number of people who take the opportunity to use public transport. Our Metro service is very popular in Belfast, and our Goldliner service is very popular with commuters, but we could probably do more with our Ulsterbus rural services. I think we need to look at ways to enhance and protect the services on offer and try to get as many people as we can using them.

2.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Chris Lyttle for a quick question and an even quicker answer, with probably no supplementary.

York Street Interchange: Funding

T9. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to clarify the funding position for the York Street interchange project. (AQT 464/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Again, without stepping over the embargo on the ministerial statement tomorrow, I reiterate what I have said all along about the York Street interchange. It is strategically a very important project. It is a project I want to be able to deliver. I took the decision to lengthen the procurement period so that I can take all available advice.

We have seen that the landscape, even with Brexit, has changed, with High Court rulings since that decision was taken. I am hoping the Member will pay close attention to the ministerial statement tomorrow.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Thank you. Time is up.

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I advise the House that questions 5, 9 and 11 have been withdrawn.

HIU Family Reports: Appeals

1. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice what provision she plans to make available to people who wish to exercise their right to appeal Historical Investigation Unit family reports. (AQO 641/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): As Members will know, the Stormont House Agreement was an agreement between the Northern Ireland Executive and the British and Irish Governments. Since coming to office, I have been in discussion with my Executive colleagues and the United Kingdom Government to play my part in the delivery of the justice elements of that agreement.

Political discussions continue between Executive parties and the Secretary of State to finalise the outstanding policy issues. One of

the issues under discussion is a proposed appeals mechanism on family reports. As that mechanism concerns material that would engage national security, the Secretary of State has been leading on its inclusion in a Bill to establish the Stormont House Agreement institutions for dealing with the past. I understand that the Secretary of State intends to consult before a Bill is introduced in Parliament. That should provide a vehicle for wider discussion, suitably informed by the Bill.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for her response. Does she envisage that such a provision would be made on a statutory basis for those families that might seek to appeal those decisions?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Again, when the Secretary of State moves to publish his Bill for consultation, there will be an opportunity to put those views forward. Any appeals mechanism would, I imagine, happen on a statutory footing.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. She will be aware that not all family members think the same way about justice and truth recovery. How can she ensure that family members who do not want information are not traumatised by having it forced upon them by siblings?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. He raises a number of points concerning the difficulties with addressing legacy issues. When we move towards setting up the Historical Investigations Unit, these are issues that we will definitely need to consider. I imagine that the director of the HIU will take them into account when deciding what cases to take forward.

Mr Bell: Does the Minister agree with me that most objective academic reports — those that I have read — suggest that 90% of all the murder during what was called the Troubles was carried out by non-state actors, more accurately termed terrorists? How can her Department ensure that we have an historical investigation into 90% of the terrorist murders and not investigations into only the 10% that involved any aspect of the state, which seems to be the case?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I think that, in dealing with and tackling legacy deaths during our troubled period, we need to have a consistent approach. I would be keen to see the HIU move forward along with the legacy inquests. A number of these are outstanding. I believe the

approach we have to legacy inquests needs to put victims at its heart.

I am keen to see this progressed as soon as possible, because that responsibility is still there. We will continue with the legacy inquests, but, as I have reiterated in the House time and time again, whether we do that in five years or 25 years, it is a matter of trying to progress this as soon as possible and get agreement on that. The responsibility for the HIU falls to the PSNI and the other justice agencies. As a Department and, indeed, as a Northern Ireland Executive, we are not resourced to do that. We need to find agreement on this as soon as possible, and I am working with my Executive colleagues, along with the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office, to see if we can do that.

Mr Attwood: Given that your Department leads in the conversation with the NIO about the HIU, can you confirm to the House that you have seen the draft legislation? Are you or are you not making representations to London to ensure that all collusion cases can be investigated by the HIU, rather than what was in the draft last year, when fewer rather than more cases were to be investigated by the HIU? Are you personally making that representation?

Ms Sugden: I can confirm that I am working alongside the NIO to progress this as soon as possible. The Secretary of State has said publicly that he will move towards the draft consultation phase; indeed, I imagine that, during the process, there will be an opportunity to address some of the issues that the Member has raised.

Mr Lyttle: Can I ask the Justice Minister for her timescale for the establishment of the Historical Investigations Unit?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I do not have a timescale for that until we can reach political agreement. Yes, those institutions fall under my remit. However, this requires the agreement of the Northern Ireland Executive alongside the Northern Ireland Office. Again, I maintain that I hope that this will happen, and I am confident that it will, because, either way, we are addressing these issues and, in order to address our past, we need to do it as soon as possible.

Hydebank Wood Secure College: Drugs

2. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Justice how her Department is addressing the availability of drugs in Hydebank Wood Secure College. (AQO 642/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has a zero tolerance approach to all drug misuse, both illicit and prescription, and alcohol misuse in prisons. Hydebank Wood College's drug and alcohol policy outlines four core tenets that have been designed to tackle the issues related to alcohol or drug misuse in the college. Number one is supply reduction, which is the steps taken to interfere with the supply of drugs coming into the college, including searching and the use of passive detection dogs; the use of CCTV; drug testing; closed visits where intelligence or evidence suggests attempts to obtain illicit substances through visits; banning of visitors found trying to smuggle illicit substances into the college; training and drug awareness sessions for students; and joint initiatives with the PSNI. Number two, demand reduction, is about support services provided to men and women in Hydebank Wood by Start360. Number three, harm minimisation, is about comprehensive screening on committal by healthcare staff, detoxification, maintenance therapy and referral to the clinical addictions team and Start360. Number four, throughcare, is about pre-release planning with Start360 and referral to AD:EPT2. As a measure of the steps being taken to detect and deter the introduction of unauthorised articles into Hydebank Wood, there are currently two women in Hydebank Wood College sentenced to a period of custody for conveying a list-A article into or out of a prison.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Following on from that, given that the availability of drugs has led to bullying and victimisation, what support is available for those in Ash House who suffer because of that?

Ms Sugden: One of the challenges with drug and alcohol misuse in prisons is that those things almost become a currency, and that leads to issues such as you have described, where we have seen the victimisation and bullying of students in Hydebank Wood. One of the initiatives that Hydebank has put forward is about challenging antisocial behaviour, and there is an opportunity there to encourage those who are being victimised to come forward to prison officers. It also enables prison officers to be trained in this type of prisoner behaviour to see if we can challenge it.

The difficulty with drug and alcohol misuse in prisons is that it is almost a microcosm of what

happens in wider society. Regrettably, drug and alcohol misuse is on the increase, and stopping that manifesting itself in prison will remain a challenge. We need to remain vigilant. I outlined in my initial answer a number of the measures that we intend to use. It is something that we need to keep on top of, because prisoners will find other ways. We will keep a close eye on this, because we recognise the difficulties that it presents.

Mr McGrath: Following his reports on the deaths of Geoffrey Ellison, Patrick Kelly, Sean Lynch and Mr I, all of which have been published in recent months, has the Minister met the Prisoner Ombudsman to discuss the recommendations? Has she met the chief inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection following its report of 27 October?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I have met the Prisoner Ombudsman in the past; indeed, prior to the reports being published, he sends me a copy so that I can issue them for publication. I am meeting Criminal Justice Inspection tomorrow, and we discuss a number of these issues. I put it on record that the reports, whilst highlighting some of the challenges that we face in prisons, are useful because they put forward recommendations. In particular, there were recommendations on substance misuse in the most recent Criminal Justice Inspection report that we, along with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, are working on to see how we can implement some of them.

Mr Robinson: Does the Minister have a figure for drug offences committed inside HMP Magilligan?

Ms Sugden: I do not have the figures to hand, but I reiterate my earlier point: drug and alcohol misuse in prisons is a concentrated reflection of what happens outside. We need a wider concept of how drugs find their way into prison. As I said in response to Mr McGuigan's initial question, we have measures in place, but we are reviewing our drug and alcohol misuse policy to see whether there are better ways of mitigating that type of behaviour.

Mr Beggs: The problem of violence and drugs in English prisons has been highlighted recently; indeed, there was an announcement of 2,500 additional officers. Given that the problem also exists in Northern Ireland, whether in Hydebank Wood Secure College or in other prisons, are there plans to employ additional prison officers and to support staff members in the difficult task that they have to carry out?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. In addition to looking at the number of officers working in our prisons, we need to take a wider look at how to strengthen the training of the prison officers currently in position on that type of activity. It is something that I am keen to look at. I am keen to support prison officers in their role, with the aim of enabling them to mitigate the behaviour. It is something that we are always mindful of. We look across the water at how prisons operate in Great Britain. However, it needs to be noted that, in Northern Ireland, we work in exceptional circumstances and there are difficult challenges presented by the legacy of the past. As I said, moving forward, I am keen to explore this when the new director general is in position.

Hydebank Wood Secure College

3. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Justice what she is doing to address the mental health issues in Hydebank Wood Secure College, following the publication on 27 October 2016 of the Criminal Justice Inspection 'Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Secure College'. (AQO 643/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My officials in the Northern Ireland Prison Service work closely with staff in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to facilitate appointments and treatment for students with mental health issues. Following the inspection, action plans have been compiled, and work is due to begin shortly to implement the recommendations. Work will take place between the Prison Service and the trust to ensure that the healthcare recommendations are taken forward. The occupational health team at Hydebank Wood has developed new, creative initiatives, including a student/staff choir, health promotion days and a sensory garden. Hydebank Wood is the first custodial setting in the United Kingdom to have a sensory garden, which will be used to help those with mental health issues.

3.00 pm

Mr Lynch: Thank you for that answer and your answers to date, Minister. When I was on the previous Justice Committee, I visited the prisons on a number of occasions and saw prisoners with vulnerabilities and mental health issues. Can the Minister outline what steps her Department is taking to ensure that there are sufficient alternatives for those types of prisoners?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. From a number of responses that I have given around the issue of mental health in prisons, the Member will be aware that I have been working with the Health Minister in respect of tackling this particular issue. Ultimately, mental health issues in prison are a matter for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. However, I am keen, as I said, to work with the Health Minister to see whether we can find a way to move forward in respect of alternatives to custody. Currently, those decisions would be taken by the South Eastern Trust, but I think that we need to find a new way of moving forward. Indeed, on a number of initiatives, I am keen to introduce an approach of problem-solving justice to perhaps, at the point of sentencing, look to see whether there are more appropriate forms of sentencing for offenders who present with particular difficulties. I have put on record before that I am also keen to look at this in respect of mental health.

Mr Butler: Is the Minister satisfied that she has sufficient funding resource in place to seriously address the issue of prisoners who are affected by poor mental health and well-being?

Ms Sugden: I am not sure that any Minister would admit to having enough funding resource to address this particular issue. I will have to work with the budget with which I have been presented. With mental health, there are other approaches that we could potentially take. I have said on record time and time again that we need to perhaps strengthen the skill set of prison officers with regard to how they identify mental health issues amongst the people in their care and how we can better facilitate prisoners to develop through their time in prison. We need to take a number of initiatives. It is heartening that we are focusing on mental health. Again, I have said in the House before that I believe that mental health is one of the lasting legacies of the Troubles. Indeed, we are starting to see that. In particular, I see it within my prisons.

Lord Morrow: Minister, it has been said numerous times in the House that mental health problems are very prevalent within prisons. If that is the case, can you give any indication to the House how prevalent it is and what you are doing to tackle that particular issue in the future? Do you believe that there are many prisoners in prison who should not be there?

Ms Sugden: A significant number of the prison population present with mental health issues; that has been demonstrated. I do not have the

exact figure to mind, but it is considerable. Yes, I think that we do need to look at why we put these people into institutions, because I am not quite sure that they are the best place for them. However, as I said in my response to Mr Lynch, it is something that I will need to work on alongside the Health Minister because ultimately mental health, whether inside or outside prison, is the responsibility of the Health Minister. However, because there are such a significant number of such people in prisons, it is something that I am keen to take forward. As I have said time and time again in the past, these issues encourage people to offend. Ultimately, I want to ensure that it does not happen again. We need to look at mental health provision in prisons and perhaps even at whether they should find themselves in that environment.

Ms Bradshaw: I am very heartened by the tone of your answers to these particular questions, Minister. Have you had any conversations with the Probation Board on non-custodial sentences? I know that it is very keen to see you go down this line as well.

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. Indeed, I have had a number of conversations with the Probation Board. It will be a key stakeholder in helping prisoners with mental health issues, particularly when they come out of prison. One of my difficulties around mental health is that we need to take a before-, during- and after-custody approach with people who present with these particular issues, because if we can ideally get to a situation where we have stabilised any issues whilst they are in our care, the difficulty is whether, when they come out of prison, that support is maintained. Hopefully, that will mean that they do not offend again. That is where the Probation Board comes in, as well as the various health trusts that the prisoners will go back to.

Prison Service: Pay Award

4. **Mr Beattie** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on her Department's negotiations with the Northern Ireland Prison Service on the annual pay award. (AQO 644/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am keen to reach an agreement at the earliest opportunity on a 2016 pay award for Northern Ireland Prison Service operational staff. Given his role in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service pay policy, I have been in contact with the Finance Minister on a number of occasions, most recently at the end of last week. At the request of the respective staff

associations, some staff have received payments in respect of contractual entitlements due, which is a one-step progression for qualifying staff in their August 2016 pay. Whilst recognising public pay policy constraints, I must also have regard to the different environment and challenges that prison-grade staff are working in and facing.

Mr Beattie: As ever, I thank the Minister for her answer. Of course, I knew the answer because I asked a question two weeks ago, and, since then, we have had prison officers removing their labour for 90 minutes, a death in custody and an ombudsman report on another death in custody. Today, we have prison officers balloting for industrial action.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to move to a question.

Mr Beattie: Will the Minister assure the Assembly that the Northern Ireland Prison Service and prison reform are not in free fall due to poor management and low morale?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his questions and his consistent focus on the issue. I am keen to ensure that prison officers are supported in the work that they do. I have reiterated that time and again in the House. I hope that my negotiations with the Finance Minister on how we can move forward on a pay policy will come to a conclusion. We expect to hear news of that after we have had our negotiations with the Prison Officers' Association and the Prison Governors Association. There is work to be done in looking after our prison staff. I hope to announce a number of initiatives that may do that. I assure the Member that I very much have the prison officers and the work that they do at the heart of things moving forward. It is something that I am keen to keep pressing on.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister recognise that she took over a Prison Service where the staff have been denigrated and demoralised, and that, consequently, there is an urgency about addressing the issue to raise staff morale?

Ms Sugden: Indeed there is an urgency to address this issue. I have been treating it as a matter of urgency. As I said, my most recent conversations with the Finance Minister took place at the end of last week. I hope to see those coming to a conclusion very soon.

Mr Mullan: Minister, do you support the principle and the implementation of pay recovery for staff across your Department and

justice agencies following years of austerity and pay restraint? Will the recovery commence in this financial year?

Ms Sugden: We need to be mindful that we still operate in challenging times, particularly in relation to budgets and public pay policy. We need to work within the guidelines. It is a valid point. I am doing all I can to ensure that our prison officers in particular are supported. Their role is a challenging one. Enabling them to move forward has to be about more than just pay rises; there needs to be support, training and development. It is something that I am keen to look at. Everything else will follow from it. Our prisoners will be better looked after as a result. I am taking an all-encompassing approach. Regrettably, it will not happen overnight, but it is something that I am working towards.

Mr Ford: Has the Minister been given any indication by the Minister of Finance that Prison Service grades will be exempt from normal Civil Service pay policy this year?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I met the Finance Minister at the end of last week. Whilst negotiations are ongoing with the various associations linked to the Prison Service, it would be inappropriate for me to suggest what the outcome might be, but I am hopeful that, for the pay policy for the Prison Service, we will have a conclusion very soon.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Question 5 has been withdrawn. I call Emma Little Pengelly.

Organised Crime

6. **Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister of Justice what measures her Department is taking to address organised crime. (AQO 646/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), which I chair, sets priorities to develop strategies and agreed actions to confront organised crime in Northern Ireland in all its guises. The Organised Crime Task Force undertakes regular threat assessments to identify known and emerging trends and threats and looks at how they may be tackled.

Since the Fresh Start Agreement, we also have the joint agency task force, and, unlike the OCTF, the new task force is operational. It is led jointly by senior officers from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, an Garda

Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. A number of other organisations, including the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the Irish Criminal Assets Bureau are also involved in this operational activity. Its first months of operation have seen many operations targeting the initial priority areas of rural crime, child sexual exploitation, financial crime, illicit drugs, excise fraud and human trafficking, and these have led to a number of arrests with prosecutions being taken forward.

There is a clear focus in the Fresh Start Agreement and the subsequent Executive action plan on tackling organised crime and criminality linked to paramilitary groups, and as part of the implementation of the action plan, the PSNI has set up a dedicated investigative capacity to focus specifically on those issues. In the action plan, we have made commitments to promote a stand against criminality and to promote a culture of lawfulness, including reporting such activity to the police. As part of our work to implement a Fresh Start, I will also be launching a public campaign before Christmas to raise awareness of the harm caused by organised crime and to encourage the public to support a lawful society and report information to the police. My Department is also reviewing the legislative framework with a view to consulting on proposals for new organised crime offences in early 2017.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I thank the Minister and welcome progress on this matter. Will the Minister clarify, in the context that organised crime here is often allegedly linked to paramilitary organisations, that the action plan under the Fresh Start commitment to tackle paramilitarism and organised crime is undergoing a process of co-design and consultation as recommended by the panel report and will she confirm that no plan has been rejected or money refused by Her Majesty's Government in relation to that?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her questions. I can confirm all three. It is not the case that the Northern Ireland Office or the Secretary of State have refused any money. Indeed, they sit on our programme board and are working with us on when we want to draw this money down. We will not draw down money for the sake of the optics; we will draw it down for the sake of using it in the most effective and efficient way, and that has been the process to date. To clear up the confusion around the money that has been available from Her Majesty's Treasury: we have not drawn down money, and it is not the case that they have not given it to us.

Mr Boylan: I realise that the Minister has given us her action plan, but will she update the House on the discussions that she has had with the Irish Minister of Justice in tackling cross-border crime?

Ms Sugden: As the House is aware, I have a formal arrangement with the Tánaiste and Justice Minister, Frances Fitzgerald, in the form of an inter-governmental agreement. We met most recently in September to discuss a number of initiatives, particularly the joint agency task force and the work of the Organised Crime Task Force in respect of strategy and information-sharing. I will meet the Tánaiste again at the end of this month to go over similar issues. I have found the meetings very useful because we have shared interests in some of the issues that we both face. It is reflective of the new joint agency task force that came out of the Fresh Start Agreement, in that it was work that was almost happening anyway; however, this has put it on a formal footing. Indeed, we have seen some successes from that, so there is a real pragmatic opportunity in tackling types of organised crime because of the border arrangements. Again, my meetings with the Tánaiste, Frances Fitzgerald, have been very positive in how we do this moving forward.

Mr McCrossan: Minister, is it the case that no Fresh Start moneys will be allocated to the NCA to tackle organised crime in this financial year?

Ms Sugden: No, it is not the case. The NCA has not put a bid in for Fresh Start moneys since the money became available. Indeed, we expect a bid from the NCA to be forthcoming. When that happens, the Department and the Executive will consider that.

3.15 pm

Mr Allister: If the Minister heard this morning's BBC interview by Kevin Magee with a UDA member, she will be in no doubt as to the iron grip that these hideous organisations have on the community. Does she accept that the Executive's job of breaking that grip is made more difficult by pandering to those organisations? Does she accept that siphoning money to pay chief executives of other organisations, to individuals who are actually key paramilitaries or community workers, compounds the supposed attempt to deal with these organisations?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I accept that tackling paramilitaries within communities will be really difficult due to

the grip that they have on those communities. I spoke about this in my response to the debate on paramilitaries in the Assembly last week, and one of the challenges is about paramilitarism versus criminality. Indeed, the testament that we heard on the news this morning goes to show how challenging it is.

We need to be quite honest in how we approach it, and we should enable those who want to move away from this type of crime to do so. These people are a credit. It is not the case that we are letting anyone move forward on these initiatives, but it is something that we need to be really honest about with our local communities. It is going to be challenging and difficult and is not something that will happen overnight. The action plan that the Executive have published, and how we move forward on that, will go some way in tackling the criminality of these types of activity.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Maghaberry Prison

T1. Mr McKee asked the Minister of Justice, assuming that the First Minister discussed with her the meeting that she had with the Prison Officers' Association in Maghaberry on 10 October to discuss a number of safety issues, to state her recommendations. (AQT 466/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, I have had conversations with the First Minister about some of the challenges for prison officers and staff that are presenting themselves in my prisons. I am keen to tackle these particular issues and get to the root cause of the problem. We are working with the Prison Governors Association, which I met last week, and I also met with the Prison Officers' Association a number of weeks ago, to understand the problems so that we can find a positive way of moving forward.

Mr McKee: Thank you Minister for your answer thus far. Last week saw the death of a prisoner and the Prisoner Ombudsman's report on the death of another last year. Will the Minister outline what she is doing to address this failure to keep prisoners safe in custody?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. There have been a number of reports on tragic incidents happening in the prisons. It is something that I am very saddened by and we need to take action. In the Prisoner

Ombudsman's reports, he outlined a number of recommendations that my officials in the Northern Ireland Prison Service are working towards implementing. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust also has a role in implementing them, so it is critical that both agencies work together to tackle the issues. As I have outlined again, a lot of this can be very much satisfied by how prison officers themselves are supported in looking after people in custody. We had a conversation earlier in Question Time about the mental health issues there and a lot of these incidents seem to derive from that.

I am very keen to work with the Health Minister, as I said. We met to affirm our commitment to this particular issue, but it has to be part of a wider holistic approach and that includes how prison officers can be better supported in the job that they do.

DOJ: Sickness Absence

T2. **Mr Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice whether she has an explanation for the very high levels of sickness absence in her Department, particularly in the prisons and youth justice. (AQT 467/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. There are significant levels of sickness absence in my Department in particular.

It points to the really difficult nature of the job, particularly in the Prison Service, which is perhaps why officers are taking sickness absence. It is a stressful job, and many of the reasons why officers go off sick is down to stress. I hope that we can address the issue, for prison officers in particular, with the modernisation programme that we are bringing forward. We have yet to firm up on the detail of other initiatives that will address sickness absence. I am putting a keen focus on how I can better support staff in my Department, and, hopefully, we will see the positive outworkings of that.

Mr Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer up to now. Notwithstanding what she said about stress in the job, if it is a part of the job, will she elaborate on her strategy, and does she have targets for bringing down sickness absence?

Ms Sugden: We are in the very early stages of what we hope to do, particularly with the modernisation programme. The Member will be

aware that we are in the process of recruiting a new director general, and I am keen to understand how he or she will lead on taking this forward, particularly from the operational perspective of Prison Service staff. We have yet to firm up the details of a number of initiatives. Hopefully, we can move forward as soon as we decide on the best strategy.

Prison Service: Staffing

T3. **Mr Aiken** asked the Minister of Justice to state the establishment staffing figure, meaning how many prison grade staff there should be, rather than how many there are, for the Northern Ireland Prison Service, not including civilian support staff. (AQT 468/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I do not have the exact figure to hand. There have been issues about maintaining that figure, which in itself adds to the stress that prison officers face when we have those limitations. I believe that we are operating in a safe environment, but we need to look at the issue. Sickness levels can have an impact on the figure, and we need to find a way to mitigate that as much as possible so that staff are operating in a safe environment and prisoners are being cared for in an appropriate environment.

Mr Aiken: I thank the Minister for those comments. In the Ministry of Defence, there is normally a continuous attitudes survey that samples the views of key staff. Is there a continuous attitudes survey amongst prison officers, and, if so, as part of that, has there been any indication of how many staff are seeking early retirement?

Ms Sugden: Not that I am aware of. I could be wrong on that information, and, if I am, I will come back and correct my response to the Member. I am keen to understand individual officers' issues with their job. To an extent, it is not the problems that are the problem but it is how we deal with them. If we can get as clear a picture as possible, we can better support prison officers, who are then less likely to have work-related stress issues, which will, hopefully, mitigate sickness absence in the service.

Anti-Semitism

T4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Justice, given that she will be aware that anti-Semitism is the oldest form of racism, with the appalling attacks on the Belfast synagogue, the graffiti daubed in Belfast city centre, the evil attack on the Jewish cemetery in Belfast City

Cemetery and the email hate campaign against Rabbi Singer, whether her Department can do more to eradicate the scourge of anti-Semitism in Northern Ireland. (AQT 469/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, hate crime is a scourge on our society, and the Executive Office leads on that area. The crime committed falls within my Department's remit, and, operationally, it is more for the PSNI.

As an Executive and an Assembly, we need to be united in the messages that we put out that this type of behaviour is not acceptable. We can all contribute to the message by continually condemning this type of attack and supporting these people, who are very much part of our community, and ensuring that the message is out there that this will not be tolerated in any way. Indeed, the Member will be aware that the close relationships with the PSNI can also encourage that. The PCSPs have done a lot of good work on this, particularly in North Belfast, which the Member represents, through the No Hate Here campaign. Again, we need to continually press the message. We also need to be careful with the language we use in the House so that we do not incite that type of behaviour. Again, I think we all have our part to play in that.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree with me that people need to be careful with their language not just in the House but in the media and, indeed, in councils, where they put forward anti-Israel motions that have the knock-on effect of causing offence, annoyance and distress to Belfast's small but growing Jewish community? I have already invited the Chief Constable to join me on a visit to the synagogue. Will the Minister join me in meeting the Jewish community and the Jewish Council at the Belfast synagogue at her earliest convenience?

Ms Sugden: I think everybody has a responsibility with the language they use in the type of leadership they want to take forward. Indeed, I am more than happy to join the Member on a similar visit, particularly given the attacks on Jewish graves. We made contact with the rabbi with the aim of making such a visit. So, I am quite happy to join the Member and the Chief Constable, if it will send across a united message about how we tackle that type of hate crime.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Mr Nelson McCausland is not in his place.

Charter NI

T6. **Mr Stalford** asked the Minister of Justice whether she or her Department have ever received any complaint of wrongdoing or impropriety by Charter NI. (AQT 471/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Not that I am aware of, but I can probably confirm that. No, I do not think so.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to the Minister for her answer. Does she agree with me that it is entirely wrong for elected Members in the Chamber to malign good people who are involved in the work of trying to move their community forward because of the inappropriate comments of one individual?

Ms Sugden: Yes, I agree that there is a lot of really good work happening within our communities, particularly on that type of issue. I think we need to be careful not to undermine that good work moving forward and not to make problems worse by manifesting them into something that is not the case. Indeed, a lot of the community organisations are best placed to do that work, given the communities they work with. Indeed, I have seen some of that good work on the ground as well, and I think we need to be supportive of that type of work.

McGurk's Bar Massacre

T7. **Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Justice, in reference to the McGurk's Bar massacre legacy case in North Belfast, whether she is aware of the evidence uncovered through the efforts of relatives of the victims in a British Army ATO report, which confirms their long-standing view about the location of the bomb and whether she agrees that this warrants a fresh investigation by the Police Ombudsman. (AQT 472/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. Indeed, she has approached me to talk about the issue. As always, I am keen to listen to the views of victims on this. I think that will better inform our legacy approach moving forward. The institutions agreed under the Stormont House Agreement will, I believe, enable victims to essentially get their issues on the legacy of the past addressed. I think that this reiterates that we need to move forward as soon as possible. Indeed, I encourage anyone who has a role in moving legacy forward to do so as soon as possible, because time is running out. I think the example the Member raised demonstrates how difficult these issues are. We need to do this so that victims are no longer suffering.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she consider at some stage meeting some of the relatives of the victims to listen to their case?

Ms Sugden: As the Member will appreciate, it is difficult for me to comment on those types of issues. Since becoming Minister, I have been keen to listen to the various victims represented on the various groups. I am happy to do that, yes.

Gerard Mulligan: Mental Health Assessment

T8. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Justice whether an appropriate mental health assessment was carried out upon the committal of Gerard Mulligan to Maghaberry prison. (AQT 473/16-21)

3.30 pm

Ms Sugden: My understanding is that that case is still under investigation. A number of processes have been put in place, including the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process. I think it is an active investigation, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment. If I am incorrect, I will come back to the Member with more details.

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answer. Is she content that comprehensive mental health assessments and reviews are being carried out with all new inmates right across the prison system?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. No, I think more work needs to be done. Over the past number of months, a series of tragic incidents have happened in custody. Recommendations in reports from the previous Prisoner Ombudsman suggest that there is more that we can do, not only in the Northern Ireland Prison Service but in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which also has a role to play. Moving forward, it is a conversation that we will continue to have. We need to take action on it, so I am working with the Health Minister to see how we can best do that.

Prisons: Mental Health Assessments

T9. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Justice whether she is satisfied that the process of

assessment is rigorous enough and that we can assure ourselves that people are not being committed to prison who should not be committed to prison. (AQT 474/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I believe that there is more that we can do, because one death is one death too many. We need to have a really honest, critical assessment of how the processes take place so that we can ensure that we do not have another death in custody. There is more that we can do.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): A quick supplementary question, Mr McCartney.

Mr McCartney: Has the Minister anything in mind subsequent to this investigation — perhaps a review of the processes of committal?

Ms Sugden: More generally, we need to have a review of mental health in our prisons. That perhaps begins at the stage of committal but also during their stay in prison or, perhaps, going back to an earlier question, even before they get there. It is something that I am committed to doing. Ultimately, mental health, whether in or out of prisons, is under the remit of the Health Minister, so she will be critical in how we move it forward. It needs to be tackled. It comes up time and again in the House, which I suppose is a good thing because it means that we are talking about it. We need to tackle it, so I agree with that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. That completes Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease while we make changes to the top Table.

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

Private Members' Business

Sporting Events and Activity-based Tourism

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly welcomes the success that the Executive have had in attracting major sporting events in recent years and attracting visitors engaged in sports tourism; notes the high-value economic benefit that can arise from events-based and activity-based sports tourism; and calls on the Minister for the Economy, through his Department, agencies and the new

tourism strategy, to promote and encourage growth in this sector. — [Mr Dunne.]

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. This morning, the Speaker very helpfully guided the House with regard to oral statements by Ministers in the House. Having had the opportunity to peruse Standing Orders, I feel that it would be helpful if the Speaker, as well as making requests of Ministers, would point out the veracity of Standing Orders. They state that in the circumstances where a Minister is free to attend the House — when we are not on holiday or closed down and it is a standing day of the Assembly — there should be no reason for a Minister not to make an oral statement to the House. I refer to an impending statement by the Minister of Infrastructure tomorrow that will be given in writing rather than orally to the House.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I will certainly refer the matter to the Speaker.

Mr McNulty: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after 'Executive' and insert:

" , tourist agencies and sporting organisations have had in attracting major sporting events in recent years and attracting visitors engaged in sports tourism; notes the high-value economic benefit that can arise from events-based and activity-based sports tourism; further notes the failure to publish a tourism strategy in the 2011-16 mandate; and calls on the Executive to agree and publish urgently a tourism strategy, which addresses the capital, resource, marketing, skills and training requirements of the sports events and tourism sector, to enable the Minister for the Economy, his Department, tourism agencies and sporting organisations to deliver real and sustainable growth in this sector.'

I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate and propose the amendment in my name and those of my party colleagues. I urge all in the House to support the amendment, which reflects the needs of the sporting and tourism sectors and matches our ambitions in this region. We must recognise the achievements of our tourist agencies and sporting organisations in helping to attract major sporting events. Our successes in promoting tourist events are in part due to the Executive but are also due to the sheer determination of our tourism agencies and

sporting organisations. For that, we must be grateful. I thank the signatories to the motion for giving us an opportunity to talk about our great sporting record.

As has already been mentioned, over recent years, we have hosted prestigious events such as the Irish Open in 2012 and 2015, and we will do so again next year. We will also host the Open Championship in 2019. There is a bid in to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup. That is an exhilarating possibility and opportunity. The thought of having the All Blacks based in Armagh city is a mouth-watering prospect, and I am invigorated by the lasting positive impact that that could have on our young people. For all of Ireland, hosting the Rugby World Cup would leave a legacy that we could all be proud of.

We have hosted the World Police and Fire Games and the Giro d'Italia. That is not to mention regional events, which are home-grown and unique. While we do not hear about all those events, they include international fishing competitions on the River Bann and Lough Neagh; the Northern Ireland Countrysports Fair at Scarva; the ploughing at Mullahead; the Crooked Lake Triathlon; the UK Indoor Bowls Championships; point-to-points in places such as Farmacaffley; and, entirely unique to Armagh, road bowls or bullets. King of the road and all-Ireland championships are held annually in Tassagh.

In working to attract large-scale sporting events, we must look to the work already happening across the region in our local sporting organisations. It would be remiss of me not to mention the contribution of the GAA. In Armagh city alone, the Athletic Grounds attracts over 175,000 visitors a year, and, across County Armagh, over 300,000 people attend games throughout the year, yet that goes unrecognised across government. I must praise the Armagh county board on the work that it did to deliver a modern, fan-friendly stadium, not to mention the other clubs and county teams across Ulster. Only yesterday, I was at Páirc Esler in Newry for a game in which Kilcoo hosted Maghera in the Ulster Club Senior Football Championship, with upwards of 10,000 people paying for the privilege of watching amateur players in the comfort of a modern stand.

Although all those sporting occasions are a fantastic asset for our tourism offering, to date, the approach adopted in attracting global events has been too piecemeal. We have sought to attract one event at a time, without any strategic vision or direction. That is why

Northern Ireland urgently needs a tourism strategy. Central and local government must work together with sporting bodies and organisations on large- and small-scale events. If we are to look at growing the market, we must be bold and ambitious in planning and in our support for such projects by way of marketing, promotion and capital requirements.

The region must host teams and games, but we need to develop our sporting, hospitality and transport infrastructure. If we are to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023, we need an hourly Enterprise between Dublin and Belfast. We must encourage new and exciting partnerships, where government and numerous sporting bodies can come together and develop facilities for training and hosting teams.

The legacy that these games can leave for our people is one of sportsmanship, social inclusion, a fitter and healthier population and one that recognises that sport unites us and brings out the best in us. All of that can be achieved with an ambitious and accurate strategy that the Executive and the tourism sector support.

It is disappointing that the only notable development that we have had in recent times regarding inward tourism is the loss of the United Airlines route between Belfast and New York city. Maximising sports and event tourism relies on convenience and ease of travel for fans. Global events such as the Open Championship can have the transformative effect on local economies only if they are accessible in as few movements as possible for international travellers.

The loss of the United route is, therefore, extremely worrying, meaning that the US fans, a lucrative market, are less likely to make the journey if they have to travel through London or Dublin. It also underscores the critical need to improve the transport infrastructure throughout this island, as Dublin becomes the primary airport for US travellers. We need a reliable, hourly Enterprise service to be incorporated as part of any tourism strategy as a minimum.

As well as this, a potential UK exit from the EU poses huge challenges for Northern Ireland. Amongst them is the impact that it could have on our tourism industry and wider economy. With the uncertainty that the referendum result has brought, now, more than ever, the tourism sector needs the Government to create a favourable environment for tourism to expand, to flourish and to contribute to our local economy. The Executive must take the earliest opportunity to promote and enhance the

tourism sector, and fundamental to this is the development of a tourism strategy.

Key amongst our proposals to protect and promote the tourism sector has been a long-term call for reduction in VAT on tourism and hospitality products, putting the North's services on a level playing field with those in the South. Harmonising this rate across this island is a no-brainer. Our debates on this issue have received cross-party support both here and in the House of Commons. It is disappointing that this proposal has not yet been adopted.

In conclusion, the SDLP, for our part, will continue to press for the introduction of a fit-for-purpose tourism strategy that addresses the capital, resource, marketing, skills, training and infrastructure requirements of the sports events and tourism sector. The Executive must do more to develop and support our tourism industry as a key economic driver, and, to do this, they must prioritise a tourism strategy, the aim of which must be to deliver real and sustainable growth. That is the aim of our amendment. This is a debate that we must continue in the months ahead. Attracting sports events is one thing, but leaving a legacy for all our people is another. We can and must do more for the betterment of everyone in this place. We can build an infrastructure to be proud of, a capacity in our sporting sector that means that we are the place to go for major sporting events. I look forward to the day that the legendary All Blacks perform a ceremonial haka on the historic mall in Armagh, when we welcome them to Ireland as their host city in the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

Mr Murphy: I support the motion. I think that it goes without saying that the experience over the last number of years of the great sporting events that have come to this part of the world is that they have raised our profile very substantially and have brought enormous benefit to the community. The proposer of the motion outlined a whole series of large events, and I was very proud to see the Giro coming through Armagh and down through south Armagh. I think that the sense of a buzz in the community that that event created was one of the most exciting in the area that I have seen, certainly since my colleague and his teammates won the all-Ireland for Armagh in 2002. There was such a buzz around the community in relation to that event.

Of course we need to see those events happening, and we need to see the infrastructure that goes with them, but in my contribution to the debate, I want to focus on the smaller scale. Some of these events have

been mentioned. I make no apology for mentioning, as the previous Member did, the Crooked Lake Triathlon in our village of Camlough. It started out as a very small community event, and, within five or six years, it was attracting 600-plus competitors from all across Ireland and right across other parts of Europe as well. It started with a local small committee in the community beginning the event, building their own capacity and organisational skills and creating an event that has become of almost international standard.

We recognise the headline events, with a big focus on the golf opens, the Giro, the Rugby World Cup and others, but we should also make sure that there is support in communities for small-scale events because those are the events that people who have moved away come home for. Those are the events for which people time their holidays to come back to Ireland. It is those events that bring communities together. As well as ensuring that councils have the necessary resource to support them, we should ensure that there are programmes, perhaps through the Department for Communities, for capacity-building in those communities to ensure that local people get the necessary skills. From that small event, we now have a water festival. The same group of people are bidding for the world ice swimming championships to be held in Newry in 2019. That will bring an international event, and it all came from a small community project. It shows you what is possible.

3.45 pm

The Member who spoke previously also touched on the GAA. When I have visited other countries, I have been very fortunate to go to their sporting events. I have been to baseball in America. I have been to pelota in the Basque Country, where we also saw handball being played. The GAA is a unique sporting organisation. Although it is a global brand now, it is unique to this island in that it is our sport and one that has developed here. More should be woven into a tourism strategy to promote the GAA and the attraction that it provides. We can see how much more of a worldwide attraction it has become since it went onto Sky Sports. My colleague in front of me, who is a keen cyclist, instructed me that I was to mention the Rás, which is a cycling event that is unique to Ireland. It has not as yet come North of the border, and we would like to see it come up here. There is a lot of work that can be done at the local level to ensure that the small events that bind communities together receive the proper support and the proper recognition in a tourism strategy.

I have to say that I struggle to see merit in the amendment. It appears to just, in a mean-spirited way, try to dilute any credit for the Executive and pass it onto organisations. Of course, the sporting organisations and the arm's-length bodies in Executive Departments do a huge amount of work, but they do so under direction from the Minister and agreed resource from the Executive. That did not stop a former Minister in the previous Executive, who was sitting beside the Member who spoke previously but has now left, going out and firing a rugby ball about in front of the cameras when a planning decision was taken on Ravenhill and claiming the credit for that decision. I do not see the need to dilute any credit for the Executive in this regard.

On urgency, I would expect all the things that the proposer of the amendment said to be in that tourism strategy. I want to see a tourism strategy that is well done, timely and listens to the voices in today's debate and incorporates those into the tourism strategy. I want to see a proper strategy rather than an urgent one. I want to see one that gives the level of support that is required and recognises that events-based tourism is a growing force in tourism and attracting people and the well-being that that brings to host communities and communities generally in health and community cohesion. A tourism strategy must be done in a timely fashion, but it must be done properly.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring his comments to a close?

Mr Murphy: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Chambers: There is nothing in the DUP motion that anyone could not acknowledge. There have been huge successes that have made us all very proud. However, I am disappointed that it makes no reference to the many organisers of major sporting events in Northern Ireland and those across the entire tourism industry who do so much to make a visit here an unforgettable experience, especially when an event or sport is the magnet.

The motion calls on the Minister for the Economy to promote and encourage growth in this sector. Does that mean that those who tabled the motion feel that he is not already doing what they request? It would be interesting if the Minister, in his contribution today, would share with us what he thinks he is not already doing that this motion will fire him up to now deliver. It is also a disappointment to

me, as a new Member, to be reminded that such a success as our sporting events and activity-based tourism is not embraced by a specific tourism strategy, despite that having been talked about throughout the life of the last mandate and still being talked about today. I have the sense that this type of backslapping motion, with a call for the Minister to do what I would expect him to be doing already, serves only to feed into the perception held by many members of the public that this House is only a talking shop with no outcomes. That perception can be understood, even though we who serve here know that things actually do get done in the Chamber and in Committee.

At a meeting of the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association in October 2014, a report was produced on the topics that we are discussing today. It talked about events-based and activity tourism. It then referenced a third category, called nostalgia-based sports tourism. However, it said that this type of opportunity is not prominent in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland.

Why do we not have a museum in Northern Ireland dedicated to the proud sporting achievements over many years of a population of 1.8 million people who box well above their weight on the international stage? Is there a sport organised in this country that has not produced a world champion, a record breaker or a medal winner? That success is replicated by our Paralympians. I know there is a call for a museum of achievement that embraces sport, but we have a wealth of material in the sporting world and a story to tell that would fill two sports museums. The challenge will not be what to include; it will be what to leave out. Look at the success of the Titanic centre: a sporting museum could replicate that success and appeal to visitors attending major sporting events in our country and provide added value to their experience. Using some of the interactive technology deployed in the Titanic centre, a sports museum could be made a family-friendly must-visit for our citizens.

Nothing cuts across and makes a mockery of the divides in our society like sport. Let us use it to showcase all our sporting achievements on a cross-community basis. The material is there and the story is there; let us use it. The Ulster Unionist Party will support the SDLP amendment, and we call on the Executive to embrace our idea of promoting the establishment of a sporting museum. It makes no sense to continue to miss an opportunity that is sitting in our laps. Let us not dilute the opportunity by concentrating on a museum of achievement that would include sport. That

concept would not add value for visitors at either an event or on a sporting activity break.

Mr McNulty referred to sport providing a legacy. We have such pride in the sporting achievements of all our sportsmen across this country in every discipline, and a sport museum would be a legacy for those people. I call on the Executive to embrace the concept. I also call on them urgently to stop talking about a tourism strategy and get one —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Chambers: You will have your opportunity to speak.

Get a tourism strategy on the books now.

Dr Farry: I support the motion and the amendment. Before I make some direct points about the motion, I will reflect on some of the things that Alan Chambers has just said. There is a rather self-congratulatory tone to the motion, which is of concern in two respects. First, although it is welcome that we are having a debate in the Assembly on the economy, it strikes me that we are using precious time to discuss an issue where the supporters of the motion wish to pass on congratulations and recognise how well we have done. We are doing that at the expense of discussing some of the more pressing issues that face us, such as what we are going to do on an economic strategy, the implications of Brexit for our market access, the future of corporation tax, what we are doing on manufacturing and what we are doing on higher education funding. There are a lot of very important issues on the economy that we need to get our heads round.

Secondly, it is simply not good enough, when looking at the specifics of where we are with sport tourism, to sit back and list what we have achieved to date and say how great that has been for our economy and how we are now on the international map. There are some very particular issues that we need to address on that subject. First, as has been referred to by a number of Members, there is the absence of a tourism strategy. That is not a recent development; it is a long-running gap in the suite of strategies that an Executive should have in place. Clearly, a tourism strategy is a fundamental cornerstone of any wider economic strategy, and that is something that we need to address as soon as possible. Such a strategy also needs to reflect the all-island dimensions and the connectivity issues on the island.

We should also bear it in mind that tourism, as a sector in our economy, remains significantly underdeveloped relative to comparative jurisdictions elsewhere in these islands and internationally. There is significant room for growth, and obviously that should be a priority sector for the Executive and the Department. That demand is reflected by many across the sector, and it will have cross-cutting benefits in a range of areas.

It is also important that we look specifically at sports tourism. We talk about the high-profile events, but we must recognise that they tend to be variable. We will bid for those. In some, we will be successful; in others, less so. They will come to us very irregularly. If we are looking for sustainability we cannot build a strategy solely around those events. We need to ensure that there are proper spin-offs from the events that we manage to attract and ensure that we invest in a balance of reasons for people to come to Northern Ireland.

If we are looking at the specific issue of sustainability in terms of sports and events-related tourism, one of the key issues is the level of repeat visits by those who come for the initial sporting event and the recommendations that they make to their friends, colleagues and family members to come to Northern Ireland. In that regard, customer care will be very important. I encourage the Minister to look again at WorldHost training to ensure that we do as much as we can to maximise its uptake across the cities, towns and villages of Northern Ireland. We have seen some good examples in that regard. During my term of office, Derry city was the first jurisdiction in the entire UK to achieve the status of a WorldHost city. That was good. There are other issues around training. We need to see how we can support the sector in its desire to engage in work around apprenticeships and youth training. Clearly, it sees potential opportunities in that regard.

Gordon Dunne talked about the investment that has been made in stadia and hotels. We note and take into account what was said in that regard, but I need to stress that we missed an opportunity in Northern Ireland in relation to the development of a shared sports facility across the three leading spectator sports; instead, we went for three separate stadia. I do not wish to reopen old ground — that has now passed — but a single stadium would have brought us together in terms of sharing, but, more importantly, it would have brought us greater economies of scale in infrastructure and in the quality of that infrastructure. It is still a concern that Casement Park remains an outstanding

issue. That would be the largest of the three stadia available to us.

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

Dr Farry: If we are to seek to attract a certain type of event, including the Rugby World Cup, developing Casement, albeit a GAA stadium, is of crucial importance.

Mr T Buchanan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The great sporting activities that we have in Northern Ireland have been mentioned by various Members who spoke, so I do not intend to go into that except to say that we are proud or should be proud of the sporting professionals we have in Northern Ireland who represent it on a global basis.

I welcome the success that the Executive have had in recent years in bringing some fine international events to the shores of Northern Ireland. By hosting those successful events, we have seen knock-on effects that have reverberated across the length and breadth of Northern Ireland in the growth of our economy. Some people might want to turn a blind eye to that, but it is the reality of the situation and is what happens through sporting tourism.

This year saw the opening of the newly refurbished and extended Waterfront Hall in Belfast and, of course, this is a foretaste of the growth that is happening in Belfast as a place for business tourism. Expansion and room for growth were necessary to facilitate the boom in business tourism in our capital city, and, already, Belfast is tipped to be a leading destination for business tourism. That in itself will maximise our potential for visitors to come with their families and come back again. Of course, that is what we need to do: we need not only to have visitors coming in but to have sufficient interest for them to come back and join us in Northern Ireland. Business tourism may prove to be one of the catalysts for boosting the wider tourism potential that Northern Ireland has to offer the world.

By the same token, as the vision for business tourism becomes a reality in Belfast, we need to merge government, businesses, local authorities and all organisations involved in tourism to get them to think on a much wider basis and facilitate the growth of the sporting tourism industry. While major steps have been taken to attract global sporting events to Northern Ireland for which the Executive must be congratulated, we have to recognise the potential for the future in this rapidly growing

tourism market and tap into that on a broader scale.

4.00 pm

Just last week, my colleague Mr Hamilton attended the draw for the Women's Rugby World Cup 2017. That event alone, which will last for nine days, will generate almost £2 million for the local economy, not to mention the priceless publicity for Northern Ireland around the world after visitors attend the event and spread the word about our attractions and hospitality.

If we look at the North West 200 and the huge numbers of people that it attracts every year from across the world, surely we have to say that events like that are valuable assets to the local economy and provide valuable boosts to local industry. The domino effect of bringing large-scale events to the Province must not be underestimated. The power of seeing an event broadcast around the world against a backdrop of stunning scenery is priceless.

As part of a tourism strategy, we need to move with the times. We need to set the bar higher and lead the way in establishing events. We need to be more creative. We have marathons in Belfast, but I could not mention Belfast and the north-west without mentioning Fermanagh or south Tyrone and west Tyrone. There is no reason why an international marathon could not be run in west Tyrone or in Fermanagh or south Tyrone, where you have the beauty of the Sperrins and the lakes of Fermanagh. That would attract visitors, and attract them back again. Maybe that is something for the Minister to consider.

As part of a tourism strategy, we need to work alongside advertising and marketing companies, tourism agencies and hoteliers to come up with strategies to attract more people to Northern Ireland more regularly. It is imperative that we are open to capitalise on trends and have the flexibility to work alongside ever-changing trends to implement ideas that are collated from a wide range of bodies that know the industry, having worked in it for many years.

Northern Ireland is an emerald in the crown of natural rugged beauty, and when we recognise the value of the product —

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

Mr T Buchanan: — that we have to sell to the world, we can truly grasp what a unique destination we have.

The year 2016 has been one of dramatic change on the political stage of the world. We should embrace these challenges —

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

Mr T Buchanan: — and look for the opportunities —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Carál Ní Chuilín.

Mr T Buchanan: — that will present themselves as a result —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Iarraim ar Carál Ní Chuilín.

Mr T Buchanan: — and push ahead for Northern Ireland to become —

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

Mr T Buchanan: — a leading global destination for sport.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Carál Ní Chuilín.

Mr T Buchanan: Thank you.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Ms Ní Chuilín: That was a marathon speech, Tom. Fair play to you. I also support the motion, and, just for clarification, when my colleague Conor Murphy was talking about his colleague in front of him being an avid racer, it was not me; it was Philip McGuigan.

I welcome the motion. It is a good debate that is looking at all the aspects that enhance our tourism product. Someone said that, at times, we are tabling motions that have no point. Lots of people could take that view about lots of things. People take the time to table a motion and there is then a debate, and it is always worthwhile. Even if we do not agree with it, it is still a worthwhile process.

I am heartened to hear, certainly with Justin McNulty's contribution, that the SDLP is now supporting the redevelopment of Casement Park, which I welcome. I found it completely

ironic that some Members were complaining about a lack of investment in west Belfast — rightly so — yet one of the Members representing the SDLP — Mr Attwood — was one of the two Attwoods who stood outside Casement Park against the redevelopment. For me, that was a complete —

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that the Member would recognise the right — indeed, the duty — of any of us as MLAs to make representation on behalf of constituents with concerns.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Tá nóiméad breise ag an Chomhalta. The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely. To be fair, any of us could be in that situation. My difficulty was when the line was crossed in making representations, as he or anybody else is entitled to do. I found it disturbing that some were proactively arguing against such an investment. I welcomed the Member's intervention and his leadership on the issue, and I also now welcome his party's position.

I think the role of Casement Park in the Rugby World Cup for 2023 is absolutely critical. I look forward to the whole Assembly giving support to its redevelopment. Will it enhance tourism? It absolutely will. Will it add to the sports activity and potential events not just in west Belfast but in Belfast? Yes, it will. Will that improve good relations? In my opinion, it will. I grew up never putting a foot in Windsor Park, but now I do. I do not do it because I was a Minister; I do it now even though I am not. I do not go to soccer matches but to other events. When I was growing up, there were areas you just did not go to. I think that, if we are all honest, that was the case for many of us. Investment from our Executive in big infrastructure projects will help by not only creating awareness but attracting people to places and events that, in the past, they may not have considered.

The investment in the ladies' rugby has been mentioned. Next year, we will see the UEFA Women's Under-19 Championship, and, hopefully, the Assembly will give those women our support. They need it. I have witnessed world-class fishing competitions come to these shores, even to the waterworks in my constituency, which is a small lake. It was brilliant. It was a cross-community event. People from right across the island and from Wales and everywhere travelled for these events. Things like the Transplant Games and the recent world-class Irish dancing

competitions in the Waterfront Hall are examples. There are many other things, even in rural communities, such as bike trails that have had investment from DARD and others, and there are water and marine activities. I think we have a lot here to enhance our tourist product. Can we all do more? Certainly. That is a given.

When I spoke to other Ministers, some of them would have given their eye teeth for the infrastructure and investment we have put into some of our areas to enhance tourist product. I also welcome the fact that, across the island, both institutions are working to look at events we can host in both parts of the island. That has continued and is a good thing. I believe that Tourism NI, Sport NI, the Executive and councils have a massive role to play. Local government has a massive role to play. I think that when we have joined-up approaches — I am seeing more of that — you will get more world-class events.

I will go back to a point that Conor Murphy raised. Do not lose sight of the small events. World-class events like the Olympic and Paralympic Games have inspired children and young people to get involved in sport. Some of the smaller events will do the same. We need to make sure that the infrastructure is invested in and maintained and that we create the opportunities not only for people to come to our shores but for our residents and citizens to make sure they, too, participate in some of these events. I, too, support the motion.

Mr Robinson: My East Londonderry constituency hosts the North West 200, the Northern Ireland Milk Cup and the air show. It has top-quality golf courses, has been used as part of the Giro d'Italia route and is blessed with excellent salmon and trout fishing rivers as well as a stunning coastline that attracts sea angling. This is why I am particularly interested in speaking on this motion.

As my colleague Gordon Dunne said, we must also remember the recent magnificent achievements of our Northern Ireland football team in reaching the last 16 at the finals of the Euros. To add to that, we have had some great past sporting legends, such as George Best, Joey Dunlop, Alex Higgins and others, along with present sporting ambassadors like Rory McIlroy etc, who have put Northern Ireland on the sporting map.

As I have already demonstrated, much has been delivered and many events supported by the Executive. I congratulate them on their successes. I also point to the future and the

2019 Open golf tournament, which is coming to Royal Portrush. That is more delivery for our tourist industry. Again, my congratulations to the Executive. No one can say that the Executive are not successful in supporting our sporting events. The result is employment and economic development, the cornerstones of future development.

With a more peaceful Northern Ireland, the potential for developing the tourist sector is immense and, as stated previously, much has already been achieved. I want to see all sectors developed because this is one of the cornerstones of Northern Ireland's economic development. In every constituency, there are sporting events and activity-based tourism: climbing the Mourne, surfing on our coasts, caving in Fermanagh, sea and river fishing or boating on our lakes, waterways and coasts. We have a huge sports activity tourist product to sell to the world. This is a base for our tourism economic growth.

I am confident that, with this Executive and Minister at the helm, Northern Ireland can be assured of the commitment to developing our tourism sector in all aspects and to utilising our sporting and activity-based tourism to the utmost. I support the motion and ask the House to follow suit.

Mr Aiken: I support the motion and the amendment and add our support to Tourism Northern Ireland and to other bodies as we seek to grow Northern Ireland as one of the key niche sporting and cultural tourism destinations in the world.

Whether it is large, medium or small sporting events or cultural events, helping to promote those events or benefiting from the wider positive image these activities sell of Northern Ireland plc as a great place to visit, to invest and to live in, our brand is something that we must build up, cherish and guard from being undermined by other competitors, either here on this island or further afield. We have much to be proud of: our strong sporting links to golfing, motorcycling, cycling, equestrianism, rugby, football, GAA, sailing, swimming, athletics and hockey. It would be remiss of me not to mention the great Mossley, Parkgate and Randalstown hockey teams of my constituency of South Antrim. Then there is the sporting prowess exemplified by our international sports stars, Olympians and Paralympians. This does not just imply the promotion and support of sports in schools and our communities but having the facilities for our sports, whether through our planners ensuring that globally significant road races such as the Ulster Grand

Prix are not penalised by unwelcome graveyard developments or having suitable venues to attract major sporting events.

In mentioning the Ulster Grand Prix and as a proud Ballyclarian, I would also like to put on record again my delight in Jonathan Rea's being crowned World Superbike champion. I too would be delighted if the Assembly formally recognised his fantastic success.

We also have to ensure that our cultural landscape is supportive and attracts major visitor numbers. I particularly note events such as the Belfast Tattoo, Ulster-Scots events in Glenarm, arts festivals, literary events and the great work that has gone on in Londonderry, as well as the new visitor centre celebrating Seamus Heaney in Bellaghy. We need to effectively promote all our sports and cultural events and tourism, so let us make sure that we appropriately invest in the promotion of brand Northern Ireland. It is noteworthy that the Irish tourism authorities spend many multiples of Tourism Northern Ireland's budget; indeed, the budget for the Wild Atlantic Way alone is much more than what we do to promote Northern Ireland tourism. If Northern Ireland tourism is

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member made a good point when he mentioned the Wild Atlantic Way. I ask the Minister to look at that. We need to bring it up here. The Atlantic does not stop at the border; the Wild Atlantic Way should not stop at the border either.

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

Mr Aiken: Thank you very much indeed. As we all know, the Atlantic stretches all the way to Ballycastle and Torr Head. That is what we should be doing; we should promote the extension of the Wild Atlantic Way along that way.

We should commend Tourism Northern Ireland's desire to increase the market to £1 billion per annum. If we are to do that and support that growing investment, we need to help Tourism Northern Ireland. As part of the strategy, we need to resource it adequately.

4.15 pm

Mr Maskey: Like my colleagues, I support the motion. As I understand it, the Member who spoke previously said that the Ulster Unionist Party will also support the motion, albeit along

with the amendment. I am not sure whether that means that, if the amendment falls, the party will support the motion. I hope that it will. As my colleagues, particularly Conor Murphy, have already said, in our support for the motion, we will not support the amendment, because it appears to us to be part of the now standard trend from the SDLP to be, in a way, mean-spirited, not wanting to recognise that the Executive have done anything right or of substance. Even though that party had Ministers in office in the previous mandates and was quite prepared to share in, and rightly so, some of the very good work that was done, it would never take responsibility for some of the work that was not done. Nevertheless, I recognise that Justin McNulty in his remarks did acknowledge that the Executive did do some good work. To that extent, I am quite pleased to hear that, because, ultimately, whatever way the amendment is voted on, I do not think that any of us can really find any substantive fault with the motion.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister, because, as Conor Murphy said already, we expect to hear that we will have substantial and substantive support for the tourism industry, not least the sporting tourism sector, in any upcoming tourism strategy and, in fact, right through to the heart of the economic strategy eventually. All Members have testified in the House this afternoon that it is a very important sector for a variety of reasons. It certainly helps the local economy. There is no question or doubt about that. It brings more people here and increases the spend locally in the broader community, including the hospitality sector.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. He mentions the hospitality sector. One of the big issues around hospitality is the review of licensing laws, which, at the moment, the Committee and the Minister are looking at. Will he agree with me that a more radical approach to that particular issue would be very helpful in supporting the economy and economic growth?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute. Tá nóiméad breise ag an Chomhalta.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for that intervention. There is no doubt of that. In the previous mandate, I was very clearly on record as saying that we need an overhaul of licensing legislation. I look forward to that happening in the time ahead. There is no doubt that it will also be of benefit if it is improved in the right and appropriate manner.

As I said, the community here is accruing very important economic benefits through sporting tourism events. Beyond that, they continue to increase the involvement of people here in sports. Although the motion refers to the Executive achieving good things in the past, all those other organisations, be they tourism bodies or sporting bodies, not to mention all the participants, activists, sportsmen and sportswomen, have inspired many of us here and people around the world. The continuing success of the sports tourism industry and sector will add to the number of people who are involved in sport. That has an overall benefit to society here, because sport increases people's participation, addresses social exclusion and is far better for people's health, well-being and all the rest. It is a no-brainer, really: if we can, we should increase support for the sector.

One of the things that has come through in the debate is that, although everybody acknowledges all the very many major sporting events, and rightly so — we are very thankful for them and for the prowess of our sportspeople and all those who support them, such as their coaches, trainers and families — all Members have testified to the fact that there are many much smaller sporting events that really go unsung. I will mention just one. On Friday past, I had the benefit of meeting those involved. It is a small event that involves two amateur boxing clubs: St Paul's in west Belfast and Scorpion in Ballymoney. The two clubs have come together and developed a partnership with Detroit. They hope to bring over a party from Detroit that will include Thomas Hearn, a very famous world champion of our generation.

There is no doubt that the relatively small party that they will bring over here will increase the tourism spend not only in Belfast. A very good programme of events has already been arranged around that one small programme. It is only one. There was a previous similar initiative called Beltway, which married people from Washington and, mainly but not exclusively, Belfast — originally, it was an Ardoyne club.

These smaller sporting events are very important not only for the local economy but for the well-being of people here because more and more people are becoming involved in sport. Of course, when people come here to take part in those sporting events, they avail themselves of other parts of our tourism industry. That is all the better for everybody concerned.

I commend the Executive for all the work that has been done over the last number of years. I particularly commend all the people who have been involved in the sporting achievements, the tourism and other sporting bodies —

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

Mr Maskey: — that have helped. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about other substantive support that will be given to these events in the future.

Mr Frew: I support the motion. I acknowledge the work that has been done to date. I invite Mr Chambers to visit North Antrim, where he can attend Ballymoney town hall and learn all about the history of road racing in Northern Ireland. On his way home, he could call into the Ballymena Showgrounds, where he will see our hall of fame, which has represented in it Willie John McBride, Eamonn Loughran, Michael O'Neill, Maeve and Sean Kyle and Nigel Worthington. There are a lot of museums that acknowledge and support the work of all sports in all guises and through all individuals. I disagree with him: if we focus on a museum, we could lose sight of the future potential. We need funding and support to make sure that we assist the athletes of the future rather than spending money on a museum that shows us what happened in the past.

I acknowledge the work of the organisers of the North West 200, which is very close to my constituency; it benefits greatly from that event. What a massive event it is, and it is free. Where else would you get that in the world? The Milk Cup — the Super Cup as it is called now — does tremendous work with young people from around the world. We also have our golfers. Look at what has been achieved at the very highest levels by Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell, Darren Clarke and, of course, Michael Hoey, who, I think, is now a six-time winner on the European Tour.

Michael Hoey has done a lot of work with Galgorm Castle Golf Club. He is an ambassador for the Northern Ireland Open, which is Northern Ireland's annual professional golf tournament. Whilst it is good that Northern Ireland can attract the Irish Open and, of course, the Open in 2019, we should look at the potential of the Northern Ireland Open. At the minute, it is a Challenge Tour tournament, which is the second division in European golf terms. It has been going only since 2013, when it had over 22,000 spectators. In 2014, it had 34,000 spectators. In 2015 and 2016, it had

39,000 spectators, and the grand total for 2016 was 39,721 spectators. It was won by Ryan Fox from New Zealand. That is the potential that the Northern Ireland Open has. It broke the Challenge Tour attendance records in the last two years. That tells me that the Northern Ireland Open has outgrown that division of European golf. To go up higher, you are talking about the same professional tour as the Irish Open, the Scottish Open, the French Open, the Spanish Open and all the rest. How good would it be if Northern Ireland were to get a slot in that diary? It would be at the very peak of European golf. We can do it. I pay tribute to the owner of Galgorm Castle, Christopher Brooke, on the work that he has done on that ground and the investment that he has made. I also pay tribute to his managing director, Gary Henry, who is also the main organiser of the Northern Ireland Open. These people can put Northern Ireland on the map.

We can compete right up there with the Irish Open. It is good to have the Irish Open in Portrush, at the Royal County Down in Newcastle and, now, in Portstewart. We can do this every year; we can have a tournament of that calibre every year through the Northern Ireland Open. Why should we not strive to get there and to have this as an annual event? We have the infrastructure around Ballymena, and we have the golf course. I know that the Minister has played it; I have seen him in action.

Mr Lyons: Was he any good?

Mr Frew: Well, I think he should get a tour invitation. You never know. I will take half of his prize money. This is a tremendous opportunity for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Open.

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

Mr Frew: I hope the Minister will look at that and see how we can grow the Northern Ireland Open.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I was a little thrown there by Mr Frew's final comments. It would be a very kind invitation to join the tour. He was offering his services as an agent or something —

Mr Frew: A caddy.

Mr Hamilton: A caddy, perhaps — looking to take half of my winnings. Half of zero, of course, is still zero.

I thank all of the Members who have contributed to the debate and particularly thank Mr Storey, Mr Buchanan, Mr Dunne and Mr Lyons for tabling the motion. At times during the debate, as debates of this nature can tend to do, it sounded a bit like a Tourism NI brochure for each constituency in Northern Ireland. Well done to the Members who availed themselves of the opportunity to promote the attractions of their area.

The motion states that Northern Ireland has been very successful in bidding for and hosting a range of high-profile sporting events in the last few years, and that is undoubtedly the case. I do not think that anybody denied that in their contribution. From the Titanic centenary in 2012, when the world spotlight shone on Belfast for all of the right reasons, to the hosting of events such as the MTV European Music Awards, the Irish Open in Portrush and a range of other high-profile 2012 celebrations, major public events have become extremely important to the Northern Ireland tourism industry, to the further promotion of the tourism product and to the wider economy.

The follow-up from that tipping point, as it were, in 2012 has been extremely good. Londonderry's year as the first ever UK City of Culture in 2013 was a resounding success. We then had a series of further major events, such as the World Police and Fire Games, the Giro d'Italia Big Start and the 2015 Tall Ships Festival. Aside from their individual and economic successes, collectively, all of those events have not just served to greatly improve Northern Ireland's profile as a place where major events can take place but have increased the likelihood and potential for Northern Ireland to host bigger events — sporting and otherwise — in the future. I am delighted, for instance, that World Rugby has chosen to award the hosting rights for the Women's Rugby World Cup 2017 to the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). This prestigious tournament will be held in Belfast and Dublin in August next year, and Northern Ireland will undoubtedly benefit from the global coverage that goes with such an important event. The Northern Ireland Executive are also very supportive of the bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. I am delighted that Ireland is through to the second phase of the bid process. I know that a lot of work will go into this next phase to secure a winning bid. Northern Ireland will also host the 2017 UEFA European Women's Under-19 Championship. Securing that football tournament is particularly exciting, considering the recent success of our men's senior team, who did so well in the summer's European Championship in France.

The Gran Fondo of the Giro d'Italia will return next year as part of the successful legacy event. Some Members talked about the legacy of big events that we attract in Northern Ireland. In 2015-16, the event attracted 3,066 participants, 21% of whom were from outside Northern Ireland. The 2016-17 event attracted 4,399 participants, 14% of whom came from outside the Province. The impact of events of this type is instant, with riders, their friends and families filling up hotels, enjoying our local food and drink and attractions, experiencing our unique cycling trails, increasing international visitors and generating revenue for local businesses.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for giving way. He makes a compelling case in the assessment he does of the economic out-turn of the issues that are supported by the Executive. However, sporting events take place day and daily. There are, for example, 10 world champions in kick-boxing in my constituency. They bring people from Japan, the US and across Europe here, and they have a multiplicity of championships there. That is not work supported by the Executive.

Does the Minister do any assessment of its value to the economy, as well as to participation in sport?

4.30 pm

Mr Hamilton: It is a topic that was mentioned by many Members in their contributions about celebrating — I am sure that the Member agrees — the large events, both home-grown and international, that we have established or attracted over the years. There is an importance for local events, and I have heard it loud and clear. There is a range of events at local level that have been supported; not always through the Executive, admittedly, but mostly through local government. That is the principal way in which it should be done to reflect the needs of the local community.

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Hold on a second. I know that the Member likes to talk, but just let me finish my point.

Mrs Long: International events, Minister.

Mr Hamilton: Look, if the Member has any particular cases that she wants to raise with me, I am very happy to look at them —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask that all Members make their comments through the Chair.

Mr Hamilton: — to assess their impact on any particular events that the Member raises. I know that the councils that principally fund those events at a very local level will do their impact assessments on what the impact has been on the local economy so that they can justify the expenditure that they have made on them.

Whether it is very localised events, events that attract people from elsewhere in the British Isles or, indeed, from further afield, it is vital that we focus at an Executive level on the bigger events and that there are smaller events at a local level that allow people to participate. They can be inspired perhaps by the bigger events, but they can certainly be encouraged to participate at a local level in local events.

I am happy to give way to the Member if she has another point to make.

Mrs Long: Thank you. The point that I am making to the Minister is not that these are local events, but that they are international events; they are world championships. They are not supported by any government funding, but they take place in Northern Ireland on a regular basis. They are not just local events.

Mr Hamilton: The Member will appreciate that, as successful as we have been over the last number of years in attracting some major sporting events — some of which I have mentioned already; some of which I am sure I will mention throughout the remainder of my contribution — we do so on the basis of what will bring in a return for the wider economy and improve our tourism product. That is not to say that other events held at a local level, which are international in nature, are seen in any way as inferior. The Member will appreciate that there is a limited budget to support events available to me and my Department through its agencies, so we cannot support every event. To do so would dilute the pot and give far less of a return on our investment than supporting the bigger events that I have already mentioned.

I am also delighted that the Dubai Duty Free Irish Open will return to Northern Ireland next July with Portstewart Golf Club being the host venue. Tourism NI and my Department are working with partners in the European Tour, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Tourism Ireland and the wider tourism industry to deliver another great Irish Open, the third to

be held in Northern Ireland in the last five years. The Irish Open has, of course, been one of the key factors in attracting the Open Championship to Royal Portrush, and next year's Irish Open will provide the perfect stepping stone to the excitement and drama of the biggest tournament in world golf, which will take place here in 2019. The Open's return to Northern Ireland is a hugely significant step forward. Securing this tournament has been a key part of Tourism NI's events strategy, and, unquestionably, it will further consolidate Northern Ireland's reputation as the home of outstanding events and boost efforts to grow domestic and overnight visitor numbers and spend.

The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews retains global research company Repucom to conduct an annual branded content analysis of the Open Championship. It estimates that the combined tourism promotion and economic development will be up to £70 million, with 200,000 spectators expected at Royal Portrush over the competition days.

The hosting of major golf events, including our own — as mentioned by Mr Frew — Northern Ireland Open, as with all major sporting events that we manage to attract, continues to play a key role in realising our ambitious plans to grow tourism here to a £1 billion industry by 2020. Whether it is world-class home-grown motor sports events like the North West 200, the Circuit of Ireland and the Ulster Grand Prix, or major one-off internationals, they all have the capacity to showcase our people and places on a global stage.

Events drive visitor numbers, generate increased spend and provide platforms for the visitor to interact with the local culture, local people and explore our scenic landscapes and cities. In activity tourism, and I have to say that, when I am on holiday, I am anything other than —

Mr Attwood: I thank the Minister for giving way and note what the leader of the Alliance Party has said. The British Open is going to be the game changer of all game changers for tourism and sports tourism in Northern Ireland. Given that we are within touching distance of 2019 for marketing and promotion, will you have a bespoke budget line for the British Open 2019 to deal with infrastructure, marketing, promotion, training, skills and anything else that will make that event as big as possible given its scale? Is there going to be a bespoke strategy, bespoke money, bespoke efforts and bespoke ambitions because that is the measure of

whether you are putting meat on the bones of a tourism strategy?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his contribution and it is not unexpected around golfing. The Member is a far better golfer than I am and he is a great supporter of golf, particularly when the Irish Open first came to Royal Portrush and the regeneration of that area. My ministerial colleague Paul Givan is actively working on that front to ensure that the benefits of the Open are felt.

The Member is right, this is at an entirely different level. Members will want to promote events in their particular areas, but this is a truly international global event the like of which we have not seen in Northern Ireland, perhaps ever. Even when it was hosted here in the 1950s, it was nowhere near the level it is now. The Member is absolutely right; we need to capitalise on this, and I am adamant that we will not miss this opportunity. Yes, the intention is that the Open will come back on a regular basis, but we will not miss this opportunity in 2019 to make sure there are other benefits such as regeneration, improving skills and infrastructure in the surrounding area and across Northern Ireland.

The motion also mentions activity tourism, and this is one of the key themes for unlocking the potential of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. The beauty and variety of our ever-changing landscape, and the compact distances that we have, make Northern Ireland a wonderful place to undertake all types of outdoor activity. Activity tourism is estimated to be worth about £100 million to the Northern Ireland economy annually and is well placed to grow further due to the diversity of activities available. Activity tourism marketing is delivered through a service level agreement with Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland, which is responsible for industry engagement and the development of activity-specific websites. The activity tourism sector here is young and vibrant, representing a confident Northern Ireland and, in that context, Tourism NI's activity product priorities are focused on five areas: adventure, walking, mountain biking, cycling and canoeing.

Many Members talked about local events, particularly in their areas and constituencies. In 2014, Tourism NI introduced a three-year letter of offer fund for international events and administration of the national fund as a sponsorship scheme. However, that events programme is the subject of a review being conducted by my Department, which is likely to take a number of months to conclude. In the

interim, Tourism NI has put in place a one-year programme to support events whilst the review and strategy are completed.

A new tourism strategy for Northern Ireland to 2025 is being developed by my Department, and part of that new tourism events strategy will emerge to support the delivery of the overarching tourism strategy targets. There is a new appreciation of the potential for tourism to contribute to the growth of the Northern Ireland economy and to deliver jobs and investment. We have worked very hard in Northern Ireland to improve visitor perception and to build on our reputation as the home of great events. We must continue this hard work with a focus on further improving our reputation internationally and our attractiveness as a destination. When we play host, we all join in and go the extra mile.

Our new tourism strategy will have a global focus that will set Northern Ireland as an internationally competitive and inspiring destination. The new tourism strategy will have the sole aim of transforming Northern Ireland into the world-class tourism destination that we know that it can be, and we are pursuing that aim on strong foundations. The annual tourism statistics show that, in 2015, we had 4.5 million overnight trips, with an associated expenditure of £764 million; a 3% increase. We had 2.3 million external visitors, which is the highest number on record and a 6% year-on-year increase.

Hotel room occupancy was 67%, which was up 2%. Northern Ireland also welcomed nearly 70 cruise ships with 123,000 passengers. More recently, NISRA occupancy statistics for January to September this year reveal record room occupancy levels over the summer, with August hotel occupancy reaching 88%, the highest on record for any month. Factors that may bode well over the rest of the year include recent favourable currency movements. That will potentially be supported by improvements in air connectivity over the winter, with 10 new routes from Spain, Poland, Germany, Italy and Brussels.

World-renowned events such as those that we have been speaking of today will continue to play a vital role in attracting external visitors, helping to enhance our international reputation as a destination of choice and providing world-class experiences for all. Northern Ireland has already had significant success in bidding for and hosting a range of major global events.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister bring his comments to a close?

Mr Hamilton: We are in a strong position to continue the success and to attract sporting events and tourists who wish to engage in a range of outdoor activities.

Ms S Bradley: I welcome the opportunity to make the winding-up speech on the amendment. I start with comments made by my party colleague Justin McNulty, who rightly referred to events such as the Irish Open and could barely contain himself, being the sporting man that he is, when he referred to the bid for the Rugby World Cup and something about a haka on the Mall in Armagh. Reference was also made — rightly so — to embracing the GAA. The scale of support across the world for the GAA is largely unmeasured, but the Executive must embrace it, considering the fact that we are the homeland of Gaelic games. Justin McNulty also rightly raised the point that there is one-event thinking going on at the moment — successfully at times, when events are captured and brought here — but we must extend beyond that way of thinking.

Alan Chambers expressed his concern that the Minister's party had once again tabled a motion for debate that really calls for nothing more than what we should already consider to be agreed. He also made calls for a sporting museum, which, he thinks, would be a precious addition to any strategy.

Stephen Farry rightly highlighted what we will discuss further: the self-congratulatory tone of the motion. He went on to mention and discuss all-island connectivity, the methods of getting repeat visits, customer care and, rightly, the training that would be required to make a visitor's experience one that they would wish to return to and share again.

We then had a contribution from Steve Aiken, who referred to the Wild Atlantic Way, which we look at with envy, and there are lessons to be learned there. He acknowledged the good work of many organisations and individuals who have contributed to the sector and the success of sporting tourism to date.

What we must ask ourselves is this: why would tourists come here? What events would attract them? How do they get here? There is the uncomfortable truth of the United Airlines story, which should not be repeated in the House. There are also issues with the Enterprise service, which is barely functioning right now. Some tourists might even like to approach my constituency of South Down via a bridge at Narrow Water. The infrastructure and the means of getting here should be there.

How do they get here? Where do they stay? I am very conscious that hotel plans are sitting with the Planning Service and not getting through the system. There must be out-of-silo thinking and a joined-up approach to where people will stay and what their experience will be. What activities and pursuits will they engage in while they are here? At the same time, we are talking about the possible threat of closure of outdoor education centres. Opportunities do not exist in other constituencies to partake in sports that people would not otherwise have an opportunity to engage in. What opinion will those tourists leave with when they have had the Northern Ireland hospitality experience? Again, that goes back to Stephen Farry's comments about training and being not just open for business but successfully open for good business and giving our tourists an experience to remember.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. While she is lamenting the fact that, for example, the Narrow Water bridge has not yet been developed, does she not accept that many of her party colleagues supported all those parties in the last Southern mandate that withdrew the money the Irish Government had committed to the project?

4.45 pm

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

Ms S Bradley: No, I do not accept that; in fact, if I remember correctly, it was your party colleague who was in office when the money was not brought forward for the bridge.

Speaking directly to the amendment, Conor Murphy on behalf of Sinn Féin gave first light about why his party did not believe it could support the amendment. He said that he believes that the SDLP, at any cost, will come in here and take merit from the Executive. I assure you that that is not the case. If the Member does not want to listen to me, he could take time to read the amendment. He will see that it goes further than the motion. It adds a sense of urgency and asks the Executive to address the need for:

"capital, resource, marketing, skills and training".

If the Member is serious in saying his party does not accept those as additional factors to be considered in the amendment, I find that quite disingenuous. In fact, I would go further. When I listened to the debate — this will

perhaps be the routine — I felt that, regardless of what amendment is tabled, parties will simply look through it to find a get-out. I do not see the get-out here, and Sinn Féin should really reflect before it decides how it will vote on this. While it is comfortable going for the softer language, I ask this: is there a fear of accountability? Rather than vote for the promotion and encouragement of economic growth, why not call for real and substantial growth? I put it to the House that, increasingly —

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

Ms S Bradley: I will. Increasingly, I suspect this Executive will become known as the Executive who like to share the blame but never the credit.

Mr Lyons: I am pleased to be able to make the winding-up speech on the debate. I thank Members for their contributions.

There is a reason why we brought the motion before the House. It is the same as the other motions we have brought as members of the Economy Committee on the economic strategy, exports, SMEs and now on activity- and sports-based tourism. That is because we want to set out our stall and show the priorities we have and what we would like to see in the various strategies that the Minister will bring forward.

I know this is hard for some members of the Opposition to take in, but the Executive have had some success on those issues. I know you would prefer it if we did not, but we are going to talk about the successes we have had. I know you are trying to get a narrative together that everything is bad and terrible and that we are awful people. We have had successes, and I am afraid you will have to listen to some of them.

Mr Durkan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: If the Member has something useful to say, I will give way.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he say whether all those successes have taken place in the past five months?

Mr Lyons: No, they happened before that as well. We have certainly had successes, and I am sure that, by the end of this Assembly term, we will have had even more that we will be able to speak about. We want to talk about the successes. We will continue to have them, and

we hope that, through the new tourism strategy, we will be able to address some of the issues.

We have had successes in tourism. You have only to look at some of the figures. We have the highest number of external visitors, hotel occupancy is up and we have the highest number of overnight stays. We have also made huge progress in developing our tourism potential and product here in Northern Ireland. In just the last number of years, we have seen the opening of Titanic Belfast and the visitors centre at the Giant's Causeway, and next year will see the opening, for good, of the Gobbins path in East Antrim. In the meantime, do not worry: if you want to visit East Antrim, there are many other attractions you can see. We look forward to that happening as soon as possible.

It is also right that we look at areas in which we can see room for improvement. One of the reasons why we brought the motion to the House was that a significant portion of our tourist offering is in larger sports events or activity-based tourism.

What we are saying to the Minister today is, when that tourism strategy is being put together, let us not forget about that and about how important they can be. That is the basis of our motion today.

I will address briefly some of the criticisms that have been made of the motion. This was not meant to be a motion that would divide the House or cause any problems in the House. We think that it is fairly straightforward and simple and something that everyone can buy into. That was the way in which the motion was drafted, but we have complaints that it does not include all the sporting organisations that have been involved in the success. Absolutely, we need to acknowledge the work of sporting and other organisations that has led to the success, but, as an Assembly, we are here to call on the Executive to do things and take action. That is why we are pointing out some of the steps that could be taken.

To move on to what other Members have said, briefly, first of all I thank Gordon Dunne for opening the debate and highlighting the importance of activity and sports events for our tourism sector, and all the benefits that can come from that. He only mentioned North Down twice, which, I suppose, is some kind of record for him, but no doubt he will continue to mention it in the future. Of course he had to mention motor sport as well, and the opportunities that can come from that.

Justin McNulty is no longer here, but he mentioned the reason for the amendment, and I have to say that I think it was just for no other reason than to have a pop at the Executive. I do not see any real reason for putting that amendment in. It took him almost six minutes, but he was able to mention Brexit and talk about the uncertainty that that is causing for the tourism sector. I do not know what figures he has been looking at because, regardless of your view on Brexit, surely people can see the benefits that are coming from the changes that have occurred in the pound and how beneficial that has been.

Conor Murphy mentioned some constituency issues and mentioned the keen cyclist who was in front of him, which, as Carál Ní Chuilín has pointed out, was not her. Maybe Sammy Douglas can encourage her to take that up, but he was absolutely right in what he said: any tourism strategy must be well done, not half-baked, and timely, and we look forward to the publication of that.

Alan Chambers talked about the sports museum that he wants to see. He did not give away where he wanted that to be — probably in North Down. If he wants it in North Down, he will have the support of Gordon Dunne, so he has two votes in favour of that already. It is a shame that he did not give way, because I would have liked to have heard a little bit of the debate between him and Paul Frew on that.

Stephen Farry mentioned the importance of not just having high-profile events. That is not what the motion is calling for. We want to see those high-profile, major international events and not just one-offs. In its entirety, it is about activity-based sports events and the tourism that comes from that.

Mrs Palmer: Thank you very much for giving way. There has been a lot of talk in this debate around massive sporting events. Do you agree with me that more needs to be given to the Women's Rugby World Cup next year and the European Women's Under-19 Football Championships next year? Women are certainly at —

Mr Lyons: The point first of all is that both are being supported and are getting funding. That is exactly the point of the motion: it is about making sure that we are getting the support for these. So I challenge Stephen Farry on that. Stephen Farry was also very interesting because he complained about how the motion was all about self-congratulations. The Alliance Members would know all about self-congratulations; they do it often enough

themselves. Maybe I will take a lecture from him on that, but, as I said, we are not going to shy away from our accomplishments as much as he would prefer it if we did.

Tom Buchanan rightly talked about the pride that we should have in our sporting heroes in Northern Ireland, and other Members mentioned that during the debate. It is important that we do that, because that has been the catalyst for so much of the success that we have had. He also made a very important point about ensuring that we have the infrastructure necessary in Northern Ireland. He also floated a novel idea of a marathon through west Tyrone and Fermanagh and south Tyrone. Maybe he can continue to be a cheerleader for that.

I mentioned already that Carál Ní Chuilín made very clear that she is not the cyclist whom Conor Murphy was referring to, but she did mention the role of local government. It is important that we ensure that all levels of government are involved where possible. George Robinson extolled the virtues of his constituency and the fantastic tourist product that we have on the north coast. I also welcome the fact that he elaborated somewhat on the activity-based aspect. It is not just about the big international sporting events but about the other things that we have here on the activity side of things, which we should be proud of and where there is room for growth and investment.

Steve Aiken mentioned Jonathan Rea, whom, I am sure, the whole House will want to congratulate. He went off topic slightly, not that that has stopped him in the past, and talked about the cultural, literary and Ulster-Scots side of things. That is not what the motion is addressing, but it is absolutely right to mention it, because we have a product there that is worth selling, and we want to make sure that that is realised.

Alex Maskey nailed it when he referred to the SDLP reasons for putting forward the amendment. He also made a very important point on the importance of health and well-being for our people. Paul Frew highlighted our sporting heroes, in particular those from north Antrim. He told us something of his golf knowledge and perhaps some of his ambitions for the future.

Finally, I thank the Minister for his comments. It is good to hear that the tourism strategy is being developed and will include the issues that we have been discussing. He mentioned the activity-based side of tourism, which maybe we

could have mentioned a little bit more during the debate. The targets that he set out are all very welcome.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring his comments to a close?

Mr Lyons: I thank the Members who took part in the debate. We have put forward our position, and I ask Members to support it. I commend the motion to the House.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I have to say that I am very disappointed that tennis did not get mentioned in the entire debate. That will happen in the next one.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 38; Noes 56.

AYES

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McNulty and Mr Mullan

NOES

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

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the success that the Executive have had in attracting major sporting events in recent years and attracting visitors engaged in sports tourism; notes the high-value economic benefit that can arise from events-based and activity-based sports tourism; and calls on the Minister for the Economy, through his Department, agencies and the new tourism strategy, to promote and encourage growth in this sector.

Adjourned at 5.14 pm.

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