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Contents

Assembly Business

Speaker's Rulings 1

Tributes to Former Members 1

Matter of the Day

Harry Gregg OBE 11

Assembly Business

Committee Membership 15

Committee Business

Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019: Prayer of Annulment 15

Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019: Prayer of Annulment..... 15

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office 16

Justice..... 25

Communities..... 34

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 43

Assembly Members

Aiken, Steve (South Antrim)
Allen, Andy (East Belfast)
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)
Archibald, Dr Caoimhe (East Londonderry)
Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)
Bailey, Ms Clare (South Belfast)
Barton, Mrs Rosemary (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Blair, John (South Antrim)
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)
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)
Buckley, Jonathan (Upper Bann)
Bunting, Ms Joanne (East Belfast)
Butler, Robbie (Lagan Valley)
Cameron, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)
Carroll, Gerry (West Belfast)
Catney, Pat (Lagan Valley)
Chambers, Alan (North Down)
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)
Dillon, Ms Linda (Mid Ulster)
Dodds, Mrs Diane (Upper Bann)
Dolan, Ms Jemma (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)
Easton, Alex (North Down)
Ennis, Ms Sinéad (South Down)
Flynn, Ms Órlaithí (West Belfast)
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)
Gildernew, Colm (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)
Hargey, Ms Deirdre (South Belfast)
Harvey, Harry (Strangford)
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)
Kearney, Declan (South Antrim)
Kelly, Ms Catherine (West Tyrone)
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)
Kimmins, Ms Liz (Newry and Armagh)
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, Fra (West Belfast)
McCrossan, Daniel (West Tyrone)
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)
McGrath, Colin (South Down)
McGuigan, Philip (North Antrim)
McHugh, Maolíosá (West Tyrone)
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McLaughlin, Ms Sinead (Foyle)
McNulty, Justin (Newry and Armagh)
Mallon, Ms Nichola (North Belfast)
Maskey, Alex (Speaker)
Middleton, Gary (Foyle)
Muir, Andrew (North Down)
Mullan, Ms Karen (Foyle)
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)
O'Toole, Matthew (South Belfast)
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Rogan, Ms Emma (South Down)
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)
Sheerin, Ms Emma (Mid Ulster)
Stalford, Christopher (South Belfast)
Stewart, John (East Antrim)
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)
Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)
Weir, Peter (Strangford)
Wells, Jim (South Down)
Woods, Miss Rachel (North Down)

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 17 February 2020

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Speaker's Rulings

Mr Speaker: Members, Mr Allister raised a point of order last Monday about remarks made to him by the Minister of Finance during Question Time. It was clearly a heated exchange, and I have written to both Members to advise them to ensure that they meet the standards expected in the Chamber. I do not intend to rehearse the incident any further and consider the matter closed, but I want to take the opportunity to give the House an indication of my approach to the standard of debate required.

As the Principal Deputy Speaker pointed out on Monday, previous Speakers' rulings have focused less on individual words being deemed unparliamentary and more on the tone and context in which they are said, and that ensures that Members show one another respect in the Chamber no matter what words they use. Tone and context will remain important considerations for me when judging our debates. There are, of course, myriad important issues to be dealt with in the time ahead on which Members will not agree. It should still be perfectly possible to express and challenge opinions robustly, but that must be done with respect, courtesy, good temper and moderation. Those are the standards that Members should observe and that I intend to uphold.

We have to be mindful that what is said in this place is not simply a matter of relationships between Members, as crucial as those are. We also have a leadership role to play in the wider community. At a time when there have been community divisions and when developments such as social media often make abusive language more commonplace, we should be careful to set an example that helps to minimise those tensions rather than add fuel to them. We are all fully aware that there is much to do to build confidence in the Assembly, and we all have a role to play in that. If people watching

from outside can see the main issues of the day being dealt with constructively and respectfully, that would be a very good start.

Finally, if Members are in any doubt as to how they can express themselves in an orderly way, I encourage them to return to my remarks this afternoon in the Official Report and be guided by them.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am not taking any points of order on the matter. The matter is closed.

Tributes to Former Members

Mr Speaker: Last week, the Assembly observed the normal convention to express condolences on the death of our late colleague Francie Brolly. From a distance, public perceptions often focus only on the party political differences among Members. They often overlook the respect for one another, the strong working relationships and the friendships that are created while pursuing common interests on behalf of our constituencies and sections of our community, and that is why the convention to pay respect to former colleagues exists.

However, during the period when the Assembly was not sitting, a number of other former Members passed away, but there was no opportunity to extend the same convention to them. Having consulted with the Business Committee last week, I take the opportunity put that right today and allow the Assembly to pay its respects on the record.

Today we remember the following eight former colleagues who served in the Assembly: P J Bradley, the SDLP MLA for South Down from 1998 to 2011, who would undoubtedly be proud that his daughter Sinéad continues the legacy of the Bradley name in the Assembly; Pat O'Rawe, the Sinn Féin MLA for Newry and Armagh from 2003 to 2007 and former Mayor of Armagh, whom I obviously knew and respected as a party colleague; Donovan McClelland, the SDLP MLA for South Antrim from 1998 to 2003, who was one of the first Deputy Speakers of the Assembly; Oliver Gibson, the DUP MLA for West Tyrone from 1998 to 2003, who, like Francie Brolly and Séamus Mallon, whom we have lost in recent weeks, gave significant public service as a teacher; the Rev Robert Coulter, the UUP MLA for North Antrim from 1998 to 2011, who was a long-serving member of the Assembly Commission; Dr Ian Adamson, the UUP MLA for East Belfast from 1998 to 2003, who was a former Lord Mayor of Belfast; Wilson Clyde, the DUP MLA for South Antrim from 1998 to 2007, after a lifetime in the agriculture industry; and Seamus Close, the Alliance Party MLA for Lagan Valley from 1998 to 2007 and former deputy leader of the party. We formally express our belated sympathies to their families, colleagues, friends and, of course, parties.

The fact that many Members here today may recognise the names but had never met those Members highlights the fact that, increasingly, the Assembly relies on a new generation to take it forward. However, a few of us, including me, worked alongside almost all of them

throughout their tenure in the Assembly in the early days, which were also difficult days. While I knew some of them better than others, I acknowledge the significant public service and sacrifice that they made to their constituencies and our society as a whole. No matter the challenges that continue to exist, we should not overlook the problems faced in the first terms of the Assembly and the pressures that they imposed on those who were Members at that time. I extend my personal condolences to all the families, friends and colleagues of the deceased. We, therefore, record our thanks for the contribution that all those colleagues made to public service, the Assembly and our community.

I invite other Members to add their tributes.

Mrs Foster: Let me say, Speaker, that this is a very timely matter that you have brought to us today, which, obviously, comes all together, for very obvious reasons. It is important that we remember former colleagues in this way. My colleagues will pay tribute to individual Members, but, as First Minister and leader of the DUP, I put on record my sympathy to all the families who were bereaved during the three years that we did not meet in this place. It is important that we recognise the service that was given by those Members, as you rightly said, sometimes in difficult and challenging times. We sometimes think that we are the only politicians to live through challenging times, but I will remember that first Assembly and how there were many challenges to be dealt with. I particularly pay tribute, of course, to Oliver Gibson and Wilson Clyde, who were members of my party and served with distinction during that time. I pass my condolences to their families and all the families of the Members who are remembered here today.

Mr O'Dowd: I also welcome the opportunity to add tributes to the Members who have passed away since the Assembly last sat. As has been said quite often but deserves to be repeated, public life is not always an easy life. I admire anyone who steps forward to serve in public life, regardless of which political tradition or background they come from or espouse to. I knew some of the Members who passed away. I pay particular tribute to Pat O'Rawe, who, as you mentioned in your opening comments, was the first Sinn Féin mayor of Armagh city. I worked with Pat in the Assembly on a number of committees in preparing for the establishment of the Assembly pre 2007. Often when public figures lose their life, it is forgotten that there are family members left behind — they could be partners, husbands, wives,

children etc — who grieve the person while society grieves the public representative.

I also pay tribute to Rev Robert Coulter, who represented his constituents in a very quiet and humble way but made his point. I remember that, when I was Education Minister, he lobbied extensively for schools in his constituency. He always did it in a very respectful way, but he made his point. I think we could learn a lot of lessons from how the Rev Coulter went about his business.

So, to all those who lost their life since that last sitting of the Assembly and to all their family members — I think of Sinéad Bradley and pay tribute to P J, who I also worked with and knew — we pay tribute to them and honour their memory.

Ms Mallon: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for creating the space for us today to reflect on the contributions of former Members who passed away over the past three years.

On behalf of the SDLP, I express my sincere condolences to the families of all those who served their communities here and to the current Members who served with them in difficult times. While we often disagree in this Assembly, it is fair to say that, more often than not, political battles rarely infect the personal relationships that have been built across our parties and communities. The strength of this place should be our ability to respectfully differ but to never stop working together in the substantial common interests of those we represent. That is the thread that connects the contributions of all those across all parties we are remembering today.

I pay particular tribute to those SDLP voices that are no longer with us. If you were looking for inspiration on how to connect with your community and represent its interests, you would need look no further than P J Bradley. A fierce and compassionate advocate for Burren, Warrenpoint and Ballyholland, P J's loyalty was to the people of South Down before anyone else. That spoke to his values and his character. P J was a patriot in the truest sense of the word, working quietly without fanfare to bring our communities together and build a resilient peace. He was a trailblazer in initiating the campaign for Narrow Water bridge, a campaign his daughter Sinéad has taken up with the same vigour. I know how proud he was when Sinéad won his seat in South Down, and I have no doubt that, the moment the votes were tallied, he was already thinking about the next campaign. Their contribution to our party, to South Down and to Ireland has been immense.

I also reflect on the contribution Donovan McClelland made to peace and politics on this island. As an SDLP delegate to the Brooke-Mayhew talks and a participant in the Good Friday negotiations, Donovan was an important member of our negotiating team and a key part of that immense effort to get an agreement over the line in 1998. He then worked to sustain these institutions as Deputy Speaker, winning respect for his unfailing fairness to all Members.

It is impossible to reflect on Donovan's life without mentioning the lasting legacy of love he had for his family. I have the privilege of working with Donovan's wife, Noreen, who is one of the North's most genuinely caring public representatives. Her support for him during peace talks and her work since has created a lasting legacy that they both share as pillars of our peace. Life in politics is never easy, not least for our family members, who, in many ways, have to share us with our constituents. It can be difficult for them as their husband, wife, father or mother work long hours; as we know, being an elected representative is not a nine-to-five job. At the same time, it is with great pride that they see their loved ones battling tirelessly and serving relentlessly their constituents as they strive to make life better for their own children and for all children across Northern Ireland.

I have no doubt that the families of P J Bradley, Donovan McClelland, Seamus Close, Dr Ian Adamson, Pat O'Rawe, Rev Robert Coulter, Oliver Gibson and Wilson Clyde are all filled with immense pride at the contribution and legacy that they each made to making this place of ours that much better.

12.15 pm

Dr Aiken: On behalf of the rest of the Members from the Ulster Unionist Party, I pay tribute to all our Members, but in particular to Rev Robert Coulter and Dr Ian Adamson.

Rev Coulter was a man of faith who served in the Assembly from just before its formation in 1996, when he was elected to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue, where he served as the UUP Chief Whip. He had a long political career. In 1985, Robert was elected as a UUP councillor to Ballymena Borough Council. He retained his seat in 1989, and, in 1993, was re-elected to the council and also elected as the first UUP Mayor of Ballymena since the early 1970s. He served as first citizen of Ballymena from 1993 to 1996. He was part of the team in the background that laid the

negotiation foundations for what was to become the Belfast Agreement in 1998, and he was elected as a North Antrim Assembly Member in 1998, a seat he was to hold until his retirement in 2011. During his entire Assembly career, he was a member of the Assembly Commission.

He was also active in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which saw him represent the Assembly at conferences at India, Australia and Canada. In the Assembly, he also served on the Health Committee and on the Employment and Learning Committee and was our party spokesman on both portfolios during his time on those Committees. In 2010, he was awarded an MBE for his services to the Commission and to the Assembly.

Following his retirement in 2011, he championed the cause of special needs education and, something that was very dear to his heart, he served as a chaplain to the Ulster Defence Regiment Association and was president of the mid-Antrim branch of the Ulster Special Constabulary Association. Rev Dr Coulter passed away on 5 September 2018 after a long battle with cancer. We remember him very fondly, and we pass on our prayers and good wishes to his surviving family.

Dr Ian Adamson was a former Ulster Unionist Party Lord Mayor of Belfast who died in Belfast. He was a man of many talents and interests. He represented the Victoria electoral area on Belfast City Council from 1989 to 2011 and served as Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor and High Sheriff. He was also the MLA for East Belfast between 1998 and 2003 and was a founder member of the Somme Association. In addition to his political career, he was a medical doctor and had a keen interest and provided a wealth of knowledge in the field of history, particularly local history and Ulster Scots. As many of us can testify, he was the author of numerous books and papers. He made a huge contribution to cultural and political life and will be greatly missed by all his friends in the party. Indeed, Lord Empey, who served with Dr Adamson in both City Hall and Stormont, said he had :

"a great sense of humour and dry wit. His flair for cultural issues, particularly as they applied to the Ulster Scots tradition, were brought to life with his lectures and anecdotes. Those of us who were colleagues in the City Hall will miss him greatly."

Indeed, he will probably be looking down now with amusement as there was one time in the Assembly where he made a short contribution

in Welsh, and a Member from Sinn Féin congratulated him on his fluency in Irish. Adamson corrected him:

"It is the oldest British tongue; it is the language of the Welsh." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 2, p247, col 2].

He is survived by his family, and we wish them all the best wishes.

Mrs Long: It feels very strange to be making these tributes to colleagues in this way, but I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity to do so. I hope that Members from other parties will forgive me for focusing on my late colleague Seamus Close in my remarks today.

He was one of the first people to join Alliance when it was first formed in 1970, driven by his belief that the horror that was unfolding on our streets needed to stop and that Northern Ireland needed to change. Characteristically, he did not sit back and wait for someone else to do the heavy lifting, but rolled up his sleeves and he did it himself. In 1973, he was first elected to the new Lisburn Borough Council, and between his role there and as an MLA, he served as an Alliance elected representative for over 34 years. One of the highlights of that time for him was in 1993, when he became the first Catholic and non-unionist mayor of Lisburn council. His first act on that occasion was to write to the leaders of all the local churches to ask if he could attend worship with them. That is a measure of how he tried to instil respect at the heart of everything he did. He was always willing to share his advice and experience with others, often, whether we wanted it or not, and to share his views with younger councillors and politicians. That advice — that you could have it out in the chamber, you could have hot and heavy arguments, but if you could not go outside, shake hands and still be friends at the end of it, you were in the wrong job — is good advice for all of us in this Chamber, too.

Seamus was very much a conviction politician. That showed in his courageous stand on paramilitarism and his unswerving commitment to creating a shared future. He was an inspiring person to work with, to listen to and with whom to be part of the same team. His style was direct and blunt, something which I personally like, and he never pulled his punches with anyone, not even his party colleagues. That style led to his being not just respected but a very useful negotiator: people knew where they stood and knew that he could be relied upon to still be standing there when they returned to him later. They were able to rely on him to be honest and forthright with his opinions.

However, that directness was also laced with a wit and humour, which made him not just respected but much liked. It also meant that, post-retirement, he made the transition to political commentator seamlessly, aided hugely by his independence of thought. Having shared a studio with him in his role as commentator on occasion, I certainly never took it for granted that Seamus would agree with me and always felt very relieved on the occasions when he did. I have no doubt that those of you who also shared a studio with him will have felt the same relief.

In the Assembly, Seamus's training in business came to the fore, particularly in finance. His desire to know that public money was not misspent made him a passionate advocate on the Public Accounts Committee. He was always ready to challenge where he felt that there was waste or that money could be better spent and was always conscious that it came from someone else's pocket and should be taken care of properly.

While Seamus was a formidable debater, a fierce opponent and a fearless defender of democracy, he was, at heart, a family man. It is fitting that his wife, Deirdre, has been able to join us today. To her, Natasha, Stephen, Brian and Christopher, and to his grandchildren, I want to extend our ongoing thoughts and prayers at this time. I never had the pleasure of being in the Chamber with him, but we were part of the same Assembly team during the hiatus in proceedings between 2003 and 2007. It was an honour to be so. He was always an encourager to me. He encouraged me to not mince my words, to be direct and to be truthful in what I said. Some of you may wish that I had taken his advice less to heart than, perhaps, I have. He was larger than life. He was full of good humour and a generous spirit. He is very much missed by all of us who knew him.

Mr T Buchanan: Of course, it is good to take time to remember and reflect on those who used to serve in the House, sat on these Benches and made their contributions to society and the constituencies that they served. Sadly, they are no longer with us. A number of them were in the House when I came here in 2003. I had the privilege of serving alongside some of them. We will all remember them in different ways; for the different contributions that they made and the service that they provided to their constituencies.

As for me, I remember with fondness my dear friend and colleague Oliver Gibson. Oliver was the person who brought me into politics at the very outset. He brought me into council and

paved the way for me to follow him into the Assembly in 2003. He was someone who lived for politics. He made some very valuable contributions indeed. He delivered for his constituents. He was a former schoolteacher and vice-principal of Omagh High School. He was passionate about education and delivering for the people of West Tyrone. He was also a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and he wanted to make sure that law and order was protected for the people of Northern Ireland.

Oliver made some very good contributions to and deliveries for the people in West Tyrone, which still stand as a testament to him. Throughout the length and breadth of West Tyrone, people still talk passionately about Oliver Gibson and his legacy.

Today, we remember all the respective families whose homes have been left with a vacant chair and a voice silenced. As they seek to learn to live with the loss that they have sustained, I want simply to pass on our deepest and heartfelt sympathy to them all. I trust and pray that they will know God's help and blessing in the days that lie ahead. It is always difficult when a dearly loved one is taken from us. You do not get over it, but you learn to live with it. As those families learn to live with their grief, sorrow and loss, we assure them of our prayers. It behoves each one of us in the Chamber to number our days and to apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Ms Kimmins: I echo the comments of other Members about former Members who have passed away in the last three years. I pay tribute to Pat O'Rawe, a former MLA for the constituency that I now represent, Newry and Armagh. I thank Pat for her service to the constituents of that area during her time in the Assembly and as the first Sinn Féin Mayor of Armagh City and District Council.

Ms S Bradley: First, I offer my condolences to my friend and colleague, Pat Catney, who today lays his mother, Eileen, to rest. I extend my condolences to his siblings Elizabeth, Laurence, Jim, Dymphna, Damian, Patrick, Assumpta and Broz-ana.

I also add my belated words of sympathy to all families of former Members who have been, rightly, remembered here today. I welcome Noreen McClelland, the wife of former Member Donovan McClelland, who is in the Public Gallery today.

It is at times like this when all our differences, whether real or merely perceived, vanish. As P J Bradley's daughter and an elected

representative of the House, I find myself in the most unusual and highly privileged position of being able to stand and thank each of you for the kind words and expressions of condolence that you offered to me and my family following our loss. The sheer volume of kind words of condolence extended to us, often coupled with shared personal stories that beautifully captured Daddy's kindness, has been overwhelming and most comforting. To each of the individuals who reached out to comfort us from near and far, we are truly grateful.

Before and after politics, P J — or Daddy, as he was known in our house — held one rule above all others during his lifetime: his respect for human life was paramount; his commitment to peace unwavering. In this Chamber, Daddy's love for Ireland and its people was repeatedly displayed: his tireless work on the delivery of Irish passport services to post offices here; the realisation of his vision for all-island free travel; and reaching out to the undocumented Irish abroad. These were just some of the projects that he pursued with passion. Daddy immensely enjoyed representing all the people of South Down and his time on the Agriculture Committee. He did so with great humility, diligence and respect for all.

It is my opinion, however, that local issues brought him the greatest sense of achievement. Projects such as securing a village green for our parish in Burren, and placing on it a millennium wall that recorded the name of every person who was living in the parish on millennium day, mark some of his local legacy. He was an avid GAA supporter who never missed an all-Ireland football final, and a lifelong member of St Mary's GAC. It is not possible for me even to begin putting on record the vast range of achievements that Daddy accomplished in his lifetime.

Thankfully for me, much of them have been captured in the books that he published before his passing. Of course, any work unfinished has been passed to me and others to administer for completion, so there is absolutely no pressure on delivering the Narrow Water bridge.

12.30 pm

On behalf of my mother, Leontia, my siblings Martin, Joanne, Deborah, Catherine, Stephanie, William and Miceal, Daddy's brother, Liam, and sisters Nora and Nuala, and all our extended families, I thank the House and all of those who offered words of comfort to us. So many people stepped in to help us. I am acutely aware that, in naming some people, I will leave others out.

However, I cannot let the moment pass without personally thanking Father Charlie Byrne, Roisin McCrink, my office staff, Sean O'Hare, and the McAteer family, all of whom offered us great support at a very difficult time.

Finally, I use the opportunity to place on record our huge appreciation to the medical team who supported Daddy during his short illness and to the Southern Area Hospice, which supported Daddy and our family during what was a very peaceful passing. I will always be proud to be P J's daughter. Rest in peace, Daddy.

Mr Swann: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing this business to proceed today. Like other Members, I pay tribute to those former Members who have passed away, in particular Rev Dr Bob Coulter, who was a personal friend and mentor to me. As John O'Dowd and our party leader have already expressed, Bob's passion for health and for employment and learning matters in this place is something that he held deeply. He brought that experience to bear in the delivery of Castle Tower special school in Ballymena. Many will see that as part of his enduring legacy, because he was chair of the board of governors from the original concept to the delivery of the school. I know that he did not make John's job as Education Minister easy at times, but the way in which he conducted that campaign brought about the delivery of the school.

It has been noted that, during his time at Stormont, he moved around the corridors not just with ease but with speed. He often left many a staff member or visitor finding it hard to keep up with him. In the tributes that have been paid, everyone has acknowledged his warmth and the personal time that he gave to anyone whom he met. He was a man who was as comfortable sitting at a kitchen table up a lane in Clogh as he was sitting down to tea with Nelson Mandela.

Like many, I am blessed to have learned from Bob's experience. Having had him as a political mentor and guide has been a great resource to me. A mentor is someone who wants to see you rise to the top and is willing to help you get there, even if it means letting you stand on his shoulders. Bob would not mind my saying that, even with me on his shoulders or him on mine, there is many a hedge or wall in North Antrim that neither of us could have seen over.

[Laughter.] For those who knew him, he was a man who had a story for every occasion and eventuality. It was only at the end of those stories that you could tell by the glint in his eye whether he had been winding you up. I once said to him that he taught me everything that I

know of the craft of politics. His answer to me, with that same smile, was, "Yes, but I didn't teach you everything I know".

Unfortunately, Elizabeth, Bob's wife, constant companion, confidante and adviser, passed away only a few weeks ago. I pass on my condolences and our condolences to comfort John, Liz, Sharon, Nick, Dan and Adam and the wider family circle. It is known that Bob was a man of great faith who had great love for the Lord. It was his greatest strength, and the gift to us all is that we are assured that he is walking the corridors of power in a better place with the same ease, grace and welcome that he walked the corridors here in Stormont.

Mr Lunn: I pay tribute to all the Members whom you mentioned at the start of proceedings. I cannot say that I knew them all very well, but I remember P J Bradley as an absolute gentleman. He was a pleasure to be with. I also knew the Rev Robert Coulter. I will say exactly the same thing about him: he was a true gentleman and made some great contributions to the House. Oddly enough, I also remember Oliver Gibson. I knew him before he got into politics, back in the '70s. He was another gentleman, but I knew him through education, so I will not say anything about his politics.

In particular, I will carry on from what Naomi said about Seamus Close and then say a few words about Dr Ian Adamson. Seamus Close was the reason I joined Alliance back in 1989. I will not repeat what Naomi said about him, but I will amplify it slightly. He was awarded the OBE in 1997 for his contribution to public services, and, in 2010, he was awarded the freedom of the city of Lisburn, along with Ivan Davis, who was a past Deputy Speaker here, and Edwin Poots's father, Charlie Poots. They all achieved the freedom of the city on the same day — all richly deserved.

Seamus had many strings to his bow. He was, for instance, a prison visitor at the Maze prison for some time, and his concern for the welfare of prisoners and staff was very evident at times. He was capable of demonstrating his sense of humour. You might remember when a tunnel was discovered under a fence at the Maze. Seamus stood up at Lisburn council and speculated that he was not too sure if it was for people trying to get in or people trying to get out, because of the benevolent regime that was the public perception of what went on in the Maze at that time.

Seamus was the first non-unionist Mayor of Lisburn, but he even made a joke about that: he said that he was the first one who had a beard.

That was Seamus. He was a very gifted debater in the Assembly and in council. He did 38 years' unbroken service on council — more than half a lifetime. I do not know how he stuck it, but he did, and fair play to him. He was a massive contributor to the affairs of Lisburn and to Lisburn council.

Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 — in which election Seamus topped the poll in Lisburn, which is fairly unusual for an Alliance person, but he did — he was tipped at that time to assume your job, Mr Speaker. It did not happen for him, but I know that it was a possibility, because he was sitting in my house when he received the call in which he was offered the job by a Northern Ireland Office Minister. He indicated that he would accept it, but it did not happen for him. We heard on the news later that night that somebody else was to take the post.

Seamus held very firm views on matters that sometimes diverged slightly from party policy, but there but for the grace of God go we all. *[Laughter.]* Members might remember back in the 2000s when the Alliance Party had decided to redesignate as unionist for a day. They all did — I was not here — except for Seamus. Seamus was for having none of that; he did not believe in it at all. He also had trouble with some of the social issues of the day: I will not go into that. He stuck to his beliefs, always. There was one thing about him: you always knew where you stood with him, because he would tell you, and he would tell you straight out. That applied to his friends as well as his so-called foes. However, he had no foes outside the Chamber; he just did not. His attitude was, "Leave it in the Chamber". No matter what was said or how vitriolic it got, you could have a cup of tea with Seamus afterwards or drain a wee brandy if you really wanted it.

I want to talk briefly about Seamus as the family man. He was married to Deirdre, who is in the Public Gallery today, for around 40 years. They have four lovely children: Christopher, Brian, Stephen and, of course, Natasha. When I first got to know him, around 1990, Natasha was very ill, as most of you will probably remember. She was suffering from a childhood leukaemia — an illness that did not spare many children. In fact, I think the survival rate was about one in five at the time. However, Natasha survived. She is now in her early 30s — a lovely young lady. She was blessed with a son two or three years ago, which is something that would have been in some doubt at a time because of what had happened to her during her childhood.

Seamus delighted in his family. He was the ultimate family man. While he could be quite scathing in his behaviour here and through politics, his attitude in the family was completely different. I know his son Brian, who may be in the Gallery as well, referred to him as a big "softie". I think that is going a bit far, but he was certainly a lovely family man. He took great pleasure in the family and also in his grandchildren, of which he had three: Rory, Thomas and Emily.

As a family, we shared some very good times with Deirdre and Seamus at weekends and on holidays over the years. We came to be very, very good friends, and we will miss him, as will all of his colleagues. He had a wide family circle — all his friends in Lisburn and his friends here as well.

However, we have his legacy as an Alliance representative, a prominent politician and a supreme family man. That is the way I would like to remember him.

I will turn briefly to Ian Adamson, who I did not know very well but whose language skills and intellect I admired. I gather he knew maybe about a dozen languages fluently, including some that some of us had never heard of because they were very old languages. He knew about the history of language, and he could be very severe on our Irish-speaking colleagues because he thought that sometimes the Irish that they were speaking was not true Irish because they had not gone back 5,000 years to find the derivation of it.

He did not particularly favour the Alliance Party, to be honest, especially in his later years. He could be quite severe with us —.

Mr Storey: Hear, hear. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lunn: But that is politics. He was a decent man, and we miss him just the same. My abiding memory of him — I will finish with this, Mr Speaker — is that I made the trip to the Somme battlefields with the Somme Association a few years ago. Ian, who was a founder member of that association, was our guide for the time we were there. He sat at the front of the bus, and, in between every stop, he told us exactly where we had been and the history of it, where we were going and the history of it and probably what was coming up next. He was an absolute fund of knowledge about the battlefields, the First World War and, particularly, the details of the Somme.

I express my sympathy to everybody who was mentioned today, particularly to Ian's family and, of course, to Seamus's.

Mrs Cameron: Thank you for the opportunity to pay these tributes to the many Members who passed away in the last three years while this place has not been sitting.

I will be very brief. I just want to mention in particular Wilson Clyde, who was MLA for South Antrim. He was part of my beginnings in my political time with this party, the DUP. Wilson was a bit of a character. He was a farmer and a very proud unionist. He was incredibly loyal in every way, and that was in a very personal sense as well. I had the pleasure of working for him in his constituency office for a few years back in the 2000s. He always turned up with a smile on his face and was always ready to crack some really crummy joke. He was notorious for that. He was an incredibly honest gentleman, he was very loyal in character and he was very much a family man. I know he will be very much missed by his wife, Evelyn, and the entire family circle in the Randalstown and south Antrim area.

Mr Dallat: I am probably almost in a unique position in that I knew all these Members from my long service in this place. Obviously, I knew some better than others. My two party colleagues Donovan McClelland and P J Bradley I knew in particular, but there were others I knew from serving on Committees.

12.45 pm

Donovan McClelland was a lecturer in the University of Ulster. Life could have been very comfortable for him, but he did not choose that. He contributed to the peace process that eventually became the Good Friday Agreement and, in doing that, he brought himself danger. I remember being in his home on several occasions, which was fortified with high fences, bulletproof glass, deadlocks and all sorts of things. However, that was the contribution that he made, which has brought us to where we are today. Of course, you cannot mention Donovan without his wife, Noreen, who served in parallel on an adjacent council and who, today, makes a huge contribution. If I had one wish, it would be that Noreen would join the Assembly one day.

As you know, Mr Speaker — this will be of particular interest to you — Donovan was a Deputy Speaker, and he was a man of severe discipline. He did not suffer fools easily. On one occasion, there was a Member who was particularly troublesome in the morning. I reassure the existing parties that it was not one of their members. In the afternoon, Donovan

was in the seat you are sitting in now, and, within 30 seconds, that Member was ejected. I am not sure if it was done according to the rules, but Donovan had had enough of him, and the Member got the message.

I served alongside P J Bradley on the Agriculture Committee, but he also lobbied me many times on behalf of the undocumented in America. I am glad that Sinéad has mentioned that, because that was important to a lot of people. His and Donovan's contributions were invaluable.

I know that Alliance Members and others have spoken about Seamus Close, and I am conscious that his wife Deirdre is here today. Seamus Close was an amazing individual, and I had the pleasure of serving on the Public Accounts Committee with him. He quickly became known as the Rottweiler, not because he went around biting ankles or things like that but because of the way he penetrated bad practice in government Departments. I know that Seamus and other retired members of the Public Accounts Committee met for years after he retired to reminisce about the good old days when they sorted out the financial difficulties of the Assembly. Seamus will be sadly missed, and I wish to record my experience of working with him, particularly on the Public Accounts Committee. I know other Members appreciated it equally.

I could not resume my seat without making reference to Reverend Robert Coulter — Bob, as he allowed me to call him. He was an incredible person who had a vision for the future of the Assembly that went far beyond simply winning the next election.

When I was speaking about Donovan McClelland's difficult life, I neglected to say that I am so sorry that, in recent days, our First Minister and deputy First Minister have received threats. That was the type of life that Donovan McClelland lived in Randalstown in those years. Current Members of the Assembly should never forget that there were a lot of people who went before them and who made huge sacrifices and took enormous risks to bring this place to where it is today.

Mr Clarke: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to reflect on the Members who passed away during the time when the Assembly did not sit. Other Members have mentioned their party colleagues, and I want to talk in particular about my two party colleagues: Oliver Gibson and about Wilson Clyde, who has already been described as a "proud unionist". I

echo those comments, because Wilson was very proud of his unionist roots.

Wilson Clyde was from South Antrim, and he and I shared the townland of Groggan. He was one of the biggest encouragements for me to first put my name forward in 2005. When I was a young boy, Wilson's name was on the ballot paper and I was unable to vote for him, so Wilson had been about for a long time: over 20 years in local government and then, from 1998 to 2007, in the Assembly. Behind all that, as my colleague from South Antrim described, Wilson was a family man and a farmer. He spent much of his life building his farm, but, behind all that, he was a community man. He wanted to see the community thrive, and he worked in his community to do that. I pay tribute to Wilson and offer my sympathies to his wife, Evelyn, who has been left behind.

Wilson was a very active member of the party right up until he suffered poor health. He was still an active member of our party into his early 80s and was frequently seen at meetings. He was so loyal that he was probably one of the first ones to be seen there and one of the last ones to leave. That may be because, as my colleague said, he was still telling silly jokes at the end. Wilson was very dependable, and I pay tribute to him for that and for what he has done for the people of South Antrim.

Mr Butler: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I put on record my thanks to you for facilitating this moving tribute to former Members of the House. You could not sit here and not be moved by some of the remarks that have been made about former Members who, perhaps, operated in much more difficult, turbulent times than we find ourselves in. I am sure that we will note that we could do a lot better in the future learning from some of the instances of the past.

Before I talk about particular Members, I pay tribute to Sinéad Bradley for speaking so passionately about her father. Sinéad has probably made the most difficult tribute today, and it was fitting for her father. I put on record our regards at this difficult time to another Member for Lagan Valley, Pat Catney, who is burying his mother.

I am one of the new Members. I am not that young, but I did not get the privilege and chance to work with any of the people whom we have spoken of today. However, I had the chance to know two of them in different formats. I knew Rev Bob Coulter through his family. He leaves a legacy not only through his family, which is a credit to him, but through the Member for North Antrim, who is sitting here

today thanks to Bob's guidance, and we will be forever grateful for that.

I am minded to pass on my personal respect for Seamus Close. Seamus was a politician in Lisburn when I was not interested in politics. I certainly may not have shared absolutely everything that he aspired to, but I can tell you, hand on heart, that I respected everything he stood for, because he was able to politic in a very mature way. I also knew Seamus — he would not have known it at the time — because his wife, Deirdre, shopped in the butcher's where I worked. There are connections that we do not even know that we have with people, but I knew of him through my admiration of him and through his wife Deirdre.

To close, Mr Speaker, the real reason for me rising is that, I think, the only time that I spoke to Seamus was about six months ago. He was having a meal with his wife and another couple in Hillsborough, and we stopped. He stopped me, because he knew who I was, and I stopped him. We talked for five minutes and made a commitment that we would meet for coffee. I really looked forward to meeting Seamus for coffee, and the reality is that that coffee never happened, so I urge the Chamber to keep short accounts. If you have an appointment to make and you have someone that you need to meet up with, put it in your diary, guys, and make sure that it happens, because, like many, I will not get that chance to have coffee with Seamus.

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for making the time available to carry out the tributes today, some of which are, perhaps, more personal than others. I acknowledge what has been said by my colleagues about Oliver Gibson and Wilson Clyde, two men whom one had to respect.

I hope that the Ulster Unionist Party will forgive me and will not mind if I pay tribute to Dr Ian Adamson, whom I regarded as a personal friend, and I am sure that you did, too, Mr Speaker. We served together for many years in Belfast City Council, where he earned respect across the chamber for his abilities to communicate in an effective but very poignant and, indeed, jocular way, as has been mentioned. As a person, Ian was a man of great distinction. He was a great historian, the author of many books, a man of great intellect in his research work and, as already mentioned, a man who spoke many languages. Yet, he was a man who was extremely humble and could walk comfortably in the presence of kings and in the presence of the most humble. He had the ability to cross the Chamber and be friends, yet

he was a strong unionist — a unionist with a capital "U" — and never at any stage did he forsake those unionist principles. He had the ability, as I said, to walk with the most high but also an ability to drill right down into matters affecting the community that we both served in the east of the city. Indeed, it was a privilege to be at meetings with Ian, and it was a good learning experience for me. Ian was interested in and a strong promoter of Ulster Scots, not just the language but the Ulster-Scots life and the Ulster-Scots times.

Many of us knew that Ian was ill, but his sad passing came more quickly than had been anticipated. When it is your time and a village is sealed off to hold the funeral, when the president of the Republic of Ireland makes the journey to that funeral, when you see the respect and silence during the entry of the remains to the church and, indeed, when, as the funeral procession takes place, there are 17 lifts of the coffin, you know that someone special has passed. I extend my sympathy to his wife, Kerry — many of you know that Ian married late in life — and, indeed, to his wider family.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the tributes to former Members who passed away during the past three years while the Assembly was not sitting. I also like take the opportunity, on behalf of Members, to extend all of our condolences to our colleague Pat Catney on the sad passing of his mother, Eileen.

Matter of the Day

Harry Gregg OBE

Mr Speaker: Claire Sugden has been given leave to make a statement on the death of Mr Harry Gregg OBE that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise in their place and continue to do so. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I remind Members that I will not take any points of order on this or any other matter until at least this item of business has concluded.

Ms Sugden: Today, we mourn the passing of Harry Gregg OBE, who passed away peacefully yesterday surrounded by family. I offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Carolyn, his family, friends and fans across the world.

Leading tributes today, Sir Alex Ferguson described him as:

"a man of great character and a true legend".

Harry was our hero in so many ways. He was a hero on the football pitch — unrivalled. When he had the ball, it was safe in his hands, much to the dismay of the opposing side. In 1957, he was the world's most expensive goalkeeper; a year later, he was voted the best. He made 25 appearances for Northern Ireland. He dominated the nets both in stature and talent. He was a reluctant hero. Following the 1958 Munich air disaster — over 60 years ago — he bravely rescued teammates and passengers, including a young baby.

He put aside concern for his own life to save others. People live today because of Harry Gregg.

1.00 pm

Harry did not want to talk too often about the tragedy, but it was clear that he carried the trauma for all of his days. He was the "hero of Munich", but that name gave him no comfort. He is an inspirational hero. Harry's legend is without doubt, and, long before he passed, when others sought to immortalise him in a sculpture, he spoke with unfiltered honesty against the idea; rather, he advocated for a foundation that aimed to inspire young people so that they might follow their dreams, as Harry was able to follow his. The Harry Gregg Foundation, which to this day attracts hundreds of children and young people each week, is his legacy.

Harry was full of character. His height and lean, straight frame and, usually, hat gave him such presence. I met him on a number of occasions. His candid conversations, sharp wit and incredible stories made him the best company. He talked about football and his family. He dearly loved his family, and I know that they will sorely feel his loss today and in the days ahead. Although incredibly humble, he was quietly proud of all his achievements. I know that some here have visited his home outside Castlerock. It is a sight to behold: a private collection of global football history.

Harry was a Coleraine man. Being born in Tobermore and raised on the Bann side gave him his most distinctive and formidable quality. Despite his success, fame and famous friends, he was one of us. To us, Harry Gregg OBE is a legend in every sense of the word, but, to him, he was Harry Gregg of 34 Windsor Avenue, Coleraine: a husband, father and grandfather, and now a "Red Devil" in heaven. Rest easy, Harry, and God bless.

Mr M Bradley: It is with sadness that I remember former Northern Ireland and Manchester United goalkeeper Harry Gregg, who passed away on Sunday evening at the age of 87. Harry passed away peacefully in the Causeway Hospital surrounded by his loving family.

Harry survived the 1958 Munich air crash and was often referred to as the "hero of Munich", after pulling passengers and teammates from the burning wreckage, including Bobby Charlton and Dennis Viollet. It was a tragedy in which 23 people died. Harry Gregg was a member of Sir Matt Busby's team of talented youngsters, who were nicknamed the "Busby Babes". Harry joined them from Doncaster Rovers for a then world-record fee for a goalkeeper of £23,000. On that fateful night of 6 February 1958, the plane carrying the team back from Belgrade crashed in a blizzard after refuelling at Munich. United were returning from a European game when the aeroplane in which they were travelling crashed while attempting to take off from a slush-covered runway. He escaped the burning wreckage but went back in and brought Vera Lukić, the pregnant wife of a Yugoslav diplomat, and her young daughter, Vesna, to safety. He also attended to Matt Busby and fellow Northern Ireland international Jackie Blanchflower. In an age in which the words "hero" and "legend" are bandied about loosely, Harry was a true legend and a true hero. Not only was Harry a legend at Manchester United, where he kept 48 clean sheets during his nine years at Old Trafford but he starred for Northern Ireland at the World Cup in Sweden in 1958,

helping Northern Ireland to reach the quarter-finals. He was named goalkeeper of the tournament. Harry used to tell me that, had Peter Doherty, the manager, registered himself to play in the competition, they could have won it, such was the regard that he had for Peter Doherty.

Harry was awarded an MBE in 1995, followed by an OBE in 2019. He was a straight talker. He told you it as he saw it. I spoke with him for the last time on Thursday. He recalled a visit that he had had from Arlene Foster as First Minister as one of his fondest memories. I loved listening to Harry, especially when he started to recount his football stories. He described them in such detail that you would nearly believe that you were there. He was a marvellous man to listen to, and I enjoyed his company.

I will continue with a quote from Harry from 2008:

"I'm Henry Gregg, 34 Windsor Avenue, who played football. Who was useful at it on good days and rubbish at it on bad days. That's what I want to be remembered for — not something that happened on the spur of the moment."

Harry will long be remembered for his love and passion for the game. He enjoyed watching young players coming through the Harry Gregg Foundation. To explain the breadth of that foundation, there are players there from Ballymena, Antrim, Dungiven, Limavady and all over the north-west and north-east of the Province who come down to Coleraine to take part every Saturday morning; it is a treat to watch. That is what Harry would like to be remembered for: his belief and passion for the game or, as he described it, "the beautiful game". I extend all our deepest sympathies to his wife, Carolyn, son, John, daughters, immediate family and extended family circle.

Dr Archibald: I extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of sporting legend Harry Gregg, who died last night. Being from Coleraine and coming from a family of United fans, I grew up knowing about Harry Gregg. His story has inspired many from the local area as well as across the world. Harry's playing career started at Windsor Park Swifts, and he enjoyed spells at Linfield and Coleraine before moving to Doncaster Rovers at the age of only 18. However, it was his then record-breaking transfer fee for a goalkeeper of £23,000 to Manchester United that enabled Harry to showcase his talent. As one of the "Busby Babes", Harry cemented his reputation as one of the best goalkeepers in the world,

keeping 48 clean sheets in 247 appearances during one of the club's most successful periods.

Harry survived the Munich air disaster in 1958, showing great bravery by returning to the plane to rescue teammates and other passengers, including a pregnant woman and small child. He returned to play only two weeks after the crash and kept a clean sheet. He went on to play for Northern Ireland at the 1958 World Cup, where he reached the quarter-finals and was voted the best goalkeeper at the tournament. His legacy will live on through the Harry Gregg Foundation, which was founded in 2015 and continues to help to inspire young people to get involved in football and to engage in an active lifestyle. My deepest sympathies go to Harry's family and friends. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Mr Dallat: I was in the privileged position of being a member of Coleraine council for over 30 years, and, if I was asked to highlight one of the greatest events I experienced during that time, I would say that it was meeting Harry Gregg. I am not into sport big time, but I am into sporting people who have made a huge contribution to this world. His sporting achievements have been well documented, and his heroism at Munich is known the world over. The fact that he came from Windsor Avenue, a working-class area of Coleraine, makes me particularly proud.

Harry Gregg was a working-class man, and, all through the most difficult years of the Troubles, he was well above the unsettled state that we survived in. My deepest sympathy to his family and to his friends. Windsor Avenue has lost a hero, Coleraine has lost an icon, and the world has lost someone who was very special not just to Manchester United and Northern Ireland but to the people as a whole. That is one of the reasons why Harry Gregg stands in such an elevated position: he was above politics, he was above sport, and he made a huge contribution to this world.

Mr Nesbitt: I will not pretend that I was some sort of bosom pal of Harry Gregg, but I had the honour and pleasure in equal measure of meeting him a few times, most recently during a visit to his home outside Castlerock with a small number of people, one of whom was Liam Beckett. If you know Liam and you knew Harry, you will understand that, after a rather promising start, when I got out the full word "Hello", it was something of a challenge to insert a third syllable into the next two hours of conversation. Joel Taggart was there that day, and I heard him on the BBC this morning saying Harry would be very cross if we started with

Munich rather than concentrating on his football career. And what a career that was. Of course, we think of George Best as our greatest, but let us not underestimate how Harry Gregg became the most expensive goalkeeper in the history of world football when Manchester United brought him to Old Trafford from Doncaster. Time after time, he showed us why, not just for his club but for his country.

Earlier today, Sammy McIlroy, the last of the "Busby Babes", said Harry had the courage of a lion. In the 1958 World Cup finals, he was voted goalkeeper of the tournament, outperforming the great Russian Lev Yashin, whom many still believe to be the greatest goalkeeper of all time. As somebody lucky enough to have commented on Northern Ireland the other two times they made World Cup finals, I think that it is easy to forget that, of the three, the '58 squad was probably the best. It made the quarter-finals of the World Cup in Sweden, a squad that included some of Northern Ireland's all-time greatest. There was Gregg himself, of course, Bertie Peacock, Peter McParland, Jimmy McIlroy, Billy Bingham and Danny Blanchflower. The FIFA all-star team of the tournament in 1958 contained six Brazilians, two Frenchmen, a Swede and two Northern Irishmen in the best team in the world: Harry Gregg and Danny Blanchflower. Blanchflower's brother, Jackie, was one of the Manchester United players whom Harry Gregg saved in Munich just a few months before.

"Only a fool would do what I did",

said Harry Gregg, but that belies a fundamental truth about him, which was identified by George Best, who said:

"On that occasion, it wasn't just an act of courage. It was acts of goodness."

Harry Gregg was a very good man. I can think of no country in the world that would not rejoice in saying, "He was a son of this country". Our condolences go to his family, his friends and to all his admirers, many of whom never knew him and never saw him play but respect him nonetheless. A good man has gone.

Mr Lyttle: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I pay tribute to the legendary Northern Ireland and Manchester United goalkeeper Harry Gregg. First and foremost, I offer my sincere condolences, thoughts and prayers to the Gregg family and hope that the tributes paid in the Assembly today go some way to offer some comfort for their loss.

Harry Gregg was a member of the legendary Manchester United "Busby Babes", playing 247 times for the club, and he is part of a rich heritage of Northern Irishmen who have graced the "theatre of dreams". He also played 25 times for Northern Ireland and, as mentioned, was a star of the 1958 World Cup. He was voted best goalkeeper in a side captained by Danny Blanchflower that reached the quarter-finals of the competition.

Harry will be remembered for his bravery during the Munich air disaster, when he courageously and without second thought helped to rescue teammates and survivors from the wreckage. As mentioned, Harry's reluctance to accept the recognition he received for that act gives some insight into the humility and humanity of the man and, indeed, into his determination to ensure that that tragic accident did not define his life or the life of his teammates. I think he can proudly recognise that he achieved that aim. Forever recognised as one of the greatest goalkeepers in the history of the beautiful game and loved by his family, Harry Gregg was an inspiration on and off the football pitch to so many.

Mr Allister: Northern Ireland has been blessed with many sporting giants not just in football but in many disciplines, but towering among them, undoubtedly, is Harry Gregg. All that has been said about him today in tribute is well deserved for his sporting achievements alone, but, of course, it is not just his triumph on the football field that made him the memorable son of this land of whom we are all proud.

It was also his triumph in the adversity of the Munich airfield, where he showed the selfless courage that most of us can only dream about. With no thought for his own safety, and thinking only of those who were in great peril, he conducted himself in a way that ensured that some people lived who otherwise would have died in the Munich disaster.

1.15 pm

Many of us — I suspect maybe all of us — in the Chamber have no recollection of the Munich disaster because it happened so long ago, yet it is embedded in the consciousness of us all. Why? Because of Harry Gregg. It was that selfless behaviour — that heroic behaviour — that made Harry Gregg one of whom we are all so proud, not just for his sporting prowess but for what he did on that occasion. Yet, through all that, as the House has heard, he was a man of immense modesty, self-effacing and looking nowhere for glory. I met him only once or twice,

but it was a privilege to meet him and be in the presence of someone who so earned the respect of this country and whom we are all so glad was indeed a son of Northern Ireland. He was one of us; he lived amongst us; he came from us. He never forgot and was very proud of his roots. He was anxious to remind us all, quite properly, of where he came from. There were no airs and graces. He was straight up and down, straightforward, and exactly the sort of Ulsterman who personifies much of the greatness of this Province.

I want to add to the expressions of sympathy and condolence to his family and many friends. He will be much missed, but not forgotten.

Mr Robinson: First and foremost, I express my sincere sympathy to the family of local football legend Harry Gregg OBE. It was with huge sadness that I learned of the passing of a man who could be described only as a legend and a hero. I consider it a huge privilege to have personally known Harry and his passion for his hometown team, Coleraine Football Club, which, ironically, won the league cup the night before his untimely death.

Although Harry was much too modest a man to call himself a hero, this is simply the truth. During the awful events at Munich, which robbed the world of football of some of its rising stars, Harry Gregg put his own safety aside to try to rescue friends and colleagues. For me, that labelled Harry as a hero, even if he did not want that title. In the years after Harry became a legend of the Manchester United team, he was a hero, most of all, in his Northern Ireland home. He never saw himself as anything but Harry Gregg. That is what made him such a special individual.

While it is his family who will miss him the most, I hope that it will be of comfort to them to know how greatly appreciated Harry was as an individual throughout Northern Ireland and far beyond. Today, Northern Ireland has lost a gentleman, a sporting hero and an inspiration, but, through the Harry Gregg Foundation, his name will live long in his native land. Again, I extend my deepest sympathy to all his family.

Ms Ennis: I thank Claire Sugden for bringing this Matter of the Day to the House, and to give us the opportunity to pay tribute to Harry. As a Manchester United fan, I, too, feel a sense of loss. I want to extend my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Harry Gregg.

Harry played for United during arguably one of the most successful periods in the club's history. He is considered one of the club's best ever

keepers. Despite being known for his talent, as Members alluded to, Harry will always be remembered as one of the unsung heroes of the infamous Munich air disaster. Following the horrendous events of that ill-fated journey, Harry set about pulling people from the wreckage, without a thought for his own safety. We heard other Members allude to the fact that he rescued a pregnant mother and her other child, whom he later met. Harry also rescued the great Bobby Charlton, Jackie Blanchflower and his manager, Matt Busby, who was seriously injured.

By any standards, Harry Gregg was a hero, but he never sought any recognition for that, and he was a very private, extraordinarily ordinary person. He was a hero who wanted to be remembered for football. George Best best summed Harry up when he said:

"Bravery is one thing but what Harry did was about more than bravery. It was about goodness."

Harry Gregg was a good person.

Mr McNulty: Harry Gregg was a sporting icon. He was so much more than a sporting icon or a sporting man; he was a man of great dignity, humility and strength. He was a family man, touched by personal tragedy as well, with the loss of his first wife and his daughter through cancer. Harry was a "Busby Babe". I am a GAA man, but, in my formative years, I was also a Man U fan. I grew up admiring such players as Sammy McIlroy, Mal Donaghy and others and their exploits with the Northern Ireland team in Mexico '86. Sammy McIlroy said today that Harry was a man with the bravery of a lion, on and off the pitch. He was a man who, in 1958, climbed back into a burning aircraft in an effort to save his teammates' lives. Although Harry was a reluctant hero, what he did that night in Munich says everything you need to know about the man. Rest in peace, Harry. Condolences to his family, friends and fans.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Committee membership will be treated as a business motion, and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Ms Martina Anderson be appointed as a member of the Committee for Infrastructure and as a member of the Committee for Justice. — [Mr O'Dowd.]

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Committee membership will be treated as a business motion, and there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Gary Middleton replace Mr Harry Harvey as a member of the Committee on Procedures; and that Mr Harry Harvey replace Mr Gary Middleton as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. — [Mr K Buchanan.]

Committee Business

Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019: Prayer of Annulment

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed that there should be a single debate, during which Members should address both motions. Following the debate, I will put the question on each of the motions separately to the House.

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That the Sea Fish Licensing Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/61) be annulled. — [Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).]

Motion not moved.

Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019: Prayer of Annulment

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

That the Sea Fishing (Licences and Notices) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 (SR 2019/65) be annulled. — [Mr McAleer (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs).]

Motion not moved.

Mr Speaker: The next item of business in the Order Paper is Question Time. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 1.25 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Speaker: Members, it is time for questions to the Executive Office. We will start with listed questions. Questions 4 and 8 have been withdrawn. Topical questions 1 and 9 have been withdrawn. We have not been informed of any groupings.

Executive Subcommittee on Brexit: Update

1. **Mr Middleton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Executive subcommittee on Brexit. (AQO 110/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill (The deputy First Minister): Before I respond, I take the opportunity to acknowledge the passing of Harry Gregg, who died today. Harry was a great sporting icon and role model. My thoughts are with his family and friends at this time.

I am pleased to advise the Member that the Brexit subcommittee is firmly established and working to ensure that our interests are being protected and that we get the best deal for us. The subcommittee has met twice, and further meetings are scheduled over the coming days and weeks. At our first meeting, we received an update from officials on what they identified as the key challenges facing us. We also agreed a work schedule to ensure that we are focusing our efforts on the most appropriate areas, although it was recognised that our consideration of issues will be informed by the timetable of the negotiations processes. At our second meeting, we had a focused consideration of the issues around the movement of goods east-west and west-east. Given the importance of that issue, we will give further consideration to our position at the next meeting.

We also considered the implications for services North/South, as well as how we can appropriately engage with stakeholders in recognition of the established and ongoing stakeholder engagement undertaken by the various Departments. We also received a paper from officials on draft negotiating principles for the Executive that will be discussed in detail at our next meeting.

Mr Middleton: The deputy First Minister highlighted the importance of ease of trade

east-west and west-east. The agri-food sector in Northern Ireland is crucial to our economy. Her party's position is that there should be no checks or infrastructure, but does she agree that, if there is an insistence that there be checks, they should not be done on this side of the Irish Sea?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not wish to see barriers east-west or North/South. We do not wish to see any kind of barrier to trade. We want to make sure that we have a prosperous economy and everybody has an opportunity to flourish. The Member mentioned the agri-food sector and its significance to our economy. We have to do everything that we can to protect the sector. The First Minister and I have written to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. I am seeking clarity around some of the issues. We have a protocol that needs to be protected, but we also have to guard against the fact that we could come to the end of this year and still not have a deal. We need to protect our local interests. We are determined to work together, and we have sought clarity from Boris Johnson on a range of issues and hope to get a response in the weeks ahead.

Mr O'Toole: The Ireland protocol sets out a joint committee on the implementation of the protocol. It sets out a specialised committee that will report to the joint committee on the operation of the protocol. Once the protocol is operational, it envisages a joint consultative working group on the operation of the protocol. Have officials advised her or the First Minister of the membership of those committees and whether there will be Executive representation? If not, when will we find out?

Mrs O'Neill: We are working our way through the detail of all those things. The First Minister and I attended the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) meeting in Cardiff a few weeks ago, at which we raised those issues, including that of representation. The Executive voice needs to be heard as part of the discussions. How it is organised and how it will operate are not yet definitive, but suffice it to say that we will insist that our voice is heard and that we are part of the discussions at each stage of the negotiations. It is important, as negotiations move — we know that they can move very quickly — that our voice is heard and that we can adapt to be part of them. That is why we are meeting as an Executive subcommittee on Brexit every week. We are trying to get up to speed and to make sure that all Executive Ministers are involved in the discussions and decisions that we need to take.

Ms Anderson: Given the deep and genuine concerns and the widespread discussions that are taking place among a range of stakeholders representing the economy, social justice and constitutional change, plus rights advocates, such as trade unions and the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), will the Brexit subcommittee, in the context of participatory democracy, undertake engagements with such relevant stakeholders to listen, possibly learn and discuss their views on Brexit?

Mrs O'Neill: We absolutely recognise the importance of stakeholder engagement. Well-seasoned, long-established mechanisms are already in place to engage with stakeholders in each Department. The subcommittee aims to build on those. Each Department will continue to engage with its stakeholders, and the subcommittee will make arrangements to receive briefings from key stakeholders as it feels appropriate.

The subcommittee will keep stakeholder engagement under review, and we will consider detailed stakeholder events at certain points between the phases of the negotiations. We have to adapt to the process as it unfolds. At the last meeting of the Brexit subcommittee, officials committed to bringing forward proposals on stakeholder engagement for consideration, and that will build on the stakeholder engagement that is already established in each Department.

Mr Muir: Will the deputy First Minister give a guarantee that the Executive and all the Ministers will act faithfully to implement the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol?

Mrs O'Neill: The protocol is established. It is in place and is an integral part of the withdrawal agreement, so it has to be adhered to. I am committed to making sure that that is the case. That is why we have a Brexit subcommittee: it is important that every party represented on the Executive is part of that. Our duty is to try to protect the interests and livelihoods of the people who live here and to ensure that citizens' rights are not diminished and that our economy can flourish. That includes the implementation of the protocol, making sure that we have everything in place that needs to be in place. There is still a danger that, at the end of the year, we could have a no-deal scenario.

Paramilitarism: Action Plan

2. **Mr McGuigan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress on the

Executive action plan for tackling paramilitarism. (AQO 111/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: While the Department of Justice takes the overall lead on coordinating the Executive-wide action plan for tackling paramilitarism, our Department has lead responsibility for delivering on four of the 38 actions in the plan. Good progress has been made on actions B1, B2 and B3. That includes the Civil Service implementing the employers' guidance, which sets out best practice in recruiting people with conflict-related convictions. Access to financial services and travel advice have also been improved. Specifically, in relation to action B4 — the communities in transition project — the Department is nearing the end of the process to appoint delivery partners to deliver individual projects across eight B4 areas. It is anticipated that all projects will be on the ground by April this year.

The New Decade, New Approach deal includes a renewed commitment from all parties to tackle paramilitarism and should be a priority in our revised Programme for Government. We look forward to working together across the Executive in support of this challenging and ambitious programme of work.

Mr McGuigan: I thank the joint First Minister for her answer. Will the Executive Office review the outworking of the plan to ensure increased community input and public confidence?

Mrs O'Neill: The previous Executive developed a cross-cutting action plan to deal with paramilitarism and organised crime, and that is constantly reviewed. The plan placed a focus on developing a range of criminal justice and community empowerment interventions to tackle paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

Dealing with criminality in all its manifestations requires a whole-community response, and I am acutely aware that people on the ground need to see, feel and experience change. As the basis for maximising public confidence, I am committed to working with all Executive colleagues and with those in public, civic and community life to ensure that no person is held back from realising their full potential as a consequence of paramilitarism or organised criminality in their community. Only by working together will we create a better future where there is no place for paramilitarism, criminality or organised crime in our communities.

Mr Speaker: I call Trevor Lunn.

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Speaker, but the Minister has already beautifully answered the question I was about to ask.

Mr Allister: I hope that it is agreed that it is important that the victims of paramilitarism should not be retraumatised. Does the deputy First Minister accept that the murder of Paul Quinn was a paramilitary killing? What steps has she therefore taken to require the Finance Minister to publicly acknowledge that Paul Quinn was not a criminal?

Mrs O'Neill: Conor Murphy has unreservedly condemned the murder of Paul Quinn. The people who murdered Paul Quinn are criminals and need to be brought to justice. He has called on anyone with information on the murder to bring it to the Gardaí or the PSNI. I know that Conor very much regrets the comments that he made in the aftermath of Paul's murder. He has apologised for his remarks unreservedly. He has withdrawn his remarks, and his apology was heartfelt and sincere. He has offered to meet the Quinn family at a time and place of their convenience, as has Mary Lou McDonald.

Mr Allister: He has not said —.

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Justin McNulty.

Mr McNulty: I acknowledge the presence of two incredibly brave people in the Public Gallery today: Breege and Stephen Quinn. I was pleased to see the First Minister and the deputy First Minister at the meeting of the Executive Office Committee confirm that, in their view, Paul Quinn was not a criminal. Will the deputy First Minister confirm that that view is held by all Ministers in the Executive, including the Finance Minister, Conor Murphy?

Mrs O'Neill: Again, I have said very clearly that Conor has apologised for his remarks and has unreservedly withdrawn them and that his apology was heartfelt and sincere. I believe the best place to deal with these issues, which are very sensitive — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, please, in the Chamber.

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that the best way to deal with these issues, which are very sensitive — we are talking about a mother who has been hurt; I, as a mother, cannot even begin to understand how you deal with that trauma — is on a one-to-one basis, and Conor Murphy is very happy to meet Breege Quinn at the earliest opportunity.

Mr Beattie: Given that the funding for the action plan on tackling paramilitarism, organised crime and criminality is due to end at the end of the 2020 financial year, will the deputy First Minister outline what discussions she has had with the Finance Minister about that plan and the funding for it carrying on?

Mrs O'Neill: We have not had any discussions with the Finance Minister on that yet. We are looking at all these things, and we have a scheduled meeting with the Finance Minister to discuss our priorities in the Executive Office. As we approach the Budget, we hope to get positive outcomes across the whole range of issues, not least funding for that area of work.

Ms Bunting: Does the deputy First Minister agree that, in circumstances where departmental agencies and arm's-length bodies afford access to these people in another role, they afford credibility to those who have been engaged and that, therefore, permits them to maintain coercion and control in areas where the tackling paramilitarism programme is trying to reduce all such influence? In circumstances where the Parades Commission, the Housing Executive, the councils and the police continue to meet these people, it affords them a status, a credibility and an access that the average citizen is not afforded.

Mrs O'Neill: We all have a duty — we, as an Executive, have that duty — to bring forward work that allows communities to transition and makes sure that nobody is held back, that we lift communities up and that we create distractions to make sure that young people are not drawn towards those elements in society. Nobody should be held back, so, if there are particular issues around arm's-length bodies that the Member wishes to write to me about, I am more than happy to receive that.

Civil Service Reform

3. **Mr McHugh** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Civil Service reform set out in New Decade, New Approach. (AQO 112/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: We are very mindful of the commitments in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document, including the commitment towards further reform of the Civil Service. Officials will bring forward proposals for the establishment of a dedicated programme to coordinate and drive forward that work in a formal and structured way. Civil Service reform

will require discussion by the Executive, and we will keep Members updated as that work is taken forward.

Mr McHugh: Will the review of the Civil Service be independent and draw on best practice?

Mrs O'Neill: Part 1 of the 'New Decade, New Approach' document refers to "further reform" of the Civil Service. The Executive have not yet determined how they wish to see that taken forward. There are priority themes underpinned by actions that are interlinked, and they would, in my view, be key principles going forward: leadership from within the Civil Service at all levels and from Ministers; collaboration; working across all Departments and Ministers; a high-performing Civil Service; an outcomes-focused Civil Service that is well placed to deliver on our Programme for Government commitments; an inclusive, dynamic and innovative workforce in which diversity is truly valued; and a great place to work that can attract new and young talent. Those are the aims that we and, I am sure, all of us want to support and build on.

2.15 pm

Mr McGrath: Given that a review often means a reduction in staff and extra responsibility for those that are in place, and recognising the fact that there is a current Civil Service pay dispute, what action is the deputy First Minister and the whole Executive undertaking to ensure that we value our Civil Service staff and that we pay them a decent wage?

Mrs O'Neill: I know that the Finance Minister has been engaging with Civil Service side in relation to the pay dispute, and we hope to get to the point where we have a positive resolution. We must value our staff; we must invest in our staff. That is really important. The Chair of the Committee asked that question, and I want to work with the Chair around the proposals that we are going to develop in due course around how we can reform and do better in the Civil Service.

Attorney General: Recruitment Plans

5. **Ms Bailey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the current tenure of the Attorney General is due to expire in June 2020, what plans are in place to fill this post. (AQO 114/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: We are aware that the Attorney General's term of appointment will expire on 30

June and recently met with him to discuss various issues. We are currently considering the position and will provide an update to the Executive in due course.

Ms Bailey: To follow on, I would like to ask the question that has been unanswered so far by the First Minister and deputy First Minister: do they have any concerns about potential conflicts of interest in relation to the Attorney General's office, given his recent appointment as a temporary deputy High Court judge?

Mrs O'Neill: I am assuming that the Member is referring to a question for written answer, and perhaps she has not received the answer yet, but I am happy to respond. We are aware of the potential conflict of interest that could arise between the role of the Attorney General and the role of temporary High Court judge. The temporary High Court judge application process provided for a conflict of interest declaration where applicants were required to declare interests and potential conflicts.

I also understand that, at the point of deployment in each case, the potential temporary High Court judge to be allocated will be assessed individually by the Lord Chief Justice on a case-by-case basis. The First Minister and I are keen to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest or perceptions of conflicts of interest that may undermine the Attorney General's office or the Executive.

Mr G Kelly: Will you go into some detail as to the process of recruitment for the new Attorney General?

Mrs O'Neill: The appointment of the Attorney General is legislated for by the Justice Act 2002. The legislation determines that the Attorney General is appointed by the First Minister and myself acting jointly, and we are currently looking at options on how best to take that forward.

Mr McGlone: Does the Minister agree that the changes to the guidance of the office of Attorney General need to be reviewed to ensure that there is no potential for conflict or, indeed, any influence, political or otherwise, on the scope, role or work of that office?

Mrs O'Neill: In the previous answer, I said that we have to get to a point where there are no conflicts of interest, real or perceived, so we need to look at all those things. In the current guidance that is at play, we will be able to look at all those things around an appointment

process if and when we replace the Attorney General.

Mr Lunn: The Minister is being very coy about hiding behind procedure and so on. Does she agree with me that it is an absolutely clear conflict of interest for somebody to hold the position of Attorney General and also be a High Court judge? This should not be allowed to proceed. It should be stopped at source.

Mrs O'Neill: I am sure that the Member will agree that we should not just throw caution to the wind and just go with our guts. We need to follow process, and I am determined to follow process. That is why we have sought additional information around the conflict of interest. Once I am satisfied about that, we will be more than happy to move forward and take new action.

Mr Stalford: Does the deputy First Minister agree that it is absolutely imperative that any appointment process to replace the Attorney General is not meddled with by politicians trying to make political points?

Mrs O'Neill: I agree that any public appointment process needs to follow the due process. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members.

Civic Advisory Panel

6. **Ms Kimmins** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline progress in relation to the appointment of a compact civic advisory panel. (AQO 115/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The compact civic advisory panel will be reconstituted through a public appointments process, which will be scheduled for completion within the six-month period as required by the New Decade, New Approach deal. There will be an important role for the panel in advising the Executive on approaches to engagement on complex policy issues. An important initial task is, therefore, to review the existing remit of the compact civic advisory panel and to design a specification for the role of panel members to set out the qualities and experience we will be seeking from potential candidates. In the light of the panel's remit to convene one citizens' assembly each year, we will also look at good practice elsewhere.

Ms Kimmins: I thank the joint First Minister for her response. Given the challenges facing the Executive, how will issues be prioritised to

ensure maximum strategic benefit from the panel's work?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is right that there are many issues facing the Executive, not least the budgetary situation. That said, it is essential that the Executive's decision-making is as informed as it can be. In going forward, it is essential that the Executive listen to, engage with and work with the broadest range of stakeholders. Members of the compact civic advisory panel will bring an expertise and an insight that can only but inform the work of the Executive. It also evidences a step change in how we now do government. On that note, I want to encourage as many people as possible who feel that they have the skills to apply. It is essential that we see an advisory panel that is reflective of all our society in all its diversity.

Mr Stewart: When the panel was announced in December 2016, the Executive Office stated:

"The panel will consider specific strategic issues relevant to the Programme for Government and report to the Executive."

Given that the deputy First Minister has had three years to think about this, what are the top three strategic issues that she would like the panel to consider?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will know that, yes, it was put in place in 2016, but, because the Assembly did not sit, the work was not progressed, so we collectively have a job of work to do. We are a collective Executive. We are a five-party coalition, so the five parties need to sit down and discuss what issues we can consider and what will be the first item that the compact civic advisory panel could take forward. The panel that we nominate and put forward will also have ideas, so it is time for a wee bit of outside thinking. If we are going to demonstrate that the Assembly is in a new mode and that we are working in a different way, we need to work together as a five-party Executive.

NSMC/BIC: Future Meetings

7. **Ms Dolan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an indicative time frame for the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. (AQO 116/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council is planned to take place after the formation of a new Irish

Government. The next scheduled summit meeting of the British-Irish Council will be hosted by the Scottish Government in June.

Ms Dolan: I thank the joint First Minister for her answer. Will the Executive Office ensure that the implications of Brexit are addressed as part of the ongoing work of those bodies?

Mrs O'Neill: The UK's withdrawal from the EU and the practical application of the withdrawal agreement will have implications for North/South cooperation as defined under strand two of the Good Friday Agreement. They are not specifically issues that can be addressed solely through the North/South Ministerial Council. However, as has already been identified within the agreed protocol, as part of the withdrawal agreement, it is envisaged that the NSMC and the North/South implementation bodies will play their role. The practicalities and the outworkings of the protocol, of course, still need to be considered and will be included on the agenda for discussion at relevant NSMC meetings. New Decade, New Approach commits the Brexit subcommittee to initiate an assessment of the impact of Brexit on the institutions North/South and on east-west relationships. Consideration of that issue has been included in its forward work programme. I am of the view that the North/South Ministerial Council meetings will present an opportunity for Ministers North and South to discuss Brexit issues that may impact on their agreed area of cooperation.

Mr Allister: If the ungovernable Irish Republic ever obtains a Government and if Sinn Féin is part of that Government, when it comes to the North/South bodies, will the deputy First Minister have the same concerns of imbalance that she and her party expressed in regard to perceived DUP influence on the Conservative Government? If it turns out that her party is sitting on both sides of the table in the North/South bodies, will she then have any concerns about balance or was that just faux outrage?

Mrs O'Neill: Given his legal profession, you would think that the Member would be more in tune with the political situation. The very different situation in terms of the DUP's confidence and supply deal was the fact that the British Government have jurisdiction here but the Irish Government do not. I would have thought that your legal mind would have picked up on that.

I see no contradiction whatsoever in power-sharing and making the Assembly and

Executive work; and, at the same time, articulating my ideological position of a united Ireland. There is no contradiction in that whatsoever. Let me also say this: no one has anything to fear from the future or from political change on this island.

Well-being and Resilience Working Group

9. **Ms Flynn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they will contribute to the Executive's working group on mental well-being and resilience. (AQO 118/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: In recognition of the importance of its work, the First Minister and I will attend meetings of the working group on mental well-being, resilience and suicide prevention. Our Department, through funding programmes such as Urban Villages and Communities in Transition, supports a wide range of projects that contribute to the mental well-being and resilience of young people and adults. We hope to be able to contribute insights through the experience of those programmes and share models of good practice.

Ms Flynn: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will the working group give a commitment that it will help to fully implement the 'Protect Life 2' suicide prevention strategy and to secure the cross-departmental working that is required to reduce the problem and prevent people from suffering with mental health problems and suicidal ideation?

Mrs O'Neill: First, I acknowledge the good work of the Member on this issue; she has been a champion on mental health issues. The First Minister and I are committed to working with Executive colleagues to ensure that there is maximum cross-departmental working to reduce the problem, to prevent people from suffering with mental health problems and to provide support at the point of need.

As a former Health Minister, I am very aware of the scale of the problem. I am also acutely aware that so many across society live with mental ill health, as so tragically reflected in our worrying levels of suicide, self-harm and substance abuse. Many in the Chamber, and their families, have also been touched by the issue. The clear commitment from the Executive to each and every person is that your mental health is valued, that you are valued and that you are not alone. Therefore, the First Minister and I are committed, along with Executive colleagues, to making sure that we

work continuously to maximise cross-departmental working.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, I am sure that everyone will welcome the collaborative approach by the Executive to tackling mental ill health. Of course, it is important to get upstream because many know the contributing factors. What additional budget will we expect to see next week going to mental ill health and tackling the causes of it?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have a specific figure, mostly because that work will come under the remit of the Department of Health. However, we will all input into it; we have focused an Executive priority on it. I mentioned a number of programmes across our Department that contribute to trying to promote mental well-being, such as Urban Villages and Communities in Transition. As we know, poor mental health arises as a result of a combination of factors, so we need a whole-society, cross-departmental approach to be able to deal with it. I am quite sure that, if you wrote to the Minister of Health, he could give you the actual figure.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister will be aware that, in 'Protect Life 2', the target is a reduction of 10% in suicides over a specific period, and that is based on World Health Organization guidelines. Does the Minister accept that that is, effectively, applying an industry norm to an incredibly abnormal situation and that the only acceptable target is zero suicides?

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree about zero suicides. We have to do everything that we can to support people who find themselves living with mental ill health. It is also a fact — I am quite sure that the Member is aware of this — that many who die by suicide are not known to mental health services; they have never sought support, so there is a societal problem that we need to address. We need to encourage people to say that it is OK not to feel OK and that it is OK to ask for help. That is a collective responsibility that we have as elected representatives, along with the professionals who work on the ground, supporting and counselling people.

Mr Humphrey: I agree with the comments that the Minister has just made. I welcome the joined-up approach across government to this hugely difficult issue. It is important that Departments here, working with the likes of the Public Health Agency, councils and service providers, come together and get a strategy to deal with the issue across Northern Ireland.

As a governor of two schools, I know that a huge amount of front-line education money in the budget of schools is being used to buy in professional help. I ask the Minister that her Department and those across government look at that issue and allow education moneys to be spent on education.

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to take that issue up with the Minister of Education.

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to the 15 minutes for topical questions.

Anti-poverty Strategy: Update

T2. **Miss Woods** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the anti-poverty strategy that the Executive have committed to develop and implement in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. (AQT 82/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: It is still in the early stages of development. I am happy to write to the Member to give her more detail. Sorry, it is remiss of me not to welcome the Member to the Chamber. This is the first time that I have had a chance to engage with her.

We have to be serious about tackling poverty, and, again, a holistic approach has to be taken. I am determined to make sure that we get the strategy delivered within the time frame set out in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document.

Miss Woods: I thank the Minister for her answer. Paragraph 4.11 on page 30 of 'New Decade, New Approach' states clearly that the future strategic-level programme and the anti-poverty strategy:

"will be underpinned by a budget and be ready for Executive sign-off and endorsement by the end of March 2020."

Given that, will the deputy First Minister give a clear timescale for the anti-poverty strategy, including any consultation, or will it be a copy-and-paste exercise from previous Executive promises that ignores the advice and recommendations from those working in the sector?

Mrs O'Neill: I give the Member an assurance that it will not be that. We have an opportunity

to demonstrate a different style of politics, and that is what we are committed to doing. I also believe very strongly in consulting experts in the sector who are delivering on the ground. As we develop all our Programme for Government commitments, we need to make sure that we have a proper consultation and that we resource the pledges that we make to the public, because there is no point having a lovely document that sits on a shelf but that cannot be translated into something that makes a difference to people's lives.

Pension Scheme: Victims and Survivors

T3. **Dr Archibald** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what engagement they have had with the NIO on the development of the regulations for a pension scheme for those who were seriously and physically injured during the conflict. (AQT 83/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: I am fully committed to providing for those who were seriously and physically injured during the conflict in an inclusive manner. On the victims' pension issue specifically, I have had no discussion with the NIO on the development of the regulations for the scheme.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is the resource for the victims' pension coming from the block grant?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, I have had no input into the development of the regulations, which very much came from the NIO. The policy was designed in Westminster, and it is my firm view that it should also be funded from Westminster.

Omagh Bomb: Public Inquiry

T4. **Mr McCrossan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that they may have seen the 'Lost Lives' documentary on BBC 1 last night, which highlighted the Omagh bomb, among other atrocities, and in the light of the fact that the families of the victims are still waiting on justice for that most heinous of acts, whether their office will support the efforts of those families to have a full public inquiry into that atrocity as part of any agreed resolution to deal with the legacy of the past. (AQT 84/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: I did not see the programme last night, but we have to deal with the past in a way that is inclusive and that allows victims to move forward. We have to deal with the past in the way that we all agreed to in the Stormont

House Agreement five years ago, which we are yet to see implemented. We have a commitment in 'New Decade, New Approach' to legislate within 100 days, and when we meet the new Secretary of State this week we intend to raise the issue with him.

I am more than happy to do whatever I can to support the Omagh families in receiving justice and getting access to what is important, because anybody who lost a loved one or was hurt during the conflict deserves to be supported in a way that is important to them.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the deputy First Minister for her answer. She will know very well that, some years after the bomb, Omagh and its people, its community and its town are still suffering from that devastating event, which took the lives of so many innocent people and has haunted Omagh ever since. Will the deputy First Minister consider joining the First Minister in visiting Omagh to meet community groups and seek out some funding to support the regeneration of Omagh town, which has still not recovered from that dreadful event?

Mrs O'Neill: Both I and the First Minister are keen to get out to meet communities and engage with people. We are determined to do that as much as we possibly can. I am more than happy to continue engaging with the Member and others on the regeneration of Omagh, and west of the Bann in general, because there is a need to tackle regional disparities that have existed for many years. We are determined to do that, and that is why it is referenced in the 'New Decade, New Approach' document.

Regional Trauma Service: Update

T5. **Mr Robinson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of a new mental trauma service for victims. (AQT 85/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: Discussions are ongoing between the different stakeholders on implementing changes to the regional trauma network's (RTN) governance structures to ensure that the voluntary and community sector groups for victims and survivors are better represented at all levels of the RTN governance structures. The RTN will deliver a comprehensive regional trauma service, building on existing resources and expertise in the statutory sector and in the voluntary and community sector. The network will focus on those who have experienced trauma and are suffering from PTSD, and we

hope that phase 1 of the service will be launched in the coming months.

Mr Robinson: Will the deputy First Minister give a time frame for victims to benefit from this new service?

Mrs O'Neill: It is still in progress. We hope that phase 1 will be launched in the coming months. I do not have an exact date for the Member, but I am more than happy to keep him up to date on progress.

Victims and Survivors: TEO Engagement

T6. **Mr McAleer** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to give a commitment to engage with the groups representing victims and survivors throughout west Tyrone, Omagh and other districts. (AQT 86/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: I am more than happy to continue to engage with all groups, and it is important that we listen to the needs of all victims and that we engage and show leadership. I am happy to take the Member up on that.

Mr McAleer: I join with the Member who asked a question earlier in requesting the deputy First Minister to come west of the Bann to the Omagh and Strabane districts to meet many groups, particularly those who deal with the needs of victims and survivors.

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to do that.

Paul Quinn

T7. **Dr Aiken** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, after paying tribute to Breege and Stephen Quinn and the rest of the Quinn family, and since the Assembly is in a new mode, with the First Minister and deputy First Minister's focus on victims and survivors, whether the deputy First Minister has asked her Finance Minister to state publicly, as the Quinn family has asked, that Paul Quinn was not a criminal and, if she has not done so, to state why not. (AQT 87/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: As I already said, Conor Murphy has apologised for his remarks and unreservedly withdrawn his remarks. His apology was heartfelt and sincere, and he has offered to meet the Quinn family. I think that that is the best way to proceed.

Dr Aiken: I thank the deputy First Minister for her answer. As the deputy First Minister knows, Ministers are bound by the ministerial code, particularly the Pledge of Office, which in paragraph 1.4 (cg) and paragraph 1.4 (ci) refer particularly to paramilitarism and paramilitary attempts to control communities. As the Finance Minister has previously stated that he spoke to the IRA, will he now give that information to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána? If he does not, will the deputy First Minister agree that the Minister of Finance would then be in breach of the code and would have him stand down?

Mrs O'Neill: No, I will not. The Minister is not in breach of the ministerial code. He has previously spoken to the PSNI and an Garda Síochána, and has called on anyone who has information to bring it forward to both parties.

Social Investment Fund: Spend

T8. **Ms Dolan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund spend to date. (AQT 88/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The social investment fund aims to make life better for people living in targeted areas by reducing poverty, unemployment and physical deterioration. The fund will run up until March this year. The full £80 million budget has been committed to a total of 65 projects across the nine SIF zones. These include 46 capital projects, which are delivering improvements to 107 premises, and 19 revenue projects. To date, 34 capital projects and 17 revenue projects have completed and are delivering the benefits to the local communities. Total spend to date is £72 million, of which £35 million is capital and £37 million is revenue.

Ms Dolan: I thank the Minister for her answer. What outcomes have been identified from the SIF projects?

Mrs O'Neill: The full impact of the projects will take longer to evaluate, but, so far as we know, over 45,000 people have benefited from the revenue projects: over 5,000 people through employment and training; over 28,000 people through early intervention; and over 12,000 people through projects focused on education. The physical improvements in the capital projects will continue to benefit communities for years to come.

Minority Ethnic Development Fund

T10. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the minority ethnic development fund. (AQT 90/17-22)

Mrs O'Neill: The budget for the minority ethnic development fund is just over £1.2 million. Funding awards run from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. Sixty-nine applications were received to the 2019-2020 fund, and 38 were successful. The fund continues to be a key element of our policy for racial equality and good race relations in our society. It is intended to be aligned with and support our racial equality strategy, which runs from 2015 to 2025. The fund continues, and will continue, to support voluntary and community organisations to address the needs of people from ethnic backgrounds, including the Travelling community.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Minister outline the type of projects involved or, indeed, how funding is applied to each of the organisations that are currently funded?

Mrs O'Neill: Funding awards fall into three broad categories or tiers. Tier 1 covers smaller amounts of up to £10,000. They may be for one-off events or for projects lasting up to one year. Tier 2 covers amounts of between £10,000 and £45,000 per annum. Funding is intended to meet central management, development and administrative costs to enable organisations to develop and provide services and projects. Tier 3 covers awards between £45,000 and £75,000 per annum. Similar to tier 2, funding in that category is intended to meet central management, development and administrative costs to enable organisations to develop and provide services and projects. However, tier 3 applications must also include clear proposals to provide a mentoring role with smaller or less-experienced organisations and/or to work collaboratively with others in the sector.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. As the next period for questions does not begin until 2.45 pm, I suggest the House takes its ease for a couple of minutes.

2.45 pm

Justice

1. **Mr Stewart** asked the Minister of Justice, following the announcement in 2012 of a review of sentencing guidelines for convictions of murder, to outline any subsequent changes to

the tariffs for mandatory life sentences. (AQO 124/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): The ministerial commitment of the time was to a wider review of the legislation governing the determination of tariffs for mandatory life sentences. In Northern Ireland, a person guilty of murder must receive a life sentence, and the sentencing judge must set an appropriate tariff. The tariff is the minimum period the person must remain in prison before being considered for release by the independent Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (PCNI).

The tariff is determined by the judge considering sentencing guidance, generally from judgements delivered by our Court of Appeal. Sentencing guidance is distinctly different from "sentencing guidelines" or a statutory structured approach for tariff setting as exists in England and Wales. The Department initiated a review of sentencing policy in 2017 and undertook a public consultation on a wide review of sentencing issues, including whether approaches to tariff setting that occur elsewhere should be developed in Northern Ireland, in October 2019. The consultation closed on 3 February with over 200 responses having been received. The responses are being considered.

Mr Stewart: I welcome the Minister to her position and wish her the best of luck in the years ahead. I appreciate that she is only one month into post, but she will know that both her predecessors announced reviews of sentencing tariffs for murders. Does she agree that it is an absolute disgrace that, in 2017, the average sentence for a murder in Northern Ireland was 11 years and 4 months, some 10 years less than the equivalent in England and Wales? When is Northern Ireland going to lose its reputation for being soft on murderers?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, and I want to say a few things in answer to his question.

First, it is worth considering that there is no major disparity in sentencing guidance covering such offences and tariffs between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The tariff is the first point where someone may ask for parole to be considered, but it is not, if you like, automatic that the person will be released from custody.

Secondly, it is very difficult to do the comparative analysis that the Member is suggesting could take place, because, due to

the small number of cases in Northern Ireland, very small differences in sentencing can skew the results. We will be considering whether or not we need to go for a more structured sentencing approach in light of what has come back from the consultation. However, when this was last considered, significant value-for-money concerns were raised in the responses. Those two things do need to be balanced.

Mr Givan: Again, I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time.

In evidence that the Chief Constable gave to the Justice Committee, he indicated a concern about the lack of deterrent value in the current legislation for assaults on police officers. Can the Minister look at this area to provide additional protection by way of deterrent value?

Secondly, in respect of murder, we recognise that police officers and prison officers represent all of us. An attack on them is an attack on democracy. Is the Minister in favour of introducing whole-life sentences so that, when those individuals are murdered, life actually means life?

Mrs Long: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his question. First, the review that was undertaken was of tariffs for mandatory life sentences, so that has already gone ahead. On the issue of wider sentencing, there is an issue of aggravated offences that needs to be considered. There are a number of different ways that people can be judged for murder, because some are whole-life sentences, some are indeterminate, some are determinate and some have tariffs applied.

If the Member would like more detail, I am happy to write to him with more information about how it is applied. However, I do not want anyone to go away from the Chamber feeling that, in any way, there is a huge disparity between the sentencing in Northern Ireland and sentencing elsewhere. It has to be borne in mind that we have a very small number of such offences in any one year. Therefore, the much larger pool of offences in England and Wales means that very small changes in Northern Ireland can produce big anomalies in the comparative analysis. People need to be careful about drawing the comparison out too far.

Mr Beattie: Given that Westminster has just brought in legislation to fill a gap in terrorist laws, can the Minister outline the engagement that her Department had with the Northern Ireland Office on the Terrorist Offenders

(Restriction of Early Release) Bill that saw Northern Ireland omitted from the Bill?

Mrs Long: Yes, I can. With respect to the provisions that have been made in Westminster under the emergency legislation, we consulted with the Ministry of Justice and the Northern Ireland Office and indicated that, whilst there were a number of issues about how sentences are constructed in Northern Ireland and, specifically, about any retrospectivity that might be incurred as a result of the changes proposed in Westminster, there was no barrier to the legislation being applied UK-wide. We made it clear that that was our preference. Indeed, in a conversation with the Justice Minister for England and Wales, Robert Buckland, I made it clear that that was my preference, because I was concerned about the risk of a two-tier system of approach being set up in the UK when it comes to the paroling of terrorist prisoners.

At the end of the day, the decision was taken by the Ministry of Justice. It is not a decision for the Department of Justice here. The decision was to exclude Northern Ireland from that. Our first sight of that decision was the press release about the legislation that was issued by the Ministry of Justice. There will be other opportunities for Northern Ireland to be included in the counterterrorism Bill that is about to come through Westminster, so the door, if you like, has not completely closed on that chapter. I have written to the Ministry of Justice and to Robert Buckland to make it clear that, in future, we expect a higher level of exchange of information between Departments before announcements of that gravity are made.

Ms Sheerin: Does the Minister intend to review the structure of the Lord Chief Justice's sentencing group?

Mrs Long: The Lord Chief Justice's sentencing group was set up in 2016 to provide guideline cases that could then be considered as part of the overall consideration that judges would make when they were doing sentencing. In addition to the legal members on the panel, lay members were added in, I think, 2018. At the moment, whilst we continue to review its operation, there are no firm proposals for change.

Mr McGlone: Many answers have already been forthcoming, so I ask the Minister to bear with me and give me some latitude. Is the Minister prepared to review sentencing for the offence of death by dangerous driving?

Mrs Long: First, I thank the Member for raising the issue, because it has been a major feature in the recent consultation. I am aware, obviously, that there was particular public interest in that, as a result of the accident involving Enda Dolan, where he died as a result of quite an appalling case. First, I express my sympathy to Peter Dolan and his wife, Niamh, for the experience that they have had since Enda was killed in 2014. I know that they have been looking, as part of the sentencing review, to see whether there is a possibility of having a view on the maximum sentencing for death by dangerous driving. As you will appreciate, I cannot prejudge the outcome of the consultation. We need to look at all the responses being analysed. I have to say that a significant number relate to that particular offence. I express my thanks to the Dolan family for their efforts, which clearly highlighted the consultation and encouraged the public to get involved in that and to send very detailed responses on those matters that we are now considering.

Mr Allister: Can I take the Minister back to Mr Beattie's question? Is she saying to the House that there is no opportunity for her Department or the Executive to bring in legislation altering the parole provisions and when they kick in, in respect of terrorist offences?

Mrs Long: Terrorist offences are for the UK Government to legislate on because they are a reserved matter. However, there is, of course, the opportunity for us to look at when parole kicks in with respect to those offences. As I said in answer to Doug Beattie's question, the issue is that this was driven by an imperative in England and Wales with respect to a particular issue that was arising. When the MOJ introduces UK-wide legislation on counterterrorism later in the spring, there will be an opportunity to address the wider issues, including the one that the Member raised. It is my hope that, at that stage, we will have better engagement with the MOJ, the Department of Justice and the NIO to ensure that we regularise what has become an anomaly in the system. However, I am clear that it is our preference that the UK-wide approach to this is consistent and that a two-tier system — one administered in Northern Ireland and one administered in the rest of the UK — does not develop.

Mr Stalford: I welcome the Minister to her place and wish her well in her new role. Does she agree that whilst always wanting to be merciful and allow people the opportunity of redemption, there are some crimes that are so

despicable that life should mean life, specifically the murder of a child? I am sure all Members will agree that, as part of any review of sentencing policy, anyone who engages in such a heinous act should spend the rest of their days in prison.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his point. A number of elements have to be considered by judges when they are deciding on the tariff to apply in life sentence cases. However, to be clear, if someone commits murder in Northern Ireland, they will automatically receive a life sentence. The tariff is not the point at which someone is released on parole; it is the first point at which they can apply to be released on parole. Therefore, even someone who is given a life sentence with a relatively low tariff can continue to remain in prison if the parole commissioners judge that that person remains a threat to society.

Legacy Issues: Legislation

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Justice whether departmental officials are in contact with their counterparts in the NIO regarding the commitment to publish and introduce legislation in the UK Parliament to address legacy issues. (AQO 125/17-22)

Mrs Long: Since the New Decade, New Approach deal, my officials have spoken to their Northern Ireland Office counterparts on several occasions, and we await formal meetings to discuss the next steps towards the publication and introduction of the promised legislation. In the period following the completion of the Northern Ireland Office's public consultation on its draft Stormont House Agreement Bill, departmental officials and relevant justice bodies participated in a series of meetings with Northern Ireland Office officials. These were intended to inform the Northern Ireland Office's thinking on how it might respond to the consultation responses and the implications of any proposed changes to the Bill. I assure Members that my officials and I remain ready and committed to working with the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Office to progress the necessary legislation.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for her answer and wish her well in her new post. What preparations are being made by the Department to plan for the establishment of the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU)?

Mrs Long: It is clear from the earlier draft legislation published by the Northern Ireland Office that many of the areas to be included in

that legislation do not fall within my responsibilities. However, the recent commitment included recognition that the legislation should have the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly, so work will have to be done to achieve that before we go any further. It is unclear whether that will be via a legislative consent motion. As the Member rightly indicates, it is a matter of some urgency. Accepting that, there are issues that we can address in preparation. A specialist team has been put in place to scope out the work needed for the HIU. Whilst we are working on this as a Department, unless the UK Government provide funding, as well as legislation, it will be incredibly difficult for us to be able to deliver a scheme that can deliver for victims of the Troubles.

Mr Frew: The Minister mentioned funding and the NIO. She will know that the vires regarding the decision on separated prisoners in our prison system rests with the Secretary of State. Does the Minister agree that the burden of paying for the separation of the Prison Service should be placed at the NIO, shadowy as it may be, allowing for that money to go into front-line services in the prisons?

3.00 pm

Mrs Long: We have gone some way from the HIU and the Stormont House Agreement to the separated regime in prisons, but, in principle, I am always happy for somebody else to pick up the bill for issues that we have to take care of in the Department. If the NIO is willing to do so, I am more than happy to let it. We recognise the sensitivity of the separated regime, but, realistically, at this time, we are working hard with our colleagues in the Prison Service to make sure that the regime is stable; that the numbers, insofar as they are within our gift, can be reduced; and that those in the unseparated regime are not following a significantly different regime from the rest of those in the prison system. That is hugely important.

Mr Stewart: Does the Minister concede that any investigation body investigating the past, such as the HIU, cannot be both investigator and adjudicator?

Mrs Long: Such a body needs to be article 2-compliant. It is important that the body that investigates then produces reports that are forwarded to a separate body to determine whether prosecutions should take place. I am not sure whether that is the particular issue that the Member hints at. From our perspective, that would be the separation that we see there

being. It is entirely appropriate, however, that those who do the investigation produce the reports.

Ms Bunting: To go back to the original question, what liaison has the Minister or her Department had with the NIO on the responses to the most recent legacy consultation? In her view, what must happen as a result of the concerns raised by innocent victims?

Mrs Long: As the Member will be well aware, the issue has drawn some particular political controversy over many years, and I suspect that that may not change in the near future. However, it is a matter for the NIO, which took forward the consultation, to look at and assess the responses. From our perspective, we are clear that the current regime is not fit for purpose and cannot continue to deal with historical cases indefinitely.

We recognise that the implications of continuing to police and investigate the past out of current budgets is a deflection from the work of the present, yet it is important work that needs to be done, because, if not done, that will colour people's interactions with the justice system in the present. While there may be many concerns about the Stormont House Agreement and the HIU, there is, as it stands, no alternative proposal that has received any more support than that agreement. We have a duty to try to take the issue forward in a way that allows the police, the judiciary, the Police Ombudsman and all the others involved to move forward and focus on policing the present and the future and allow the past to be dealt with through a comprehensive mechanism. The Stormont House Agreement, while imperfect, is the best opportunity that we have to do that.

Mr McGrath: I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time and wish her well. Does she agree that the establishment of the HIU is the last chance for many victims and survivors to obtain truth and justice for their loved ones and that all those responsible for their deaths should be held to account, regardless of who they are?

Mrs Long: I do. It is hugely important, in order to transform our society from one in which there have been significant issues around lawlessness and lack of respect for the rule of law. In order to build confidence that we are going forward on a different basis, it is hugely important that we address those issues and give victims the opportunity to receive not just truth but, where possible, justice. We also have to be realistic. With the passage of time, there is an issue about how likely it is that cases will

be fit to be prosecuted. There is also an ongoing issue of people who have died without having received justice and have carried that burden to their grave. We, as a society, have a duty to deal with those who are victims and who were most acutely affected by the Troubles, but that duty goes beyond those who were victims and survivors; in setting standards, it extends to wider society. We have to look at what happens in other places — for example, historical sex offences are being prosecuted, and it is right that that should be so. There is not a person in the Chamber who would argue that the age of the offender or the remoteness of the incident should excuse proper investigation and prosecution where possible. It should be no less serious when it comes to murder.

HIA Compensation Payments

3. **Mr McGuigan** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions her Department has had with victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse (HIA) to ensure the roll-out of the compensation payments meets their needs. (AQO 126/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Executive Office has policy, statutory and budgetary responsibility for the establishment of the redress board and has been leading engagement with victims and survivors' groups. However, my Department is working diligently to establish the redress board and to support Justice Colton to discharge his functions as president-elect of that board.

The president-elect has met the Interim Advocate appointed to act as the voice of victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse and to ensure that their needs are known and communicated, pending the appointment of a Commissioner for Survivors of Institutional Childhood Abuse, on a number of occasions to discuss the remit of the board. He also met representatives of each of the victims and survivors' groups on 18 December 2019 to discuss a number of issues, including the board's intended approach to the payment of compensation.

Redress board officials are in regular contact with the Interim Advocate's office, and a very helpful meeting with victims' groups to discuss the content of the application form took place on 21 January. A further three meetings based on agendas proposed by the Interim Advocate are scheduled to take place this month to help to inform the board's emerging procedures and guidance. The president-elect is content that any issues raised by the groups about the redress board's emerging procedures should be

shared with redress board officials via the Interim Advocate's office. Redress board officials will continue to engage with the groups through the Interim Advocate to ensure that the redress scheme meets their needs.

Mr McGuigan: Like others have done, I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. I congratulate her on her new job and wish her well.

I thank the Minister for her full answer, in which she mentioned the application form. Will she clarify whether the groups will get sight of the application form before it is published?

Mrs Long: I mentioned that three further meetings would take place by the end of February. I am not clear as to whether the application form will be the subject of discussion at those meetings, but I will check and revert to the Member in writing to confirm that with him one way or the other.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the Minister to her new post. Following the letter from the head of the Civil Service, David Sterling, to six institutions in late 2019 that stated that institutions had an obligation to contribute to payments for victims, will she outline what discussions she has had with Executive colleagues regarding contributions from such institutions towards compensation for victims of HIA?

Mrs Long: As I said at the outset, the Executive Office has the policy, statutory and budgetary responsibility for the establishment of the redress board. That question would be best placed with the Executive Office and the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mrs Barton: Will the Minister confirm that there will be no delay in compensation payments and that the first payments will be made by the end of March?

Mrs Long: My understanding is that the payments will be done by the end of April. The board will be open to receive application forms by the end of March. Applicants will then be dealt with as swiftly as they can be, but that will depend, obviously, on the volume and complexity of the applications that are received.

In deciding the priority order of applications to be processed, the board will have due regard to the age and health of the applicant. It will be possible to submit application forms online or on paper. It is anticipated that the panel will sit to determine the first payments from 20 April

and those first payments will be made in early May.

Mr Blair: Like previous Members, I take the opportunity to welcome the Minister, a colleague of mine, to her post, and I wish her well for the future.

Can I ask for clarification from the Minister whether those who have already given evidence to the Hart inquiry will also be required to give evidence again to the redress board?

Mrs Long: That will not be the case. Applicants who gave evidence to the Hart inquiry will not be required to provide further written evidence to the redress board unless they wish to do so. They will be asked if they are content for the redress board to determine their application on the basis of the evidence of the Hart inquiry, and the redress board will then obtain a copy of that from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland on the applicant's behalf.

Rape Prosecutions

5. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Justice how many reported cases of rape have resulted in prosecution since 2014. (AQO 128/17-22)

Mrs Long: I ask for the Speaker's indulgence. There are quite a lot of statistics in the answer, and I do not want to stumble over them. I may take slightly longer than I would like.

Figures from the Police Service of Northern Ireland record that there were 5,290 offences of rape, including attempted rape, reported to the police during the period from 2014 to 2019. Of those, a charge or summons has been the outcome in 385 cases. Please note that the number of offences resulting in charge or summons is only provisional: investigations for rape offences recorded since 2014 will be ongoing and may result in a charge or summons at a future date. Similarly, numbers of offences reported since April 2019 included in the total of 5,290 are provisional.

Figures from the Public Prosecution Service record that, for the period 2015-16 to 2018-19, there were 1,941 files received that included an offence of rape or attempted rape. During that period, a total of 258 prosecution or diversion decisions were issued by the Public Prosecution Service for cases that included an offence of rape or attempted rape.

For cases dealt with at courts, in the period 2014 to 2018, which included at least one count

of a substantive or attempted rape offence, there were 345 prosecutions resulting in convictions in 81 cases.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister to her first Question Time. There is a lot of concern about the process and the figures out there, including the up-to-date figures that we have just received. What steps are being taken to increase the low conviction rate, and how will the Department support victims going through the process, as that does not appear to happen now?

Mrs Long: That is a key issue and, clearly, one that is hugely important. The Gillen review was commissioned by the Criminal Justice Board to examine how the criminal justice system dealt with cases of serious sexual assault. Sir John Gillen made 253 recommendations for improving procedures and practice to deliver better outcomes and support for complainants. I am committed to delivering real change in the experience of complainants and welcome the commitment that has also been shown by justice partners to work with my Department to ensure coordinated reform.

Sir John's comprehensive review presents an opportunity to focus our efforts on delivering a justice system that complainants have confidence in. We want to prioritise the areas that can have the greatest impact on complainants going through that system in the first phase of implementation. Recommendations to be taken forward as a priority in the first phase include the appointment of additional case progression officers in the PPS and PSNI; establishing a new remote evidence centre in Belfast to allow vulnerable complainants to give evidence without having to appear in court; providing complainants with legal advice and representation pretrial to ensure they are better supported and have a voice from the outset; consideration of how best to take forward pilot pre-recorded cross-examination next year, where victims give their evidence ahead of trial; and reform of the committal process later this year so that complainants have to give oral evidence only once in court. Also, we intend to do scoping work on providing additional support to young victims and witnesses, including consideration of the child house model in a Northern Ireland context. A dedicated implementation team has been established in the Department of Justice to coordinate those phased actions as agreed by the Criminal Justice Board.

Mr Speaker: I call Linda Dillon for a very quick question and the Minister for a super-quick answer.

Ms Dillon: My question has been partly answered. I wish the Minister well in her post, and I am sure that I will work closely with her in my role as Deputy Chair.

You outlined that your Department was working towards addressing some of the Gillen recommendations.

Do you think that the gaps are more in the process or in the legislation? In other words, do we need further legislation or will the process be enough to deal with the outstanding issues?

3.15 pm

Mrs Long: I think that it covers three sets of areas. First of all, there is an educational piece, where the Department of Justice and other Departments need to engage in educating people better about the issues of consent and sexual assault. We also need to look at process issues that can be resolved without legislation. The third category does include legislation, and I hope that, in the miscellaneous provisions Bill that we are hoping to bring forward next year in the Department of Justice, we will be able to take through the first wave of legislative change from the Gillen review. The committal reform Bill, which I have said will be brought forward this spring, will deal with at least one of those issues, namely replication and expecting somebody to repeat their evidence more than once in court.

Mr Speaker: We now move to topical questions.

Provisional IRA: Current Status

T1. **Mr Buckley** asked the Minister of Justice, after welcoming her to her post, in the light of the fact that, last week, the Chief Constable appeared before the Justice Committee and failed to give the police assessment of the current status of the Provisional IRA, whether she, as Minister with responsibility for policing matters, can give her assessment. (AQT 91/17-22)

Mrs Long: The assessment of the activity of the Provisional IRA is not a matter for the Department of Justice. The assessment of active terrorism is a matter for the Northern Ireland Office and an operational matter for the

Chief Constable. Therefore, it is not something that I can offer.

Mr Buckley: Does the Minister recognise the damage to public confidence in our justice system that this lack of evidence results in, when a Chief Constable is ducking the question, a Justice Minister is dodging the question and an independent commission has run away from the question? In light of recent activities in the Republic of Ireland, the people of Northern Ireland are quite rightly and legitimately asking the question: where does this responsibility lie? We have the right to an answer. Or is it a case that dark forces continue to operate with no accountability from our judiciary?

Mrs Long: For fear of any confusion, I did not dodge the question. In fact, I gave the Member a very clear answer: responsibility for this matter lies with the Northern Ireland Office.

Springhill/Westrock Massacre

T2. **Mr Carroll** asked the Minister of Justice whether she supports the campaign of the families of the Springhill and Westrock massacre, which took place in West Belfast in July 1972, and, in particular, whether she will support publicly the families' demand for an inquest into the death of their loved ones. (AQT 92/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. As you are aware, there is already a procedure in place when issues are referred to the coroner for an inquest decision. However, I believe that the best way forward in dealing with legacy issues is, as I stated in the earlier part of my answers, a comprehensive process such as that set out in the Stormont House Agreement, but I am happy to meet the Member and his constituents, if it would be helpful, to discuss it further with them.

Mr Carroll: Thank you, Minister, for your answer. I cannot speak on behalf of all the families, but I would imagine that they would be willing to meet you. I thank you for that offer. Five people were massacred — shot down in cold blood — three of whom were teenagers. It is an absolute crime, and those families deserve truth and justice. I will certainly pass that message on to the families.

Magilligan Prison: Accommodation

T3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Justice, given that homelessness is a topical issue at

the moment, albeit that she might wonder why on earth she is being asked a question on that subject, and in the light of the fact that she may not yet have visited Magilligan prison, to state whether, if she has visited, she discovered that hundreds of prisoners are living in accommodation that is over 80 years old, including Nissen huts that were built during the Second World War, and to outline her plans to address that issue. (AQT 93/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. The Department is committed to replacing the prison at Magilligan and retaining a prison at that site. We recognise that significant investment is required on the site and, as part of the work of the Prison Service and the directorate for prisons, they are taking forward a number of proposals that are required on the prisons estate. I would be happy to inform the Member of the detail of what is proposed. We are aware of Magilligan. I have not visited yet, but I will visit in the next few weeks.

Mr Dallat: When the Minister is visiting, perhaps she will slip me in to the Škoda limousine; I would be happy to join her. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: As long as you get a release date, John. Just ensure that you get that.

Mr Dallat: I join the Minister in supporting the retention of Magilligan prison where it is. Not only does it provide employment to a lot of people, but the local community has embraced it, particularly the open part of the prison. I can speak in glowing terms about it, which is why I have raised the question. Will the Minister give us a timescale for when the 80-year-old Nissen huts will disappear?

Mrs Long: It would not be appropriate for me to prejudge the outcome of the development of the estates, but, as you know, in December 2018, the Northern Ireland Prison Service published a document on the estates and sought the view of stakeholders. We remain committed to the redevelopment of Magilligan prison. An outline business case is at an advanced stage for that and will be submitted for approval in the coming months. I assure him that we are not dragging our heels on the issue.

Interface Barriers

T4. **Ms Mullan** asked the Minister of Justice, after wishing her well in her new role, for an update on the commitment in the 2013 T:BUC strategy to create a 10-year programme to

reduce and remove by 2023 all interface barriers. (AQT 94/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department has been taking forward work, on a collaborative basis with other Departments, on trying to support communities in the removal of interface barriers. Some of those communities, as you will appreciate, face significant challenges in building the confidence that would allow them to feel safe and secure. That has to be our priority; that people feel safe in those communities when barriers are removed.

There are a number of areas where successful programmes have been introduced, and I think that three more are due for consideration this spring. Our responsibility in the Department of Justice is to move at the pace that is demanded by the residents in the neighbourhood. We cannot move ahead of them, because, without their support, it will not be successful; it actually could be counterproductive. Equally, we should not be behind them when they ask for our support and for change to be made. My role is to support them fully in what they need to do. I know that our officials engage with people in interface communities to look at how those structures can be reduced, amended and, eventually, removed. I think that we would all like a community that is free from barriers, physical and mental, in how people can live their lives in a way that does not curb their aspirations and freedom to make their own choices.

Ms Mullan: I thank the Minister for her answer and her understanding of the issues. The creation of an interface barriers support package was identified as a key action. An aftercare support package was presented to the interface programme board in June 2019. As of February 2020, it appears that that has still not been signed off, and no delivery schedule is yet available. Will the Minister comment on why that package is still not available to local communities that are impacted? When is it likely to be in place?

Mrs Long: I cannot give a definitive answer, but I guess that part of the reason why it has not been signed off is that we have not had a Minister in place to do that. I will certainly talk to the Department to see what stage that is at and whether there is anything more that we can do to advance it. It is crucial that we not only support communities as they prepare to remove barriers but make sure that adequate support is in place afterwards. Even low-level antisocial behaviour in an area where there previously was an interface structure can cause real fear

in a community; they could think that things will escalate and become much more serious. It is important that we have early-warning systems in place and good support through neighbourhood policing, community contact and a package of measures to make sure that people feel that they are safer without the structure there than with it in place. That is, ultimately, our objective.

Upskirting: Criminal Offence

T5. **Ms Ennis** asked the Minister of Justice how soon she intends to introduce legislation to create a new criminal offence of upskirting, the introduction of which formed part of the Sinn Féin response to her Department's consultation last year on measures to combat child sexual exploitation. (AQT 95/17-22)

Mrs Long: As the Member will be aware, a number of things are in process in respect of sexual offences, not least the Gillen review. There is also an issue with cybercrime and looking at how those attacks are done; there is a White Paper in Westminster on that. We will consider which is the most appropriate vehicle for us to be able to deal with that so that we ensure that people are protected.

There is no doubt that upskirting, revenge porn and a whole series of other online abuses are serious matters. They are a serious invasion of privacy and a serious violation of people's bodily autonomy. We need to deal with those issues, even through a piece of education work, such as that suggested in the Gillen review. It is important that people understand the seriousness of those incidents. As digital crime remains a reserved matter, we might need to look carefully at whether the Assembly is able to progress that or whether it is better that we ask Westminster to do so on our behalf.

Ms Ennis: Sinn Féin also recommended reversing the burden of proof from child victims to the defendants for some sexual offences. Does the Minister intend to legislate for that change?

Mrs Long: I have no plans to legislate for the change. However, we are doing a number of things to support child victims, including making sure that they are able to give evidence remotely in cases so that they are not at risk of coming into contact with the offender; and ensuring that they are properly supported in advance of that in an age-appropriate way. There are a number of other things that we can do to ensure that victims are properly cared for. A number of packages and measures are in

place to support victims, but there are no plans for legislation. However, I mentioned in an earlier answer the Department's intention to table a miscellaneous provisions Bill in the latter half of this mandate. Those Bills can be burdensome for the Committee — I apologise in advance — because they tend to cover a wide range of issues, but there is the opportunity, if the Member wants to discuss her concerns further with me, that it could be scoped and taken forward at that time.

Paul Quinn

T6. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice, given that she may be aware that the parents of Paul Quinn were in Parliament Buildings today to express their disgust that the Finance Minister, Conor Murphy, has failed to withdraw his unjust claim of criminality against their son, whether she agrees with and supports their call for him to withdraw his claim. (AQT 96/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. Each Minister takes a Pledge of Office that commits us:

"to work collectively with the other members of the Executive Committee to achieve a society free of paramilitarism; to challenge all paramilitary activity and associated criminality".

All of us need to live up to those commitments. Anyone with information about Paul Quinn's murder should pass it to the police. Any attack by any group on any member of our community is completely unacceptable and is to be condemned. I have huge sympathy for the Quinn family. Breege and Stephen Quinn have acted with integrity throughout this process, not only in trying to seek justice for their son but in trying to ensure that the smear against his name is removed. It is right that it should be and that the insult that was added to the injury of his loss should be withdrawn. An apology cannot make up for the damage that has been done, but it would go a long way to showing an understanding of the impact that that has had.

Mr Nesbitt: Does the Minister agree that the Finance Minister's failure to withdraw the unproven claim of criminality undermines the credibility and integrity of an Executive that place a huge emphasis on collective responsibility?

Mrs Long: I cannot answer for the Finance Minister, but I was in my place when the deputy First Minister was answering that question and said that the allegation had been withdrawn.

So, I point the Member to that answer: the allegation has been withdrawn; it is not, as he suggests, that there has been a refusal to do so.

Mr Speaker: We have a minute and a half left.

Mr Blair: I assure you that I will try to stick to that.

Stalking Legislation

T7. **Mr Blair** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her plans to introduce legislation to outlaw stalking, in the light of the fact that his constituent Fiona Jamieson has been in the news recently regarding stalking and the pressing need for legislation. (AQT 97/17-22)

3.30 pm

Mrs Long: Thank you. I met Fiona Jamieson and her daughter Ciara Hindman, who has been a victim of stalking. Her mother has been an incredible advocate for her. I have met a number of victims of stalking over the past number of weeks, and Members will be aware that it is my intention to introduce a Bill in the autumn to create a specific offence of stalking. It is also the intention of that Bill to create stalking protection orders, as we are aware that the burden under harassment legislation etc requires the victim to go to court to get a non-molestation order. That can often be appealed and allows those who maliciously wish to use the justice system to continue unwanted contact with their victim to do so. Stalking protection orders would be issued by the police, thereby relieving victims of stalking of both a financial burden and the burden of going to court in order to obtain one.

Mr Speaker: Members, time is up. I ask Members to take their ease for a moment or two, please.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Stalford] in the Chair)

Communities

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question number 8 has been withdrawn.

Reval2020: Sports Clubs

1. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Communities for her assessment of the impact

on the viability of sports clubs of Reval2020. (AQO 150/17-22)

Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities): I thank the Member for his question. I am aware of concerns raised by representatives from a number of sports governing bodies about the impact of the latest rates revaluation for sports clubs. The assessment of rateable valuation is, in the first instance, a matter for my Executive partner the Minister of Finance. I am pleased to note that Land and Property Services (LPS) will apply the sport and recreation rate relief and the community amateur sports club rate relief for qualifying sports clubs. Those arrangements have not been affected by the revaluation, Reval2020.

The measures were put in place to allow significantly reduced rates liability across the sports sector. In October 2016, the Assembly passed the necessary legislation to allow for enhanced rate relief for community amateur sports clubs. That allowed enhanced rate relief from 80% to 100% for community amateur sports clubs that do not operate social-club bar facilities. In addition, sports clubs that are neither community amateur sports clubs nor registered charities are still benefiting from an 80% reduction in rates on the parts of their facility that are used solely for sport and recreational purposes. I encourage the governing bodies and clubs that are concerned about the effect of the revaluation exercise and that operate facilities that do not qualify for rate relief to address their concerns through the appropriate channel in Land and Property Services.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that some of the percentage increases in NAV are in the region of 30%, and in some cases over 40%, including double digits for Casement Park, which is not, as the Minister will know, currently operational as a sports ground, how does she square that with the Programme for Government's objective of increasing the well-being of all and the specific outcome of promoting longer, healthier and more active lives? Surely this is entirely the wrong direction of travel.

Ms Hargey: Sport plays a key role in our society, through engagement and through health outcomes for all age groups. Sport also brings various groups together to enjoy it. On the impact of the revaluation, any governing bodies or, indeed, any clubs should follow the process that is set out. Therefore, if clubs have concerns with the increase, they should be speaking to Land and Property Services and to

their governing body. I have not yet received any correspondence from governing bodies and clubs. I am open to speaking to them about the impact, but there is a process there if they do not fall within the rate rebate system. Where they have a financial income through other means, they need to look at that to ensure that it is as fit for purpose as it can be.

Mr Hilditch: This goes beyond the current relief that is available. Will the Minister make representations to her Executive colleagues about sports clubs that will be absolutely hammered by Reval2020, when, in reality, their clubhouses have limited opening hours and are operational purely to raise money to sustain the clubs and the sport? Reval2020 could sound the death knell for many clubs and sporting organisations.

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, I have not yet had any approach from governing bodies or clubs. I am open to listening to any that want to come forward. Obviously, in the first instance, looking at the revaluation sits within the Department of Finance, but I encourage any governing body or club to engage urgently with Land and Property Services, because there is a dedicated process there, to look at what the valuations have brought up. I encourage any club or body to go to LPS.

Ms Ennis: The Minister has answered my supplementary question in a previous answer.

Mr O'Toole: On the subject of the financial viability of sports clubs, will the Minister consider meeting groups that campaign or advocate for an all-Ireland soccer league to find out from them what their proposals are to improve the viability of football on both sides of the border on an all-island basis, given that they have also made clear that they respect the integrity of two different national teams?

Ms Hargey: There is a request for a meeting in the system. We are working through the processes to ensure that a meeting happens in the near future. Once that takes place, I will update Members.

Mr Buckley: With regard to the viability of sporting clubs, and following on from the ongoing governance and accounting concerns that relate to Sport NI, has the Minister had an opportunity to read the lessons learned report from June 2019? If so, is she satisfied with its conclusions?

Ms Hargey: I am going through the issues surrounding Sport NI. I am looking at the valuations and next steps. I will engage with Sport NI directly. I will update Members in due course.

Social Inclusion and Social Change Strategies

2. **Mr Blair** asked the Minister for Communities what co-production and co-design she plans to undertake on the outstanding social inclusion and social change strategies. (AQO 151/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his question. My Department is the lead on producing a number of strategies that could support the Programme for Government as outlined in New Decade, New Approach. Those include the anti-poverty and child poverty strategy, a disability strategy, a gender strategy and a sexual orientation strategy. The principles and practice of people and community engagement, co-design and co-production will be a key part of the development and delivery of each of those strategies. The approach that is taken will be tailored to each individual strategy, depending on delivery timescales and work that has been completed to date. I am keen to involve people who will be most affected by the strategies at all stages of their development and will ensure that steps are taken to allow them to make a meaningful contribution to that work. I am committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable people in society have their voices heard and their views taken into account.

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for that reply and her replies so far and in this, my first exchange with her at Question Time, I wish her well and welcome her to her post.

Given the long list of outstanding strategies for social inclusion and change — a list that, perhaps one could argue, has been renewed by the New Decade, New Approach agreement — will the Minister assure the House that the Department will seek to involve a wide range of stakeholders from the outset of any consultation, and that stakeholders will not simply wait until, some way down the process, questions have already been set by departmental officials?

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. It is an important area. If we are to take a co-design approach, that has to be built in from the very start. It cannot be just attached to the end. As I said in my opening remarks, we have to ensure that our

policies and strategies impact on those who need them the most: service users and those who will feel the impact. They have to be an integral part of the co-design process. That will be built in from the very start.

Ms Sheerin: Campaign groups have been promised a disability forum for a number of years now. When will that be implemented? Can the Minister advise if that forum will be the vehicle for the co-design of a new disability strategy?

Ms Hargey: I am obviously considering the establishment of a disability stakeholder forum as part of the development of the new disability strategy. The role and remit of that forum will need to be considered in the context of the Programme for Government and enhanced arrangements for cross-departmental collaboration. Once I have considered it in the coming weeks, I will outline plans to Members in the time ahead and will say what the composition of the forum will be.

Ms S Bradley: I welcome the Minister's comments about reaching out to vulnerable groups. Can she give an assurance that those hard-to-reach minority groups will be included, particularly those that will be directly affected by any strategies?

Ms Hargey: Thanks very much for the question. It is essential we reach out to all groups, particularly those that are furthest removed. A co-design process works with those who have a lived experience of the topic at hand, and we will look at professional expertise to try to bring both together. We want to democratise those policies and strategies as much as possible, so I will be looking at who can be involved and at how we can use, for example, the community and voluntary sector to reach out to those hard-to-reach communities and individuals. As we start to move through each of the strategies, co-design around the policy development and methodology will be key, and I will outline how we are going to approach that as I move forward.

Mr Muir: First, I welcome the Minister to her post. I have enjoyed working with the Minister over the last number of years, and I look forward to working with her in her new position as Minister for Communities.

Part of her ministerial responsibility includes policy responsibility for sexual orientation. What does the Minister plan to do to discharge that to improve the life of LGBT citizens in Northern Ireland who, frankly, have not been very well-

served previously by the Assembly? This is an opportunity for the Minister take forward action on that. What practical actions is the Minister planning to take to improve the life of LGBT citizens in Northern Ireland?

Ms Hargey: Thanks very much for your question. All these strategies are in ways interdependent, and, in New Decade, New Approach, there is a commitment for me to publish, within three months of the institutions being up and running, a comprehensive timetable for the development and delivery of each of these strategies, and that is something I will keep to.

In looking at our LGBT-plus community in the sexual orientation strategy, the first thing is to ensure that I engage with and listen to the community from the outset. Indeed, I am in the middle of arranging meetings to start those initial engagements. There is the draft of a sexual orientation strategy sitting there. We need to make sure that it is fit for purpose for now because things have moved on. The big issue is to make sure that all those strategies support and give visibility and respect to the community. Importantly, we should embed international human rights into our own domestic situation. We should uphold it and have a co-design approach that the community itself is involved in, particularly the hard-to-reach voices that may not be heard at the moment. There is a commitment to do that. We will also, of course, listen to Members who work with communities already to ensure that the strategy and the policy are fit for purpose.

Event Scheme Model: Armagh and Newry

3. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Communities whether she will consider replicating the Belfast city centre event scheme model in Armagh and Newry. (AQO 152/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Thanks very much for your question. Whilst I have no plans at the moment to introduce a specific event scheme in those cities, my Department's regional development office works closely with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to develop and deliver regeneration projects in Armagh and Newry respectively.

The regional development office provides capital grant funding to those councils for a number of initiatives, such as public realm and revitalisation schemes, and they often include funding for event infrastructure or equipment.

For example, previous public realm schemes have created event spaces and bespoke lighting, and revitalisation projects have funded the purchase of mobile stage equipment and public address systems for use at council events.

My Department has also provided funding to councils for the promotion and marketing of their town centres and city centres. That support often goes towards the promotion and funding of specific events such as Christmas markets and community events that animate the physical spaces created. I am content that the mechanisms that already exist between my Department and the two councils are sufficient to allow any grant funding of events, and I have no plans to replicate the Belfast scheme in Newry and Armagh.

3.45 pm

Mr Irwin: I am sure that the Minister will accept that Belfast city is in a similar position. The amount of money for events is, I am told, £200,000. Does she agree that a much smaller amount of money for the two cities that I mentioned — Newry and Armagh — would make a big difference to both?

Ms Hargey: The resources that have gone to the areas of Newry and Armagh since April 2011 are £6.5 million in capital investment and £493,000 in revenue. As was stated, a large part of that is for events and funding. I am willing to engage with the councils in the time ahead to look at what else the Department can do. A large scope of that money goes towards events that those councils are coming forward with, but I am more than willing to discuss that further.

Mr McNulty: I welcome the Minister to her post and wish her well in her role. My constituency of Newry and Armagh is rich in culture. We have our rhymers, our bullets, our dramatists, our musicians and our poets. An curadhmír springs to mind. The Cailleach Bhéara sent shudders of fear through me as a child. I welcome the Minister's capital investment in the new cultúrlann at Aonach Mhacha in Armagh city, which, I am excited to say, is due to open next month. Will the Minister take the opportunity to wish the group well? Will she bring forward a support scheme to help to develop and celebrate cultural heritage in places such as the new cultúrlann Aonach Mhacha in Armagh?

Ms Hargey: I hope to attend the opening event in March and to visit the project to see at first hand the excellent work that is being done.

Obviously, it adds to the cultural tapestry and vibrancy of our places and our communities. I will consider all of this in the time ahead to see what further programmes can be provided to support that type of work. I will outline that in the time ahead, once that is considered.

Mr Buckley: In light of all politics being local, will the Minister comment on and, perhaps, look at possible funding opportunities and streams for the biggest one-day festival in Northern Ireland: the sham fight in Scarva on 13 July?

Ms Hargey: I am not aware of any request that has come in about that. I would have to look at it in terms of events. Obviously, working closely with local government will be key to making sure that we maximise funding and assessing the community impact that events have and how they attract visitors to a certain place. I am more than willing to speak with any council and any Member in the time ahead to look at events that will transform our spaces and attract visitors, both locally and internationally.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I always worry at the sham fight, because you never know who is going to win.

Housing Executive: Debt

Ms Armstrong: I will not talk about the Portaferry Gala but instead go to question 4.

4. **Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Communities what discussions she has had with the Minister of Finance on the Housing Executive's debt. (AQO 153/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am committed to delivering on the pledge made in 'New Decade, New Approach' that the Executive will examine options to remove the historical debt from the Housing Executive. I have already met Minister Murphy to discuss the matter and to explore what may be done in relation to the Housing Executive's landlord legacy debt.

As Members may already be aware, the historical debt results from loans that were generally taken out to finance new-build housing activities by the Housing Executive and its predecessor organisations, including the Housing Trust and former local authorities. The level of historical debt, including capital and interest outstanding, at 31 December 2019 was £332 million. That is due for repayment to the Department of Finance and councils by 2036-37. There is a significance to the Housing Executive debt because of the massive

investment challenge it faces if it is to provide a sustainable and long-term future for its portfolio of social homes. Action on the Housing Executive may play a part in addressing that, albeit a minor part alongside many more substantial actions. Revitalisation of the Housing Executive is key, and I will engage on that in the time ahead.

Ms Armstrong: Minister, I appreciate that this is a big issue for your Department and especially for the Housing Executive. Will you provide any of the actions that you have considered to date on how to future-proof the Housing Executive? Perhaps you could provide them in writing. What plans do you have to make sure that the Housing Executive is stable, out of debt and fit for purpose to deliver the much-needed housing across Northern Ireland?

Ms Hargey: I am looking at considering the revitalisation of the Housing Executive. Obviously, we will need to look at a number of levers over the next 10 years. Once I finalise my view of the future direction of this, I will inform the Chamber and the Committee.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her response, particularly to Kellie Armstrong's question. My question is similar. The 'New Decade, New Approach' document has within it the potential for removing historical debt from the Housing Executive. Will the Minister ensure that any proposals to increase rents are matched against affordability? How will the commitments around the revitalisation and the removal of historical debt be delivered within this Assembly?

Ms Hargey: Obviously, affordability is key, because we do not want to increase the burden on the renter or, indeed, the public purse. We will look at the revitalisation of the Housing Executive in the whole. We will look at investment opportunities with existing stock and then look at the wider housing stock more extensively. I have raised the issue, along with corporation tax, with the Minister of Finance. While those will provide some solutions, a complete look at the revitalisation of the Housing Executive will be needed over the next 10 years. We will have to look at the debt, the income that is generated and, importantly, how we maintain existing stock whilst looking at an ambitious housing programme in the time ahead. The renter — the person in each of the homes — needs to be protected in all cases.

Mr Newton: I note that the Minister has used the word "revitalisation" several times in her answers to the question. Will the Minister

consider revitalisation to include the potential of the Housing Executive to build new homes? Where there is demolition of Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes, will the Minister consider that those sites will stay within and become an asset of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive?

Ms Hargey: I will look at all housebuilding options. At the moment, we build 1,750 new builds per annum, the majority of which are in housing associations. When you look at the increased housing need, you see that that is not enough to meet the need, particularly of those in critical need. I will look at this overarchingly in the time ahead. Dealing with the debt issues and the issues around corporation tax is one element of what needs to happen in the Housing Executive. We also need to look at the rents in a more holistic way and at other solutions and means of financing. There is financial transactions capital and the ONS legislation that needs to come forward. I will look at all those options in the time ahead, as I lay out my vision and my future approach to where housing will go. I will do that in the coming weeks and months.

Housing Executive: Northern Region

5. **Mr Robinson** asked the Minister for Communities what progress has been made by the Housing Executive to streamline the adaptations and disabled grants processes in its northern region. (AQO 154/17-22)

Ms Hargey: In the latter part of 2019, the Housing Executive streamlined the adaptations process in the north region, mirroring the strategy that was so successfully piloted in the south region. That process continues to be reviewed, and I am happy to provide the Member with more information once the data is available.

The Housing Executive has completed a review of the disabled facilities grant process, and a number of improvements have been implemented to streamline the process and improve the customer journey. They include carrying out the test-of-resources process at the start; implementing a data-sharing agreement with the Department for Communities to provide verification of benefits more quickly; and enabling technical officers to manage a case from start to finish without additional handovers. The Housing Executive is also considering the role of grant case officers, to enable them to be responsible for grant cases from start to finish. That aspect has not yet been implemented, as the Housing Executive considers the level of

authority associated with the case officer grade. In addition, the Housing Executive has specified, developed and implemented a new bespoke, more flexible IT system to support the grant process. Those improvements have been implemented across all Housing Executive grant locations.

Mr Robinson: Will the Minister meet me to discuss outstanding Housing Executive issues in my constituency?

Ms Hargey: Yes, there is no problem. I can do that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Happy days.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's responses so far. The average age of people in the northern region is very high. I am not sure whether the Minister knows how many passed away before adaptations were completed or shortly afterwards. Is the Minister prepared to look at ways in which the whole process could be fast-tracked not just through the assessment but particularly through the planners, who demand a list of requirements from people who are suffering life-changing experiences and cannot wait?

Ms Hargey: With all of the schemes, we want to get help to those who need it most in the quickest time possible. The review is ongoing, and I will ask the Housing Executive to consider fast-tracking as part of it. If the Member wants to speak to my officials about what else could be done, I am more than willing to arrange that. I will raise this directly with them afterwards.

Subregional Stadia Programme for Soccer

6. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the subregional stadia programme for soccer. (AQO 155/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I am fully committed to developing the subregional stadia programme that was included in the New Decade, New Approach agreement. It is a priority for my Department and, indeed, for the Executive. The programme will transform soccer at all levels by addressing the current and future needs of the game. It provides a real opportunity to contribute to the delivery of wider government priorities and to address a range of social, economic and cultural issues.

The programme itself must be open and transparent. It is critical that any improvements

to existing stadia or new developments prioritise health and safety provisions, accessibility and inclusion, as well as being sustainable and based on realistic needs. A 12-week consultation on the programme proposals based on the 'Irish Football Association (IFA) Facilities Strategy', dated 2011 took place from 30 November 2015 to 22 February 2016. However, in the absence of Ministers, no decisions were made on the programme proposals or on the financial allocations in the programme.

Given that the IFA strategy and the consultation it was based on are now nine years old, things have changed in the interim. It is only right that I take time to review the programme. I have asked my officials to engage urgently with key stakeholders to help them to inform the development of detailed plans for delivering a successful subregional programme. Once the engagement has been completed, I will consider proposals on how best to take forward the programme as urgently as possible.

4.00 pm

Mr Lyttle: The Minister will appreciate the extent of the frustration at the extreme delay in the allocation of funding. When will the review be completed, and what budget will be allocated for football stadia funding?

Ms Hargey: The previous commitment was for £36.2 million. Things have changed a lot over the past nine years, and I would not have been content to allocate money without having an assessment of up-to-date needs. I thought it important to engage stakeholders on the ground to get an update on where things are at and where facilities sit, particularly because rule changes have happened in the past year that have had a knock-on effect on soccer programmes. My officials are undertaking the review as urgently as possible. Although they are engaged with that, they are also looking at detailed implementation plans and at developing a process for criteria for applications. That will come back to me within the next three months to look at. If I can quicken that up in any way, I will do so.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: There are literally about 30 seconds left, so I will call Karen Mullan and ask her and the Minister to keep it snappy. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Mullan: My question has been partly answered. I just want a timeline for the opening of applications.

Ms Hargey: I cannot give a specific timeline until the engagement takes place. Once that is done, I will develop a process for criteria for applications, which will include definite timelines.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The time for listed questions has passed, and we now move to topical questions.

Hillview, North Belfast: Housing Development

T1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Communities, after welcoming her to her post, for an assurance that, should the opportunity arise, the site at Hillview in north Belfast will be brought back into consideration for housing development, given that she will be aware from her time on Belfast City Council of the planning decision that was taken three years ago, which appeared to fly in the face of logic, particularly because of the failure of retail on that site in the past and its long period of vacancy and inactivity. (AQT 101/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I will be looking at all of that. It is a critical aim for me and the Department to increase the availability of social housing over the coming years. It is also part of New Decade, New Approach that we have a more ambitious housing programme to meet increasing need.

As the Member will be aware, Belfast City Council is conducting a strategic site assessment to look at land in the city of Belfast. I know that other councils are looking at land in their area as well. I have asked my officials to engage with Belfast City Council to look at what the land availability will be. There is chronic housing stress in areas such as north Belfast. Land availability then becomes a critical issue, so I want to do all that I can and use any instrument available in my Department to prioritise housing, but particularly to do it on the basis of need. Where the housing need is, that is where the new builds should be focused and developed. As I said, I will be looking at all of that in the time ahead. I will update the Member as we move through the process.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Gary Middleton.

Mr Middleton: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I beg your pardon. Mr Lunn took so long to ask his question that we have run out of time.

[Laughter.] I am only joking. I call Mr Lunn for a supplementary question, and then Mr Middleton.

Mr Lunn: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for her detailed answer. She mentioned at the end that decisions about housing in north Belfast in particular would be based on need. May I put it to her bluntly that need should not involve political considerations and that the absolute necessity in north Belfast, of all places, is to provide social housing, and a quantity of it, as soon as possible?

Ms Hargey: I am well aware of the issues pertaining to north Belfast. I cannot speak for any previous decisions that were taken by my Department, but, for me, decisions should be based on objective need, where people apply when they are in housing stress and that application is then assessed independently by the Housing Executive. I will be looking at the housing programme to match where the need is greatest. That is something that I want to commit to in the time ahead.

Pay Parity: Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

T2. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Communities what she is doing to address the issue of pay parity, given that, on Friday, he had the opportunity to meet with many community workers from Foyle, with pay parity being one of the key themes of the meetings, with some of the workers expressing concerns about the neighbourhood renewal areas in particular. (AQT 102/17-22)

Ms Hargey: I thank the Member for his question. As somebody who once was a neighbourhood renewal worker, I am well aware of the issues. I live in a neighbourhood renewal community in south Belfast, and I met officials only last week about the neighbourhood renewal programme. I will write to neighbourhood renewal partnerships within the next week, setting out my plans for the next two years. Part of that will look at a review of the neighbourhood renewal programme, sitting below the anti-poverty strategy and co-designed with neighbourhood renewal partnerships and others, and will be key to those strategies going forward because they are best placed to know the issues.

Pay parity is a key issue. There has not been an increase in salaries in the last 10 years, so I have instructed a review to look at all community and voluntary sector work and

where that impacts on workers and employment rights. If I can move as urgently as possible to look at neighbourhood renewal, I will, but I have to wait for this review to take place.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for her very detailed response. Another issue has been raised, again around pay, but it is in relation to yearly budgets as a whole. We know that many community workers are under pressure because the funding for their salary runs out, and the organisation does not have a budget in place. Are you doing anything to look at possibly extending that to a three-year budget?

Ms Hargey: That is being considered in the Programme for Government. It will eventually look at multi-annual funding and budgeting, so this will be considered in line with that. As we develop a new anti-poverty strategy, we will look at where neighbourhood renewal sits within that programme. I will also outline some of my intention in the interim to those groups when I write to them this week.

Gender Discrimination

T3. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Communities, after stating that the Minister will be aware of previous United Nations reports on discrimination in housing, particularly in areas of Belfast and Derry, and further stating that her question is not about housing because Trevor Lunn's question was about housing, whether she has any plans to take forward the recommendations from the UN Committee on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. (AQT 103/17-22)

Ms Hargey: When I came into post a couple of weeks ago, CEDAW was holding a conference here looking at that very issue, and I took the opportunity to speak to those stakeholders who were in the room. As we take forward a gender strategy, that will be central, and it will be important for me and for the Executive to ensure that we demonstrate how we are meeting international obligations and, importantly, where we are embedding a human rights-based approach to all that we do, which includes gender equality at the heart of it.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for her response. Central to all that will be closing the gender pay gap, particularly in relation to section 19 of the Employment Act 2016. I assume that that will be an integral part of the work that needs to be brought forward on this issue.

Ms Hargey: The implementation of section 19 rests with the Executive Office, but I am working with my Executive partners and officials are engaging with departmental officials to ensure that we can take that forward as soon as possible.

Housing Executive: Damp Properties

T4. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Communities what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the Housing Executive addresses the damp in many of its properties. (AQT 104/17-22)

Ms Hargey: The Housing Executive has an ongoing programme of maintenance. Bigger challenges lie ahead with keeping the existing stock fit for purpose, and that is part of the wider revitalisation work that we need to look at. A huge investment is needed in the existing Housing Executive stock over the next 10 years. This will be an urgent priority not just for me but for the Executive and the Assembly as a whole. Looking at issues of damp is key to that. If there are any specific issues or concerns that you have in your constituency, you can follow up and we can get the specifics answered for you.

Mr Easton: As the Minister probably knows, the Housing Executive is very good at using condensation as a cover-up for damp and for the lack of cavity wall insulation. Can the Minister ensure that she pushes the Housing Executive to actually address those issues?

Ms Hargey: Yes, I have a meeting shortly with the Housing Executive as an arm's-length body and as a key body in looking at that, and this issue will be raised. When you look particularly at the rounded nature of fuel poverty and poverty more generally, you see that living conditions are a key and fundamental part of that, so that will be raised. Again, if you have any specifics or background, you can share those with me, and I will be more than willing to raise them directly.

Sports Clubs: Rates

T5. **Ms Ennis** asked the Minister for Communities, after noting the exchange of views she had with other Members at the start of Question Time, whether she agrees that sport and physical recreation make a major contribution to the health of the population and that increasing rates for sports clubs could have a negative impact. (AQT 105/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Yes. I visited a number of sports clubs. I was in Ballymacash on Friday. I was in east Belfast a few weeks ago looking at how sport is being used to tackle and deal with homelessness and to engage with those communities that are falling on hard times. Sport plays a vital role. It reaches out to hard-to-reach groups, engages people, builds capacity and is a good contributor to what we try to do to address poverty, inequality and a range of other issues.

I covered rates. That primarily sits in the Department of Finance, and, if specific clubs or organisations have concerns, they should be addressing them through the process. That said, the rate rebate still works for amateur clubs and those that are registered charities; they can get up to 80% and, sometimes, 100% rate relief.

Ms Ennis: I agree with what you said. I know that the first port of call for any club that has issues is LPS, but I want to take into consideration what the Minister's Department could do. Will the Minister outline what important information her Department could provide to clubs about their organisational structure and governance to help them to have a better understanding of the opportunities out there for rate relief?

Ms Hargey: Yes, I am more than happy to do that. Whilst no organisation, governing body or club has contacted my Department yet, that may be in part because they have not received the bill for what the revaluation does. I am more than willing to speak to any organisation or club, but I will also instruct my officials to liaise with sports clubs or go through the bodies and Sport NI to give an update on preparing clubs for the valuation or, if they wish to make an appeal, to set out what the process is.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Harry Harvey.

Mr Harvey: Ah.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: You are on my list.

Mr Harvey: Sorry, no, I have no question.

Objective Need Criteria

T7. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Communities what she is doing to ensure that social inclusion and social clause strategies will

be implemented based on objective need criteria. (AQT 107/17-22)

Ms Hargey: Objective need is in New Decade, New Approach as a way of working, and, in all the strategies that I will be taking forward — they were discussed earlier — objective need will be at the core. Co-design and co-production with those groups that are mostly impacted will also be at the heart of that, and I will outline plans on how we will knit objective need into them and what the approach will be.

Mr Boylan: To follow on, in the absence of an anti-poverty strategy, how does the Minister intend to tackle poverty in the interim period?

Ms Hargey: My Department tackles poverty in a range of ways, not least through recent moves around extending the existing welfare mitigations. One of those areas was the bedroom tax, and that has been extended indefinitely so that there is no cut-off date to the mitigation.

I have also closed the loophole for those who have a change of circumstances regarding the issue of the bedroom tax. I am also bringing forward regulations to extend the other existing mitigations. In the coming weeks, I will outline my approach to the wider social security issue and how it impacts on people the most. I will set out a way forward for how we engage with those on the ground who are impacted by this and how we work with support organisations, such as the Cliff Edge Coalition, the Human Rights Commission and, obviously, Professor Eileen Evason and Kevin Higgins, who were involved in the first round of mitigations. We have an extensive neighbourhood renewal programme and an area-of-risk programme that we will review. Those target the top 10% most deprived communities.

Other programmes include the affordable warmth scheme, which looks at fuel poverty. There is also the issue of social supermarkets. I am also looking at trying to develop a cooperative development hub in the time ahead to look at cooperative development and the idea of community wealth-building. We will also start, as soon as possible, to take forward the anti-poverty strategy and do some stakeholder engagements in the coming weeks and months to make sure that we speed up the introduction and implementation of that policy.

4.15 pm

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn, and questions 1 and 7 and questions 2 and 13 have been grouped for answer by the Minister.

Livestock Farmers: Coupled Payments

1. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether he is giving consideration to coupled payments for livestock farmers, particularly in relation to young cattle destined for beef production. (AQO 136/17-22)

7. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans he has to bring forward a replacement to the common agricultural policy. (AQO 142/17-22)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 7 together.

I am looking at what future payments can do to support sustainable farming in our agricultural landscape. In doing that, I will give consideration not just to coupled payments but to all types of support that could be available. In relation to coupled payments, we have to take into account the provisions of the Northern Ireland protocol of the withdrawal agreement, which will put a limit on the amount of support that can be linked to production in Northern Ireland. Those limits are still to be determined, but they are likely to be similar to the limits under the common agricultural policy, which currently range from 8% to 15% of the total allocation for a member state. There will be ongoing consultation with farmers and other stakeholders as policy is developed in this area.

Mrs Barton: While the support that has been provided gives a degree of stability to the farming community, what steps will you put in place in preparation for post-2022 to plan for the allocation of future funding to ensure the continuation of that stability for the agricultural community?

Mr Poots: The first element of achieving that stability is to achieve a similar amount of money, if possible. Obviously, that has happened for the year 2020. Moving forward,

we will contend that that is what Northern Ireland agriculture needs. The second element of having stability is to identify how we distribute that £293 million or the amount that we get. I want to see as much of that as possible going to productive farms, as opposed to people who own large quantities of land but do not do work on it. I want to encourage younger people into farming. Obviously, they do not have large tracts of land or land banks, so we need to incentivise them. All of those things need to be looked at. It will be for me, in conjunction with the Committee and the House, after discussion with the various stakeholders, to identify a way forward.

Mr McAleer: I note the Minister's comments about the coupled payments. Will the coupled payments that he is referring to be in addition to the area-based payments, as opposed to being instead of them?

Mr Poots: Area-based payments will remain: let us be clear about that. That will always be a proportion of the payments. It is about how we distribute other elements of that and whether we can reduce the amount that goes to area-based payments and use more of it to encourage production-based, particularly for young people who want to come home and engage in farming. Many young men and women across the country would enjoy a farming career but do not own land, whilst there are others who own land but do not want to farm. I want to encourage the people who want to farm, not the people who want to own land.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I should have said, "Topical question 5 has been withdrawn"; I did not withdraw Mr Durkan's question without his permission. Questions 2 and 13 have been grouped.

Bovine TB: Eradication Measures

2. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, considering the bovine tuberculosis (bTB) programme in 2018-19 cost £40.18 million, of which £23.6 million was paid in compensation, what further measures will be taken to eradicate the ongoing problem of bTB and mitigate its effects to the local farming sector. (AQO 137/17-22)

13. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on bovine tuberculosis in Northern Ireland. (AQO 148/17-22)

Mr Poots: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 13 together.

I am keenly aware of the financial and personal costs that a bovine tuberculosis outbreak has on local farming families and businesses. I am also extremely conscious of the large amount of public money that is spent on tackling TB in Northern Ireland each year. I am pleased to report that, as a result of declining disease levels, the compensation bill is expected to fall to around £18.5 million this financial year. However, an overall bTB programme cost of £36 million is still far too high. Therefore, implementing new measures as part of a clear strategy to reduce bovine TB in Northern Ireland is a key priority for me.

Over the past couple of years, my Department has been developing a new bovine TB eradication strategy in response to the recommendations made by the independent TB strategic partnership group in 2016. The Department's response to those recommendations was the subject of a public consultation from November 2017 to February 2018. The strategy proposes to reduce bovine TB levels by comprehensively addressing all the recognised key factors in the spread of the disease. It makes recommendations covering six key areas, ranging from herd health management and research to more complex issues such as compensation levels and wildlife intervention that will require public consultation and new legislation. Officials will shortly present me with detailed options on the proposed strategy recommendations that I will consider with a view to implementing them as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr Dunne: Does the Minister recognise the severe impact that TB has on the dairy sector and on farmers who have lost high-quality pedigree milk cows from their herd? Will he outline what is being done to reduce the risk of transmission of the disease from wild animals?

Mr Poots: Yes, I recognise it. I know farmers who have lost hundreds of animals, and the damage to them mentally and the stress caused are huge. In many cases, the family line of the animal has been in the herd for 20 or 30 years and the farmer has been developing those genetics for many years. Excellent cows are being removed from the system, but they are not removing the source of the problem.

The science is there. We are able to link badgers and other wildlife, including deer — but badgers, in particular — to that particular type of TB. There is a wide range of TB across

Northern Ireland. You get a different source of TB in mid-Down from that in south Down, that in Armagh, that in Fermanagh and so forth. Each type can be linked to the wildlife in each area. We have some very high concentrations of badgers, and they have very high levels of TB. It is in the interests of the welfare of both the bovine and the wildlife population to ensure that we eradicate the TB, and we are not doing that by just killing the cows.

Mr Irwin: The Minister is acutely aware of the situation with TB, but does he accept that the test that we use today is the same as the test that was used 50 and 60 years ago? There are new technologies and new tests being looked at: will the Minister undertake to look into those? We are told that some of the new technologies and tests can clear out TB at a much faster rate.

Mr Poots: We are spending £24 million on the testing, which is on the veterinary side of things and is a huge proportion of the money that we spend on trying to control TB. Over quite a number of years, that has been rising. Thankfully, the rate has fallen in the past couple of years after new measures were put in place. There is little more that can be asked of the farming community; it is for the veterinary side to do its bit and the political side to do its bit. That involves making tough decisions, maybe controversial decisions. Nonetheless, they are decisions that will improve the welfare of the wildlife population and the bovine population and, at the same time, reduce the spend from the public purse. To me, that is the wise way of dealing with the issue.

Ms Sheerin: I note that the Minister stated previously that he was considering a wildlife intervention. Is he minded to consider a wildlife intervention similar to that which has been implemented in the Twenty-six Counties?

Mr Poots: I remember being in a meeting with Simon Coveney when he was Agriculture Minister and I was Environment Minister. At that stage, they had only started the process. The evidence base now exists in the South of Ireland. It is an evidence base that we are happy to use, and I have a preference for what is being done in the South of Ireland over what is being done in England. I do not think that there should be a widespread cull of badgers. There should be a targeted cull so that, where the evidence base exists and the veterinary people can identify the source of the problem that is causing devastation in the bovine herd, we can do something about it. Where there is no evidence base that that exists, we should

not cull the wildlife. I would be totally opposed to that.

Miss Woods: With regard to the Department's response to the TB strategic partnership group's recommendations to eradicate bovine TB and given the strong opposition from wildlife trusts, conservation organisations, academics and the general public, will the Minister rule out the culling of healthy badgers?

Mr Poots: Essentially, that is what I have just said. Our target should be the areas with badgers that have been extensively contaminated with TB. The science — the work that has been done behind the scenes — indicates that we have had really significant breakdowns in the bovine herd. When an analysis of the badger population has been carried out, it has been found that it has an even greater intensity of TB. I make a plea to the House: if you are really concerned about the welfare of the wildlife, why not remove the wildlife that spreads infection constantly to other wildlife? That is what is needed here. We need to deal with the problem. We have, largely, a wildlife-to-bovine spread. There could be some bovine-to-wildlife spread, but we are removing the bovines; we are not removing the wildlife. It is nonsensical, it is expensive and I do not believe that it is in the interests of the farming community or, indeed, of the environmentalists who want a healthy wildlife population in our country. I want a healthy wildlife population in our country. I have badgers on my property, and I would not let anybody touch them, because they do not cause problems. However, two or three miles up the road, others are plagued with TB coming from the badger population in that area, and something needs to be done for those people.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for highlighting the problem that exists in wildlife and how TB can adversely affect wildlife as well as our farmers. The Minister mentioned deer: has there been any testing or consideration of testing deer herds in Northern Ireland or, for that matter, any wild deer that may have been found dead at the roadside to establish whether this is a problem in the deer population in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: The deer population is not as extensive as the badger population, but deer are known to be carriers of TB. I am interested in looking at that because testing is not currently carried out on domesticated deer. I will raise that with my Chief Veterinary Officer and his team. Among the real spreaders of TB are llamas and alpacas. People import them,

thinking that they are nice and cute. However, the fact that they spit quite a lot causes considerable spread of TB, if they happen to have it, so they can be very contagious. That is something to be cautious about.

Landfill Waste

3. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of ongoing opposition to an incinerator at Hightown quarry, Mallusk, what consideration his Department is giving to alternative approaches to managing landfill waste. (AQO 138/17-22)

Mr Poots: The current Northern Ireland waste management strategy focuses on moving waste up the waste hierarchy away from landfill, and that includes recovery such as energy from waste, recycling, preparing for reuse and waste prevention. Legislation and initiatives arising from the strategy have contributed to a significant increase in the tonnage of local authority-collected municipal waste that has been diverted from landfill, especially to recycling, in recent years.

During 2019, the Northern Ireland household waste recycling rate surpassed 50% for the first time, which meant that the EU and waste management strategy target of 50% recycling by 2020 has been met ahead of schedule.

4.30 pm

I am determined to build on that success and reduce the amount of residual waste. The current £23 million household waste recycling collaborative change programme provides financial support to local councils to increase recycling rates further and improve the quality of recycling. To date, I have made £3.45 million available for four projects. Ideally, I wish to see waste minimised and any waste that does arise to be recycled. However, for the foreseeable future, a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's residual waste will have to undergo residual waste treatment and be sent to energy-from-waste facilities that extract at least some value from the waste through energy and heat. In that context, I am considering the strategic and long-term needs for residual waste management in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that he will be aware of my ongoing opposition, and, indeed, the cross-party opposition, to the proposed incinerator at Mallusk. He may be aware that I have

requested a meeting with him, along with No-Arc21, to discuss the need for any such facility.

How much waste is currently going to landfill and how much to Arc21?

Mr Poots: I am pleased to say that, as a result of the work that has been done, the figures for waste going to landfill have been coming down, and coming down quite steadily. Between 1 October 2018 and 30 September 2019, 26.5% of all waste went to landfill. That equates to 264,795 tons. Arc21's share of that is 182,506 tons, so the Arc21 area is currently producing 30.7%. Obviously, there is work to be done in the Arc21 area if the overall level for Northern Ireland is 26.5% and its level is 30.7%. More work can be done by Arc21 to reduce the amount of residual waste that is in the system.

Mr Boylan: Will the Minister commit to an ambitious strategy and targets for circular resource usage, recycling and upscaling of composting in the upcoming environment strategy? Does he feel that those are the best measures by which to reduce waste overall?

Mr Poots: I know that the Member has had an interest in the issue for a long time. It is something to which I am totally committed. When I was previously Environment Minister, we were recycling 30% and were told that we could not get to 50%. We brought about the reduce, reuse and recycle campaign, which helped us to achieve the 50% level that we are at now.

The circular economy seeks to change the focus of waste management from resource management to resource efficiency. That is critical to maximising the value of the waste resource and the impact of its use on the environment. We are promoting several initiatives that encompass the principles of the circular economy. Significant work has already been done on waste prevention and recycling initiatives. Another example is the prosperity agreements that are being developed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency with businesses. The agreements promote those circular activities and resource efficiency once again, while simultaneously ensuring positive business growth and development.

Dr Aiken: The Minister will be aware of the all-party opposition to the Hightown incinerator. Will he, unlike his predecessor, commit now and state categorically that he will not ask the Executive to subsidise perversely the amount of waste that may not have gone to the Hightown incinerator, in such a way that they would have

been asked to subsidise Arc21 for renewable heat energy that was not going to produce any renewables, any heat and definitely not any energy?

Mr Poots: What I will commit to is to reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfill. We will ensure that we continue to increase the 50% figure. The composting that Mr Boylan referred to has been very successful. We need to extract as much out of that as possible. We need to continue to narrow and narrow the amount of residual waste that exists in Northern Ireland to a very small core.

Mr Dallat: I extend my good wishes to the new Minister and welcome his commitment to reducing landfill. Alternatives sometimes present their own problems, not least in the agriculture industry. Will the Minister outline his proposals to work with the farming industry to ensure that high levels of ammonia nitrates are reduced? Does he have the resources to do that?

Mr Poots: More resources, please. I will always take a few pounds to help you achieve what the Assembly wants to achieve, which is less pollution in our environment, greater use of nutrients for the good, more waste recycling for the good and more waste being resourced to produce energy. We will do all those things, and the more you can persuade Minister Murphy to send us a few pounds, the easier it will be for this Minister to achieve it.

Mr Blair: Is the Minister actively considering, in addition to the public interest and the opposition referred to in the original question, the public expenditure element of the arguments about the Mallusk site? In relation to value for money, is he considering the fact that Northern Ireland may not need a number of these facilities and that alternatives already exist? In addition, the structure of waste management currently —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member is allowed one question.

Mr Blair: — used in local government may not be effective, and also —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. Order. The Member is allowed one question. He is attempting three. *[Laughter.]* I think the Minister got the gist of what the Member was driving at.

Mr Poots: Outline business cases are done on the economics of all these things, which are for

the Department of Finance to review. The Member makes a point that will be considered by people, particularly in the Department of Finance, that these things need to stack up financially. In Northern Ireland, we have had too many schemes that have not delivered and been very expensive to the public purse. We need to stop doing that and ensure that we always spend money wisely.

Ms Bailey: It is great to hear about all the initiatives and how recycling rates have grown. Obviously, incinerators need waste — they need to be fed on waste — but we also have to meet waste reduction targets. Rather than just recycling or circular economies, will the Minister give us more detail on what we are doing to reduce our waste in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: I talked to my departmental officials and indicated that I want us to work on achieving a target of no plastic going to waste over the next five years. We need to look at fairly significant aims if we are to tackle the issue. Ten years ago, people thought that 50% was a significant aim, and that has been achieved. Let us achieve more, in all areas of recycling. Indeed, let us achieve more in all areas of producing waste that is not needed in the first instance. Many large supermarkets and other bodies use far too much packaging. We need to reduce packaging and challenge people about the packaging that they are producing in the first instance.

Coastal Waters

4. **Dr Aiken** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in Great Britain on the preservation of Northern Ireland's coastal waters for local fishing vessels. (AQO 139/17-22)

Mr Poots: I discussed the introduction of the Fisheries Bill in the House of Lords with George Eustice MP, now Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Fisheries Bill provides a new policy framework to allow the UK to manage its fisheries as an independent coastal state. The Bill includes provisions on access to fisheries and the regulation of foreign fishing boats. In future, EU and other non-UK fishing boats will have to comply with the terms of any access agreement that has been agreed between the EU, or their flag state, and the UK. The UK Government want to ensure compliance with access conditions by extending the current licensing arrangements for UK fishing boats to foreign fishing boats as well. In that way, we can

control who is fishing, where they can fish and what they can take from our waters. During 2020, the UK Government and the EU will hold talks about a new fisheries agreement, and that will include any future access to each other's waters. In that regard, I advised Minister Eustice that the Northern Ireland fishing fleet has worked hard to become the most active in the Irish Sea and that I expect it to benefit from any future agreement with the EU.

Dr Aiken: Can the Minister outline any discussions he has had with the Royal Navy, the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency or the Isle of Man Government to protect our waters from foreign vessels that could fish in our areas from 1 January next year?

Mr Poots: Discussions with those bodies will lie with Westminster as opposed to me. I believe that it is very important we have the right level of protection for our fishing boats and our fishing waters to ensure that people who fish there and who use and take that resource we have and own are there properly and that people who are there illegally are dealt with in the appropriate manner.

Ms Ennis: Does the Minister intend to ensure that EU funding for local fishing vessels will be protected in the fisheries Bill? If so, can he provide details?

Mr Poots: I know that the Member represents two fishing ports. It is important we recognise the needs of the local fishing community. They should have access to be able to carry out their fishing, because over the last 30 years, we have seen decline, decline, decline in our fishing community. At this moment in time, the message coming from the European Union is that it wants to see more decline in the Northern Ireland fishing industry. It wants all the fish that are landed to go through a customs check because they have been caught in UK waters and landed in the single market. They want to charge tariffs on fish caught in the Irish Sea and landed in Northern Ireland. I find that unacceptable, and I have already challenged our Government on how they will stand up to the EU. I certainly will not be found wanting in standing up to the EU. It has pillaged and raped our waters for years, and we will not tolerate that kind of action, which will destroy our fishing communities even further than they have been to this point.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McGrath: What discussions has the Minister had with his counterparts in the South

about shared fishing grounds beyond the EU agreements?

Mr Poots: I raised that with Minister Coveney, but Minister Coveney cannot speak to me because Minister Coveney does not have authority over his own waters. That has to be done with the European Union. I wanted to discuss the matter with Minister Coveney, but, because he is a subservient subject of the European Union, he was not able to have that discussion.

Ms Armstrong: I will follow that up by asking the Minister whether he has had any clarification at all about where the border will be in the Irish Sea.

Mr Poots: Given that all the waters between Scotland and Northern Ireland, and England and Northern Ireland, are UK waters, they will all count. You could catch a fish 100 metres from the shore and the EU would want you to go through a customs arrangement. I hope that it will change its mind and that it is just a negotiating position.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Mark Durkan. Be mindful that we have about two minutes.

Milk Exports

5. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what discussions have taken place regarding the continuing export of milk to the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 140/17-22)

Mr Poots: During preparations for the UK's exit from the EU, my Department's regular, routine engagement, which includes conference calls, emails and meetings, continued at a technical level with the dairy industry, DEFRA and DAFM. During the transition period following the UK's exit from the EU, the export of raw milk from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland continues as previously. After the transition period, under the Northern Ireland protocol, raw milk will still be able to be exported to the Republic of Ireland without tariffs or additional checks.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for that answer. I had a wee bet with my colleague here that I could get the Minister to say "Derry". *[Laughter.]* This is obviously an issue of huge concern to dairy farmers. *[Laughter.]* Is the Minister in a position to give them any reassurance or confidence that he has had negotiations with

the host country and that it will continue to accept bulk imports?

4.45 pm

Mr Poots: I will be perfectly honest: I do not want to see the milk processed in the Republic of Ireland; I want to see it processed here. I want the jobs to be here. I want to see milk plants in Artigarvan, which is not far from the Member's constituency, actually upping the amount of milk that is processed there. Too many large conglomerates have moved in, bought up milk plants in Northern Ireland, closed them down, taken all of the stuff south of the border and pay the milk farmers far too little for the good product that they produce. Milk farmers are not making money, as things stand, because we have two or three big conglomerates taking the milk off them and taking it down south. The conglomerates and the supermarkets are doing very well; meanwhile, the farmers struggle.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for "Pundonderry" for being very quick in his question. We move on to topical questions.

Farmers: Mental Ill Health

T1. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking to tackle a 2020 farming reality, which is that a survey last year suggested that 81% of young farmers believe that mental ill health is the single biggest problem facing farmers today. (AQT 111/17-22)

Mr Poots: It is not just young farmers but all farmers who face the pressures: pressures of debt and poor cash flow and pressures that are outside their control, such as the weather or, sometimes, disease breakdown, which is outside their control and is transmitted to their herds. It has proven to be a very pressurised industry. It has also proven to be a very isolated industry. Many people work day after day and have only the company of Radio Ulster or Cool FM or whatever; they are not having a two-way conversation with people. Farmers operate in very challenging circumstances and, living in a rural area, can lack contact with others. Sometimes, the younger farmers have better opportunities because they are more up to date with social media and have the modern technology to engage in that.

We have a series of things, such as Farm Family, Focus Farms and rural support, that offer support in mental health for farmers and

people who engage in such activity and face challenges. I always encourage people to look to those groups, because they have good knowledge of what is going on. I have spoken to Minister Swann to offer my support and to do anything I can not just for farmers but for rural mental health in general. We will work collaboratively on that, which is something that he is willing to do.

Mr Butler: The Minister stole my thunder for my supplementary question. Is the Minister satisfied with the strategies that are currently in place in the Department of Agriculture for tackling mental ill health and suicide prevention?

Mr Poots: I do not think anybody can be satisfied when, across the Province, we lose round about one person every day through suicide. That is what it was at the worst of the Troubles and when road accidents were taking that sort of number. We could not tolerate the Troubles, rightly, and we could not tolerate those numbers of deaths on the roads, so we should not tolerate those numbers of suicides. The House cannot solve all of this ourselves, but we, in conjunction with others, can certainly help in reducing the prevalence of this awful thing that happens in our society.

Food Quality Regulations

T2. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussions he has had with the agri-food sector about post-Brexit food quality regulations. (AQT 112/17-22)

Mr Poots: I met some sectors, but not all, post Brexit. One of the things that we have discussed is the integrity of the UK market beyond Brexit. Ultimately, if something enters the European Union, it can make all of its passage through that single market, and, once it gets to Northern Ireland, it is still in the single market but can then enter the GB market, because we are part of the UK. There are significant problems in that.

The Member asked about the quality of materials that are here. I think, from discussions that I have been having, that, even if GB breaks away from European regulations, it will seek equivalence on these issues. That is not a done deal; those are discussions that are taking place. In any event, as a result of the protocol, we will remain with EU regulations in Northern Ireland, so nothing should change.

Ms Dillon: Minister, what conversations have you had with the British Government about

that? I am sure that you are well aware — we can make as much politics out of this as we want, or we can be real about it — that the agri-food sector is genuinely concerned about what will happen with food quality. What discussions have you had with the British Government to ensure that regulations do not break with EU regulations on food quality?

Mr Poots: Today, I had an IMG meeting with colleagues from Scotland and Wales, and representatives from the national Government were in attendance. Next month, we will focus on that very issue; for example, food that may have been treated with hormones or is GM and so forth. Those are all issues of public concern, and, consequently, we need to identify them as we do deals with the rest of the world, so that we compete on a level playing field. The last thing that Northern Ireland needs is produce that is not as good as ours coming in and undercutting our quality produce and a product that is less good being offered to people as a result.

Flooding: August 2017

T3. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, after congratulating the Principal Deputy Speaker on his new role and welcoming the Minister back to ministerial office and wishing him well in his role, for an update on what action has been taken to support those farmers who suffered incredible losses as a consequence of the devastating floods of August 2017, given that he will be aware that, following that flooding in the north-west, many constituents in those rural communities, particularly the Glenelly valley, faced significant financial hardship, with no form of redress or support provided to them in the absence of these institutions, with Mr McCrossan having had many meetings with permanent secretaries Noel Lavery and Denis McMahon in the absence of a Minister, who assured him that, when a Minister was in place, funding would be provided. (AQT 113/17-22)

Mr Poots: That matter was raised with me by the farmers' union, and it has been raised by other constituency colleagues of Mr McCrossan. I know that the farmers' union visited Glenelly the day after the flooding happened. They were just astonished at the amount of water that was coming downriver, the damage that was done to fencing and the large quantities of silt on the grassland — absolutely choking it — that had to be cleared. I know that the farmers had to carry out extensive work and to pay out a large amount of money. We

continue to discuss this in the Department to see whether we can find a way forward.

Mr McCrossan: I know that the Minister feels strongly about this, particularly given his background in the farming sector. I was on the ground throughout that week or 10 days and have seen some of the scenes that you described. I do not know whether you have seen some of the video footage that exists. It was hugely devastating to the north-west. Minister, when Primark went on fire, the Departments closed ranks quickly and provided necessary funding for Belfast city centre. The view is that that did not happen in my constituency. Will the Minister accept that there is a clear disparity, when it comes to the north-west, for funding of crises such as that, particularly given what happened at Primark and the public funds that were allocated to the crisis that faced Belfast at that time?

Mr Poots: I accept that people in that area perhaps feel abandoned. I recognise that they have personally picked up a lot of cost without having had any recompense. It was a natural disaster; it is something that you cannot insure for. I understand all of that and accept it. At the moment, it has been suggested to me by the Department that it does not represent value for money for it, because a lot of the work has been done. If we go down the route of hardship funding, that is something that I will have to do as a ministerial direction, as opposed to having advice from the Department that I should do that. That is something that I have not ruled out doing.

Slurry Spreading

T4. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, whilst acknowledging that he cannot be held responsible for the weather, to state whether he has given any consideration to the difficulties that farmers are experiencing around slurry spreading, given that the period for spreading slurry opened on 1 February, with only four suitable dry days to do that safely since that date. (AQT 114/17-22)

Mr Poots: I spoke to a contractor who does that work extensively in the country and was not able to get out at all last week as a consequence of the weather. Yet, the month of January was an exceptionally good month. Here I am going on about the EU again, but it produced a proposal, worked with our Departments and came up with the closed period.

Blunt instruments do not cut it. We need a flexibility that prevents nitrates and phosphates getting into our waterways, because we know that they do damage, but we need to do that in a sensible and rational way. I have asked my officials to look at how we could amend the period to something that takes better account of the weather conditions. I have seen this happening all too often. We get to February and a bad spell of weather, and that leads to animal welfare considerations. As a result, someone is put in a position where they have not been allowed to spread slurry. They have obeyed the law, the tanks have filled up and it is too wet to go out. They either spread slurry and damage the environment or they do not spread slurry and end up in an animal welfare situation, which is not a good place for anybody to be.

Ms S Bradley: Given that the Minister has suggested that he is limited by nobody and master of his own destiny on this, can he give early assurance or direction to those farmers? As he rightly pointed out, it is not just about health and safety but about the pollution risk. Is there a timeline within which farmers can expect to hear some type of guidance?

Mr Poots: From now until the middle of October, we are in the open season. Nonetheless, rules apply, and people should not spread slurry in conditions such as those that we have seen over the last week — and they have not been doing so; certainly not that I have witnessed. As we move forward, I would like to have something in place for the next closed season so that we can identify a better way forward, one that observes the nitrates directive in a very positive way but also creates flexibility for the farming community so that it can better do its job. That will involve further negotiation with the European Union, and, unfortunately, I am not the master of everything. It would be very kind if the Member could give that to me.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Topical question no 5, in the name of Mr Pat Sheehan, has been withdrawn.

Trade Negotiations: Post-Brexit

T6. **Mr Harvey** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on his Department's readiness for the next stage of the post-Brexit trade negotiations. (AQT 116/17-22)

Mr Poots: My Department and the Department for the Economy are the most public-facing when it comes to EU trade. We are working

extensively on that issue, particularly the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) controls. A lot of people talked about the milk trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the run-up to the Brexit negotiations, but they seemed to forget that over 50% of goods that come into and go out of Northern Ireland happen to go to Great Britain. Consequently, we need to ensure that there are no tariffs between us and Great Britain. As things stand, that is not guaranteed. We should be totally resistant to that, because it would have a devastating impact on us if we ended up with tariffs. It is no good not having tariffs from Northern Ireland to Great Britain; we need zero tariffs between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Otherwise, it will have a devastating impact on consumers in Northern Ireland and, indeed, on business.

Mr Harvey: Does the Minister believe that Brexit will offer the fishing industry considerable opportunities?

Mr Poots: It absolutely does, because we have a rich harvest on our own property and in our own waters that we can use ourselves. However, we need sensible behaviour from all those who are engaged in negotiations to ensure that our fishermen have the right to catch, land and, I hope, process fish in Northern Ireland before it goes on elsewhere. A lot of opportunities exist for coastal towns, particularly Kilkeel, Ardglass and Portavogie, to support rural communities and to create jobs for men and women across the sector. I trust that those opportunities will be taken up and that we will see a real, dramatic difference in those communities over the next number of years, but we need people to be sensible.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up. I thank the House for indulging me. That is the first time that I have chaired Question Time, so I appreciate your indulgence.

Adjourned at 5.01 pm.

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