



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Official Report (Hansard)

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Armstrong, Ms Kellie (Strangford)  
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)  
Bailey, Ms Clare (South Belfast)  
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Beattie, Doug (Upper Bann)  
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Boyle, Ms Michaela (West Tyrone)  
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Buchanan, Keith (Mid Ulster)  
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Durkan, Mark (Foyle)  
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Fearon, Ms Megan (Newry and Armagh)  
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Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
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Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Girvan, Paul (South Antrim)  
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)  
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)  
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)  
Hanna, Ms Claire (South Belfast)  
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Palmer, Mrs Jenny (Lagan Valley)  
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)  
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)  
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)  
Ruane, Ms Caitriona (South Down)  
Seeley, Ms Catherine (Upper Bann)  
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)  
Smith, Philip (Strangford)  
Stalford, Christopher (South Belfast)  
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)  
Sugden, Ms Claire (East Londonderry)  
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)  
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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 19 September 2016

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

**Mr Nesbitt:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I am about to make a statement. I will take any point of order after the statement.

Before we start this morning, it would be helpful to remind Members about some of our procedures. I appreciate that there are a number of issues at the moment that Members are keen to pursue through the Assembly, and I will defend their right to do that. However, there is also an onus on Members to use the right procedural routes. A number of Members sought to raise a Matter of the Day this morning that was clearly out of line with what Matters of the Day are intended to be used for. Rather than continuing to have the same problem every week, I advise Members to reacquaint themselves with the ruling issued by the then Speaker in 2008. It is very specific as to the types of issues that will and will not be accepted. I am considering reissuing a similar ruling myself to be helpful to Members, but, in the meantime, the 2008 ruling is the key basis on which these decisions are made. I will support Members in proactively exercising their scrutiny role, but I also have a responsibility to uphold our procedures.

Members will know that the Executive Office is up for questions today. It seems to me that topical questions were specifically designed for circumstances to allow Members the flexibility to raise issues that have arisen since the Order Paper was agreed. However, I also say to Members that scrutiny is not all about raising issues in the Chamber on the day.

Effective scrutiny is about Members using the variety of means at their disposal.

Finally, there are a number of new dynamics in the Assembly in this mandate, and there might be issues for us to look at in the future. One thing that has not changed is the authority of the Speaker under Standing Orders. My decisions are no more open to challenge or

debate than those of my predecessors, nor do I intend to allow Members to try to draw me, as Speaker, into areas of party-political debate. However, if Members use our procedures, as they are, to pursue issues as vigorously as they like, they will have no issue with me. Let us move on.

**Mrs Long:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Is the point of order on the matter that I have just referred to?

**Mrs Long:** Yes, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I am taking no points of order on that matter.

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

**Mr Speaker:** Is the point of order on the matter that I have referred to?

**Mr Allister:** It is on the processes of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** I am taking no points of order on the processes of the House. I have made my intentions quite clear. Let us move on.

**Mr Allister:** To explain, Mr Speaker, it is about you as the guardian of the processes of the House and whether you think that it is appropriate that prerogative powers —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member —

**Mr Allister:** — should be used to upstage the House —

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member —

**Mr Allister:** — when making legislation.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Member to take his seat. Let us move on.

## Public Petition: Cancer Drugs

**Mr Speaker:** Ms Paula Bradshaw has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

**Ms Bradshaw:** I am pleased to bring the issue to the urgent attention of the Assembly. I am also thankful that the Health Minister is in attendance.

Everyone in the Chamber will at least know someone close to them who has been affected by cancer. Everyone in the Chamber knows the difficulty and stress that it can cause to families, family circles, workplaces and people in every walk of life. We cannot, therefore, fail to be aware of the crushing unfairness of denying access to drugs for people who are going through all that. At the precise time that the health service should be on their side, when they have paid the same taxes and National Insurance as everyone else in the UK, people in Northern Ireland find themselves at a blatant disadvantage purely because of where they live. Far from being helped out, they find yet another obstacle placed in their way.

The position of people living in one part of the UK having access to life-enhancing drugs while people living in another do not is indefensible and has gone on for far too long. It is a basic principle: we pay in the same, we should get the same out. The system is unequal and unjust. Small wonder that the petition that I am submitting today on behalf of the campaign struck such a chord with the public.

Let us not be diverted by any notion that money may be an issue. Health Ministers can always find allocations of tens of millions of pounds for various things when elections are on the horizon. Indeed, we found millions of pounds in the summer, without a business case, to subsidise an airline and, just this morning, we found millions of pounds to prop up a regional airport. Whatever the rights or wrongs of those decisions, the fact is that the budget required to deliver equal access to drugs is but a drop in the ocean in the overall Health and Social Care budget. As so often, it is not merely about money but about the system.

Let me say a word about Melanie Kennedy, who has been working on the petition. That remarkable woman, frankly, could have worked around the system; she could have perhaps taken a friend's address in England or such like. However, recognising the injustice and determined to fight for others as well as for

herself, at risk to her own health, she campaigned for what is right. If anyone deserves a successful outcome it is her. The courage of many other campaigners like Melanie, so many of whom are undergoing treatment for cancer or who have people close to them who are, is also remarkable. They are too numerous to mention.

We call on the Minister to look again at the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidance on access to those drugs. We would like her to make that a top priority for the Department of Health.

*Ms Bradshaw moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.*

**Mr Speaker:** I will send a copy of the petition to the Minister of Health, and a copy also to the Committee for Health.

## Executive Committee Business

### Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: First Stage

**Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):** I beg to introduce the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill, which is a Bill to make provision about liquor licensing and the registration of clubs.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

## Private Members' Business

### 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU'

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind up the debate. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr Aiken:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly, in the light of the referendum decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, endorses and adopts the approach contained in 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU', published by the Ulster Unionist Party.*

It is nearly three months since the referendum that resulted in the people of the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union. We as a party are conscious that the people of Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain in the EU — the position that we, on balance, campaigned for — but we accept that the vote taken will result in the United Kingdom triggering article 50 in the near future, possibly as early as January 2017. We have asked for this debate because we, as a responsible Opposition, wish to encourage our Government to action — any action. We have listened closely to civil society, business groups, agriculture, the university sector, the travel industry and, above all, the people of Northern Ireland, who have asked us, time and again, what is being done and what is the plan.

We note that, across the UK, the other regional Governments have already embarked on action. In Scotland, we have seen the formation of a Scottish standing council on Europe and a £100 million stimulus package. The Government there have already taken a proactive approach to getting the best deal for the Scottish people. In Wales, a similar approach is being taken, and the English regions and the city of London have been taking part in detailed discussions with Whitehall. Plans have been published, meetings are taking place and all these regions have defined what the impact of the loss of the EU means to them.

What have the Northern Ireland Executive done? They sent a letter to the Prime Minister on 10 August containing what to many, if not all of us, was a statement of the blindingly obvious.

Our Executive met the Brexit Minister — separately. Our European office in Brussels has set up more teleconferences. Our civil servants — at least some of them — are talking to one another. Oh, and we have the ear of Liam Fox. That, unfortunately, is about it.

Embarrassingly for a devolved Government, the Secretary of State has done more: he has established an advisory panel, held talks with our nearest EU neighbour and held a wide series of meetings with key stakeholders. He has regular chats with the PM and the "naughty trio" — all of which is a damning commentary on our dysfunctional non-Government. I imagine that David Davis was laughing all the way back to Whitehall, and probably still is.

A blank sheet of A4, unfortunately, is a good representation of what has been achieved so far, and our people continue to ask, "What is the plan?". There are no public discussions —

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

**Mr Aiken:** Not yet.

There are no public discussions, debates or grand committees, or even an understanding of the scale of the issues involved. Instead, we have a divided Government, pretending to give a facade of unity but still with no proposals or plans. That is why, in the vacuum that is the Government's response to the most significant event to affect our country in over 20 years, we had to take the lead and to publish our vision.

We recognise that, in Northern Ireland, our fellow Opposition party, half of the Government, the Alliance Party and the Green Party still hope that the decision to leave can be halted by the courts.

While the Ulster Unionist Party recommended remaining, we acknowledge that we must now accept the democratic wish expressed by the people to leave the European Union.

**12.15 pm**

**Lord Morrow:** I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that, in acknowledging all those who advocate what he advocates, he will be quick to mention that 85% of unionists voted against staying in the European Union. No doubt you will come to that.

**Mr Aiken:** Thank you for that.

As a responsible Opposition, we now offer a vision and a set of key asks to help prepare

Northern Ireland for the forthcoming challenges and potential opportunities ahead. It is also useful at this stage to state what those challenges are likely to be. Indeed, as the Member for South Belfast so regularly and graciously points out, we have not yet fallen off the economic cliff into recession. It is good to note that the early action of the Bank of England, which pumped —

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

**Mr Aiken:** Not quite yet.

It pumped £250 billion of quantitative easing — *[Interruption.]* — we are answering your question — into the economy, which staved off the immediate crisis. That was done by adding a quarter of a trillion to our national debt, which is a moot point. However, according to the 'Northern Ireland Economic Outlook' that was published by PwC this week, growth in Northern Ireland for 2016 is forecast to be 1.2% and is expected to slump even further to 0.3% in 2017. That is worse than the overall UK rates, which are expected to remain at 1.8% in 2016 before dropping to 0.7% in 2017. As the learned members of the Government are or should be fully aware, broad economic modelling of our economy shows that Northern Ireland GDP normally lags around 1% behind that of GB.

We as a party do not want to be accused of doing Northern Ireland down, but, instead of sticking our collective head in the sand, we need to face the reality of what is likely to occur. For a start, we are ill prepared as it is, without facing a shortfall of £500 million — perhaps closer to £1 billion — per annum in post-exit funding. We sell Northern Ireland as a great place to do business, which it can be, by pointing out that we have a highly skilled workforce, while conveniently forgetting that most CFOs read the 'Financial Times' and Bloomberg, and, when they do due diligence, which is something that at least half our Government have a problem with, they discover that our universities are underfunded to the tune of £55 million and are dropping like stones in the global rankings. We export 38% of our brightest youngsters per annum. We have the second highest costs of energy in western Europe. We have appalling infrastructure. Now, we have no plan for Brexit.

Rather than being negative — *[Laughter.]* — we need to build a more positive vision. The border between two great economic groupings can provide considerable economic potential. We have a strong case, if made properly, to become an enterprise zone that could

harmonise EU/UK trading positions. It was good to see — unfortunately, he is not here — the DUP Chief Whip's support for an enterprise zone around our great International Airport last week and Mervyn Storey's continued support for the enterprise zone in North Antrim. It is an idea that needs to be explored, and it already has the support of many business groups here.

We would also use any stimulus package to build up our infrastructure, an approach already being taken across the UK, except, of course, here. We should invest heavily in R&D, again using the borrowing potential created by large-scale quantitative easing. I can already hear the harping: "You've always complained about creating more debt" and, through the Executive's new spin doctor, "Is the money coming from the magic money tree?". Well, guess what? After the referendum, we are in an entirely new dynamic. The so-called £350-million-a-week tsunami and the so-called savings from our EU contribution are not going to go far. New ideas about funding will be needed, many of which will involve QE going to infrastructure, potentially through long-term infrastructure bonds, which are being discussed across the UK but, again, unfortunately, not here.

It is not about just economics. We have had a troubled and uncertain history with the Republic of Ireland that has been changed to a positive and growing relationship that has been hard-earned. We can, with sufficient imagination and will, create a dynamic that prevents hard borders in Newry or Cairnryan. Achieving those goals will help us, as proud unionists, maintain the United Kingdom in a manner that avoids our proud nation slipping into xenophobia and isolationism.

You also hear from at least 50% of our Government that it is too early to begin planning because article 50 has not been triggered, they have a special relationship with Downing Street, things are not so bad or the falling pound has significantly improved our economy and the manufacturing sector is strong. Consider the record over the last nine years of Sinn Féin/DUP majority government and consider whether they are ready to get the best deal for Northern Ireland or even whether they have a plan.

We ask the Assembly to endorse and adopt the approach in 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU' because, frankly, the people of Northern Ireland deserve a plan and the consideration of our Government to doing something. Our vision is the best and only framework to achieve that.

**Mr Stalford:** It is always a pleasure to follow the Member for South Antrim, for his contributions are always so entertaining. He denigrates the Government of Northern Ireland who have served for the last nine years, whilst, of course, conveniently glossing over the fact that the party he is a member of served in the same Government for that period. If he is saying that the Government failed to deliver, he must take responsibility at least for the Ulster Unionist Party's portion of their failure to deliver. A little less of the revision of history would be more welcome from the Ulster Unionist spokesperson.

Any old Opposition can produce uncoded plans: having a coded and sensible plan is the action of a Government-in-waiting. This is no Government-in-waiting. What we have seen from our friends since they published their document are largely uncoded, untested ideas that they know they will not be able to pay for. They know that the resource is not there. During the contribution from Mr Aiken, he referred to quantitative easing, so we are just going to print more money. Just print more money to pay for their ideas: that is the extent of the ambition of the Ulster Unionist Party's "vision".

Since the referendum, we have witnessed from those on the "Remain" side of the campaign a public display of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. I welcome the fact that Mr Aiken has been dragged kicking and screaming to the final stage: acceptance. I wish the same could be said for the other opposition parties because there seems to be opposition within the Opposition to accepting the outcome of the result. I do not really know what stage some of our more enthusiastic Europhile friends are at. Some are still in denial. Some are very angry, largely with the people who beat them in the argument during the campaign. Some are trying to bargain by saying, "Well, maybe article 50 will not be triggered", "Maybe this will happen" and "Maybe that will happen". Some have reached depression, and some will eventually — finally — have to reach acceptance of the decision that was taken by the people of the United Kingdom as a whole in the referendum. The sooner we get to that point, the better it will be. All parties, including those that were on the "Remain" side in the referendum, have a role to play to ensure that Northern Ireland secures the best possible outcome. That is what a responsible Government are doing, and it is what a responsible Opposition should be about.

Unfortunately, we have not seen that in the vision that has been offered to us by the Ulster Unionist Party. The truth of the matter, Mr Aiken tells us, is that his party recommended "Remain". It is true to say it did. It is true to say that the leadership of his party did. I suggest to Mr Aiken that he should take a straw poll of his colleagues sitting round him at the bottom of the Chamber. He should take a straw poll of Ulster Unionist councillors around Northern Ireland. He should take a straw poll of the members and voters who voted for the Ulster Unionist Party in recent elections. I think he would find that not only within unionism but within Ulster Unionism was the "Remain" viewpoint certainly in a minority. We have this attempt to cover the blushes —

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

**Mr Stalford:** Yes, I will.

**Mr Poots:** Is it not the case that the former Prime Minister offered the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party tea and sticky buns and he quickly acquiesced, ignoring what the will of people in the Ulster Unionist Party and, indeed, its voters actually was?

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

**Mr Stalford:** I am grateful, Mr Speaker —  
*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, order.

**Mr Stalford:** The bark from the dog betrays the fact that it has been hit. The roar of the beast gives away its guilt. I am glad and grateful —

**Mr Swann:** The flush in the face gives away even more.

**Mr Stalford:** Now, Robin. The Chief Whip needs to calm himself because he was on the same side as me during the referendum. He is responsible for party discipline, but he was at one with the Democratic Unionist Party, which I welcome.

What we have heard and seen from various parties since the referendum amounts to an undemocratic attempt to overturn the verdict that the people have given. It is in all our interests — the people of Northern Ireland and the people of the United Kingdom — that we accept the outcome and now work together to produce the best — I said the best; do not wave your document at me — possible outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland. I know that we

will hear a continuous stream of denial and anger about the reality, but the people made their decision —

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

**Mr Stalford:** — and running off to the courts will not change that. I urge the opposition within the Opposition to get with the programme and let us start working to make the best outcome for Northern Ireland.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I welcome the opportunity to debate the motion, although we will be voting against the proposal tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party.

In a strange way, it reminds me of the old story or saying about the leader standing on the hill, watching his people go by, and saying, "There go my people. I must follow them". In this case, however, the Ulster Unionist Party is not following the people of Ulster; it is following the people of England and Wales because, as you are aware, 56% of people here voted to remain in the EU. Over 60% of people in Scotland voted to remain in the EU. When the proposer outlined what the other devolved Administrations were doing, he failed to mention that the Scottish Government are proactively engaged in opposition to being dragged out of the European Union against their will. He failed fundamentally —

**Lord Morrow:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr O'Dowd:** In one moment. He failed to mention that important fact. When those from whatever Benches have the rally cry that Brexit means Brexit, will somebody please draw me a diagram of what Brexit means? To date, no one has been able to confirm what Brexit means. Even the current Government in Westminster cannot agree on what Brexit means.

Is there a done deal on Brexit? No, there is not. Is there a unified view about Brexit in what is known as the United Kingdom? No, there is not. Is there everything to play for? Of course there is. We are at the start of a journey here, which is the start of a negotiation not only about the future relationship of what is known as the UK with Europe but about the future of what is known as the UK.

At the other end of whatever Brexit means, it is quite clear that there will be significant constitutional change in these islands. In those circumstances, you can be a follower or a

leader. My party makes no apology that we see the way forward for this island as a reunified state. Socially, culturally and economically, we believe that that is the way forward. In the period ahead, however, we believe that the best place for the North is in the European Union. The best place for the North is in an island of Ireland in the European Union.

The only way to protect the farming industry, communities that rely on Peace money, businesses and the four freedoms that the Ulster Unionist Party states in its document that it wants to protect is to remain part of the European Union.

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

**Mr O'Dowd:** I will give way to Lord Morrow first.

**Lord Morrow:** I thank the Member for giving way. He is at great pains to point out what Scotland did, what Northern Ireland did, what Wales did and what England did in the referendum, but the referendum was not about that. This referendum was about the United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is an integral part. If Brexit brings one thing, it will surely bring this: it will remove the heavy hand — the dead hand — of Brussels from the United Kingdom.

**12.30 pm**

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

**Mr O'Dowd:** As I have stated in the Chamber today and previously, there is no unified position in what is known as the United Kingdom in relation to Brussels.

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

Members should be very careful about what they wish for because, if we want to continue our trading relationship with the European Union and other parts of the world, the claims that we will remove the shackles of Brussels do not stack up or add up. Indeed, the Ulster Unionist Party's document acknowledges that.

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

**Mr O'Dowd:** I will not give way any more.

The Ulster Unionist Party acknowledges that in its document. It realises that, if we are to continue to trade with Europe and the rest of the world, we will have to sign up to what are known as the four freedoms and to the

European trading arrangements. What is Brexit about then? What is Brexit about if we remain under the same legislative competencies as were there previously? What is Brexit about if we simply change the title of our relationship with the European Union? Is it about immigration? Is it about xenophobia? Is it about the rise in hate crimes that has been witnessed since the EU referendum? Is that what it is about? If that is what it is about, let us be honest with each other. People should stand up in the Chamber and say that that is what it is about.

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

**Mr O'Dowd:** No.

Agrifood and the agricultural industries need European labour. There are significant employers who will not remain here if they do not have access to European labour. Members who support exiting the European Union and support exiting in the belief that they will control immigration — pulling down the barriers and forcing thousands upon thousands of European citizens to leave these islands — must remember the impact that that would have on the agrifood industry, the agriculture industry and other industries. Also, remember what you would do to your friends in the property market who rent properties, buy properties and invest in this society. I ask for caution in the hopes and expectations around Brexit, but I will put on the record that this is not a done deal. My party will continue to campaign for the North to remain in the European Union, and we will call on others to support that. We will work with whatever Governments on this island or other islands to ensure that we remain in the European Union.

**Ms Hanna:** I appreciate the Ulster Unionists bringing this work forward. They deserve credit for at least articulating some of the issues that face Northern Ireland. We will agree to disagree on whether this is plan B or plan A. We are definitely not in the latter group, but we share some of the concerns about the conditions and investments that this place needs to enjoy. What frustrates me and many others about Brexit is the opportunity cost and the lost time.

Many of us came to the debate from the Refugees Welcome demonstration at the front of the Building, which was organised by the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), Amnesty and all. That was a massive political problem that the European Union really had to get to grips with.

Instead of diplomats, policymakers, resources and drafters spending time addressing that huge political problem that affects millions and saves the lives of millions, we are wasting our time trying to solve an unsolvable conundrum that did not have to be thrown into our future.

The Executive parties might dispute this, but it is not in the SDLP's nature to be obstructionist. We believe that, as legislators and as people elected to guard the public interest, it is firmly our duty not just to respect the will of the vast majority of the people here who voted to remain in the European Union, and for the stability, the opportunity and the diversity that that represents, but to do all that we can to prevent this unnecessary change from happening. We are not alone; senior people in every party understand that. Very possibly, Theresa May is seeking excuses not to trigger article 50. Unnecessary as we think that is, we will continue to put forward and take any opportunity that we have to prevent it from happening.

I will address the specific issues in the paper which I think are a useful overview. Many would not think that we were being too cynical to think that the Executive's continued line of, "We are not revealing our negotiating hand", is a cover for, "We did no contingency planning as we were banking on this not happening, and even if we had any ideas we could not agree on them." I notice that the Member who spoke before me did not bother wasting any of his five minutes in actually setting out how we are going to deal with this problem but, instead, threw punches all around the Chamber. Thirty seconds to update us on where our £350 million for the NHS is would not have been too long out of the six minutes that he had.

I will look at some of the issues raised. Trebling our infrastructure, regardless of our future, is vital. People look at the Republic and the advances it secured through corporation tax and fail to learn the lesson. Investors are not hanging around just waiting for the right tax deal; they want skills and infrastructure. I have said before that I am from Galway and that I drive up and down many times in the year. I drive through small towns like Athenry which has a massive number of tech jobs that our young people here deserve. Those jobs did not come just through the low tax rate, they came through investment in skills and infrastructure and, given the fact that London has effectively stolen our lunch by proposing to reduce its own corporation tax rate, the Executive have not set out how that policy will exist if we are outside the European Union.

The enterprise zone links into some of the issues mentioned. We believe that the European Union, in the main, has done well to balance the interests of businesses and employees. We would like that framework of employment law and protections to remain, and some of that can be discussed.

The issue of education and skills is as above — we deserve those 21st century high-quality jobs here. Many of the businesses that wanted to invest here wanted us as a gateway to Europe. If that gateway is not there then we do not know how attractive that proposal will be.

We wish to see financial guarantees too and we repeatedly stated that there is a lack of guarantees. Even if London shared the detailed interest in our well-being, and I do not believe that it does, there is no guarantee that the UK's economy will remain strong enough to do this.

I will not have time to cover all the issues such as research and development, innovation and the European Horizon 2020 fund. If we are outside Europe, people will need to explain how, and if, we will have access to that fund. To debate common travel and the avoidance of a hard border, we would need longer than an hour and a half, and those who say that neither of the Governments want this to change have yet to set out how they are going to keep what we have in place and how they will square that circle. The whole argument was about protecting our borders and keeping Johnny Foreigner out, but how can you do that when our near neighbour is perfectly entitled to have European consistent immigration policies? Similarly, we could not possibly begin to unpick the legal and regulatory framework, and we have not heard from those who want to get our laws back from the faceless bureaucrats. They have not set out their alternatives so —

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

**Ms Hanna:** — we welcome the Ulster Unionists having the discussion. It is more than the Executive have done but we agree that it is a bit too early to go to plan B.

**Dr Farry:** The debate is probably of most use if we see it as a take-note debate regarding the response, or lack of response, from the Executive to Brexit rather than an effort to endorse the view of one political party. There may well be some useful points in the document which do indeed reflect things that were said by my party and others and parts of

the business community and civil society. I take issue with the notion of reconciling the words "A Vision for Northern Ireland" and the words "Outside the European Union". To my mind Northern Ireland being outside the European Union is a negative. The issue is how deep and far-reaching the implications and consequences are going to be and how we can actually move to address all of them.

The document is framed at one part of a spectrum of different responses that we can envisage. First, there are the ongoing legal challenges, which are about ensuring a proper constitutional process rather than necessarily trying to stop Brexit itself. Those will work their way through the courts in due course, no doubt.

The second aspect of the responses is how Northern Ireland can influence the UK's negotiating position and seek to mitigate the effects of Brexit, and that is where this document lies in that particular spectrum. To date, the response from the Executive has been poor. We have seen the much more coherent and united response from Scotland. In contrast, we have had a letter from our First Minister and deputy First Minister, which very much reflects the lowest common denominator of agreement, and even in that letter a number of important issues were neglected. I appreciate that it is somewhat embarrassing for the DUP, having campaigned to leave, to now accept many of the points made by the "Remain" side during the referendum.

Even with that, they do not fully grasp the full spectrum of the implications for Northern Ireland.

The final point on the spectrum is whether we can work out some type of special arrangement or special status for Northern Ireland, whether that is preferential access to the European Union or as a region within the European Union. We could see a situation where, in line with the principle of consent, Northern Ireland remains a part of the UK, where we have a strong relationship with our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland but also a strong relationship with Brussels. That may well be something that is much more consistent with the fact that we are in a very particular place and a particular political situation; that we are still very much a contested state; that the people of Northern Ireland voted "Remain"; and, indeed, that we have the right to determine our own future, as reflected in the Good Friday Agreement itself.

It is worth reflecting that, even if we do not manage to have a coherent position from our

Executive in due course that it can seek to negotiate some type of special status, a special status, or rather an anomaly, will emerge by default. It is important that we bear that in mind. There cannot be a clean Brexit for the UK as a whole and certainly not for Northern Ireland. First, we share a land border on the island of Ireland that brings some particular complexities, and, secondly, people who are born in Northern Ireland have the right to be Irish citizens and, by default, European Union citizens. That is different from the context elsewhere in the UK, so it brings its own particular situation, as well.

On the effects of Brexit, there are probably four in particular that I want to highlight. First, we have the financial impact from the loss of revenue, and I appreciate that the UK as a whole may have been a net contributor, but Northern Ireland was a net beneficiary. Secondly, even if we take the UK perspective, the UK had much more to gain from its ability to trade and its location for inward investment. Today, we have seen some very difficult economic speculation. Whenever we see the figures for the UK as a whole moving in the wrong direction, Northern Ireland is structurally quite a number of points of a percent behind in many respects, so there is a danger there.

Thirdly, we have the complications around the border, and unless we have the softest of soft Brexits, we will see a situation where there is a different regime for immigration and trading between the Republic of Ireland, as part of the European Union, and the UK. That has to be policed in some manner. So we could see policing done on a line across the island or down the Irish Sea. If it is done down the Irish Sea, then we are looking at one massive anomaly to handle, and that is before we even come to the implications for the Good Friday Agreement and the balance of relationships that were carefully set out in that document and that very much depend upon the European Union facilitating the freedom of movement, the immigration policy and trading policy. There is a danger that that now becomes unpicked, with massive consequences for our political future.

**Mr Lyons:** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate today. I suppose we will start off with the positive; that is one good thing that comes from the motion before the House.

It is interesting to reflect, though, is it not, on the debate that took place here in the days after 23 June. I remember the debate that took place in the House. I remember the prophets of doom. I remember those who were saying that all sorts of terrible things were going to happen to jobs

and the economy, and, indeed, I remember our good friend Mr Aiken — Mr Recession himself; "deep recession" are the words that he used, actually. That, of course, has not come to pass. "Oh, but of course", people say, "that is not going to happen now; we mean that is going to happen later on, when Brexit comes". But the goalposts have been moved a little bit already in regard to this, so I think that the Members sitting on the Benches at the end of the Chamber will understand why my party will not be supporting the motion today. Yes, the Members may not like to hear that, but I doubt that they are surprised, because what we have in front of us here is not a vision at all. It is platitudes; very little on substance —

**Mr Nesbitt:** It is better than yours. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Lyons:** Yes, yes; I have not produced a plan, but I am not the Opposition — *[Interruption.]* I am not the Executive, either.

#### 12.45 pm

The Ulster Unionist Party loves to say that the Executive have done nothing to prepare for Brexit. It does not know what is going on because it did not take up its ministerial positions. It decided not to be part of a Government that are instructing their officials to prepare and meeting other Government Ministers and preparing for the challenges and, indeed, the opportunities that can come from Brexit. That is what this document is very light on; there is nothing in here about the opportunities. Yes, it talks about some of the challenges that we will face and it asks for some answers, but there is nothing about making the most of the opportunities that can come from Brexit. That is why we cannot support it. There is no vision in here whatsoever, so we will not —

**Mr Poots:** I thank Mr Lyons for giving way. Is it not important to set out a vision in advance of an election and then put that to the people, as this party did? The Ulster Unionist Party put a vision of some kind to the public, but that was rejected, and that is the position that we are in today. The DUP has a vision that has been accepted by the public, and we will work that through.

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

**Mr Lyons:** Mr Poots is absolutely correct. The Ulster Unionist Party put a vision for the people of the country ahead of the Assembly election, and that vision was rejected. It did not put a

vision for the EU before the EU referendum because it was so badly divided on it that it did not have one and the party was all pointing in different directions.

We are very clear in regard to our position: we believe that the United Kingdom as a whole is better off outside the European Union. We have seen already how the scaremongering from other parties in this House and, indeed, other parties across the UK, has been found to be completely false. So, we are now trying to make sure that we get the very best deal for the people of Northern Ireland. We will work with the European Union, we will work with Her Majesty's Government, and we will even work with other parties in this Chamber to ensure that we get the best deal that we can. I will give way once more.

**Mr Stalford:** I am grateful to my friend for giving way. Unfortunately, the Member for South Belfast would not give way to me, but when she refers to people who voted to leave the European Union as being about getting at Johnny Foreigner, do you agree with me that that is precisely the type of sneering, arrogant comment that cost "Remain" the referendum; sneering at ordinary voters and accusing them of being closet racists because they did not vote the way that you wanted them to vote?

**Mr Lyons:** Mr Stalford makes a very good point because a lot of people like to say that the result of the EU referendum was entirely because of immigration. That was not the case at all. In fact, that shows how out of touch some people are.

**Ms Hanna:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyons:** I will finish my point first. That shows how out of touch some people are. The people that I spoke to on the doorsteps had concerns about immigration and our borders, but they also had concerns about where our money was being spent in Europe. They also had concerns about our ability to be outward-looking and to trade freely with the rest of the world. So, for Members to say that some kind of xenophobic, inward-looking people enabled this result to happen shows just how out of touch and how wrong they are. On that point, I will give way to Ms Hanna.

**Ms Hanna:** The Member will note and Hansard will show that I referred to the campaigners and campaigns that focused on immigration issues as well as the mystery £350 million, and I note that still none of you has updated us on that, but will the Member agree that at no point did

the "Leave" campaign condemn those racists? At no point did anybody stand up during the campaign and protest against xenophobic signs showing lines of people queuing up at the border of an entirely different country. Will the Member agree that the position that you took in your August letter was a U-turn when you finally acknowledged the need for migrant labour here, and will you outline why that need was not outlined during your campaign?

**Mr McAleer:** I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on the motion. Our membership of the EU has a wide and significant impact on our lives. I will speak briefly on infrastructure, rural development and agriculture.

In the North, throughout Ireland and the EU transport is crucial for the free movement of goods, services and people.

That is reflected in our PFG framework, and also in one of the most recently published White Papers from the European Union, 'Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area', which sets out a long-term strategy to make the EU transport system more efficient. Central to this is TEN-T, the trans-European network. TEN-T is a multibillion-pound pot used for the funding of intermodal networks throughout the EU. The objective is to decrease the bottlenecks between EU member states to enable the free flow of goods, services and people. One of the objectives is to have the network created by 2030. Obviously, from our perspective, that begs the question: if the exit happens, what will our access be to that pot? What will happen to this part of Europe as the rest of Europe develops a comprehensive TEN-T network of ports, rail and roads? The danger is that, on the periphery of it, we could be more isolated and left behind.

Quite significant funds have come from the EU over the course of the last 10 years for infrastructure — in the region of £100 million. That includes £58 million in TEN-T projects for the likes of the A8 and the development of the transport hub in Belfast. We know that there are projects, such as the York Street interchange, which are eligible for TEN-T funding. Others, like the A2 and, indeed, the A5 and the A6, are part of the TEN-T comprehensive network — not eligible for the entire main pot, but eligible for parts of it as they are part of the comprehensive network.

Last week at the Infrastructure Committee, we heard from Dr Grieve about the greenway strategy and how INTERREG V will be eligible to develop a greenway network throughout the North. Recently, in County Monaghan, €4

million was secured for their greenway, to bring it right to the border at Middletown in County Armagh. In leaving the EU, questions are raised about our access to pots of money such as that for infrastructure projects.

I turn to rural development. It is important to point out that 87% of farmers' income in the North is single farm payment. Single farm payment is just under a quarter of £1 billion per year. A pot was negotiated during the recent CAP reform in the region of £2 billion, right up to 2020. It begs the question: if the exit happens, where does that come from? Where does 87% of the farmers' income come from in the context of exiting from the EU?

On top of that we have the £623 million rural development programme, signed off in August 2015, which opened up exciting opportunities for rural areas. There is a £250 million farm business improvement scheme, £65 million for areas facing natural constraints (ANC), £10 million for rural tourism and £70 million for LEADER, which is funding for rural projects, small businesses in local areas, community projects, crèches — a whole range — and that is in the process of being delivered. I note my recent correspondence from the Minister where no guarantees can be given beyond 2018 for that, even though the budget has been agreed until 2020, which is the term of the CAP. Being a former member of the DARD Committee, I know that this rural development programme was hard fought for at European level, and had to be agreed and negotiated here in terms of topping it up. We must remember that the Tories negotiated a 22% cut in funding during this CAP negotiations. We had to bridge the shortfall here, and that fact alone — that the Tories negotiated a cut during the CAP negotiations in 2014 — proves that they do not really give a damn about here. It is fanciful that we should create these wish lists, thinking that they will somehow bridge the gap.

In conclusion, the North has one of the highest areas of unemployment and disadvantage in these islands. The danger of exiting is that we will end up being more peripheralised than ever, which will have a huge impact on our communities. We have heard from other Members that there is no such thing as an easy Brexit. The best chance that we have for the future prosperity of the North and this island is for everyone to weigh in behind the "Remain" campaign.

**Mr Smith:** Most affected, least prepared — that is the best summary of our current position as Northern Ireland faces a unique challenge as a result of Brexit. We are the only region with an

EU land border that needs to remain fully open. Agrifood is our largest industry, which will be massively impacted by any reduction in subsidy. It faces even greater danger from potential tariffs if we no longer have single market access under existing terms. Our local economy shows no sign of recovery nine years after recession. Our net income from the EU is over £500 million per year, which will be slashed if future allocations are based purely on the Barnett formula. The enormity of the task ahead should concern everyone in the Chamber. We need to understand fully the implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland and be in a position to articulate our requirements to Westminster and beyond. If we think that London will prioritise our needs of agrifood and manufacturing over those of the city of London, we are in for a rude awakening.

Furthermore, the UK Government are, frankly, making this up as they go along. "Brexit means Brexit" means whatever you want it to mean. The capacity does not exist in London to come up with all the answers. They are looking for ideas and proposals, and that is why we must be clear on our requirements and have a thought-out Brexit plan for Northern Ireland. That is why it is so unbelievable that we have seen no action, no proposals and no plan from, as we have seen today, an Executive totally split on the issue. That is also why the Ulster Unionist Party has engaged with civic society and, in the absence of anything from the Executive, developed the policy document in front of us.

Gavin Robinson, critiquing this document in the media, asked whether this was all that we had produced in two months. The irony, that his party is meant to be in government and whose silence is deafening, appeared to be lost on him. I am no fan of the SNP, but, to be fair to it, it has appointed a Brexit Minister to argue Scotland's case. It has set up a Statutory Committee to monitor progress and introduced an expert advisory body to guide the Scottish Government through the process. Our First Ministers have sent a letter. The comparison does not flatter us. Our Government need to up their game before we are further disadvantaged.

I campaigned and voted for Remain, but I accept the result and the democratic will of the UK electorate. I see no value in trying to fight rearguard actions. We need to identify opportunities from the Brexit process, and that is why our document provides a vision for the future, which is to make Northern Ireland the UK's gateway to the EU. We also need to see evidence that the Executive are getting

Northern Ireland Brexit-ready. We propose the setting-up of a Brexit war room, with the skills and capacity to identify the best policy options and priorities for Northern Ireland, so that we are well prepared and have an effective voice in the upcoming negotiations.

Our 10 key asks in the paper recognise the scale of Brexit's impact on Northern Ireland and therefore show that we need ambition if we are to put in place the transformational policies required to deliver our positive vision. The keywords are "ambition", "transformation" and "vision". That is what Northern Ireland both needs and deserves. We want a massive increase in infrastructure investment to create an economic stimulus to break out of our bottom-of-the-league growth and to provide the connectivity required for success in the 21st century. To transform our economy, we must turn all of Northern Ireland into an enterprise zone and create an emphasis on skill development to build the most skilled workforce in western Europe in our chosen industries. In recognition of our unique status, the Executive must secure guarantees that no group in Northern Ireland will be worse off financially for five years post-Brexit. To deliver our vision for Northern Ireland post-Brexit, we must have continued access to the European single market and a continuation of the common travel area with the Republic, with no hard border to GB ports and airports disadvantaging Northern Ireland.

Those are our requirements to ensure that Northern Ireland is Brexit-ready. The Ulster Unionist Party has risen to the challenge to fill the gap in leadership and direction from the Executive. No doubt some will criticise, but their voices have little credibility in the absence of their own proposals.

Northern Ireland needs a plan. We have provided one. Unless the Chamber wishes to continue as the region most affected and least prepared, I urge you to support the motion.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr Murphy:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, although I do not particularly think that the party opposite is sincere in bringing it. It cannot possibly imagine that anyone would sign up to the vision that it has put to us today. I do not think that it fully expects anyone to. To be quite honest, from looking at the demeanour of its Members over there, I think that they are here for the craic.

Anyway, the party has asked us to sign up to a vision that falls at the first hurdle, because it

asks us to sign up to a vision of the North outside the EU, which is in defiance of the mandate that the people of the North gave us during the referendum, which is to defend the position of the North inside the EU, and that is clearly what we intend to do.

When my colleague Mr O'Dowd put it to the Ulster Unionist Party that the stock answer of "Brexit means Brexit" has become a cliché, its leader waved his document as though it were the modern version of the Dead Sea scrolls and all the answers to what Brexit means are contained in it. I find that somewhat laughable, having read through the document itself.

There are no solutions in it. It is predicated on the wrong basis. It is predicated on the generosity of the British Government, who remain committed to huge cuts to public expenditure and have, over the last number of years since the Conservatives came back to power with the support of the Ulster Unionist Party at the time, decimated the budgets available to the Executive. They have reduced our public spend and put severe pressure on spending on things like health, education and infrastructure. Yet somehow the document that the Ulster Unionist Party has produced, probably over a cup of coffee on a Friday afternoon, has with a magic wand waved away its role in putting such a Government into position in the first instance and assumes that the Government will do a complete U-turn on their continued desired objective of reducing the budget deficit through huge cuts to public spending.

**1.00 pm**

It is also predicated on — other Members have pointed this out — an uncosted spending spree on the part of the Executive. A threefold increase in spending on infrastructure would be absolutely wonderful. I am sure everybody around the House would welcome a threefold expenditure on infrastructure going forward and a huge amount of expenditure on other areas. Yet the same UUP, as long ago as July, issued a statement criticising the Executive for what it considered unsustainable borrowing and spending plans. Now, they wish to raise by a level of three the expenditure on infrastructure. In particular, they criticised the Finance Minister and asked him to recognise that every pound borrowed today would mean that even more had to be repaid by future generations. They have brought a proposition to the House today and asked everybody to sign up to a vision that includes a huge amount of public expenditure that has been not costed or budgeted for, when

only in July there was public criticism from the party on that.

The UUP has also rehashed the enterprise zone proposition. Again, that comes from the 2010 document produced by, as people may remember UCUNF — that now sounds more like an accusation than a political consideration that was put at that time. Certainly, if any plaudits were to be given for the document the Ulster Unionist Party has produced today, they would be for recycling. It should certainly merit consideration for that.

Clearly, the proposition is predicated on the generosity of the British Government, but that no longer exists and has not existed since the UUP assisted in putting them into power. It is predicated on the basis of ignoring the mandate that was given to us by the people of the North to remain in the EU. It is also predicated on a completely uncosted set of spending propositions that, they know from their relationship with their former electoral partners in the Conservative Party, the Executive have absolutely no possibility of getting access to. I listened to the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party being interviewed, and he said, "Well, if there is all this more money to come, surely we could spend it on this". If that is the basis of this proposition, we are all in trouble.

I do not think that will be any surprise to the Ulster Unionist Party, and I do not think it expected anything less than that. In fairness, a debate on the implications of Brexit is welcome, albeit on the basis of a document that no one could sign up to. I am sure that, if truth be told, half the Members sitting on the Benches over there could not sign up to it either.

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

**Ms S Bradley:** First, I echo the comments made by my colleague Claire Hanna that it is nice that we have an opportunity to look at and speak to a document in the House. When I compare the document with that of the Government, I find that, of course, there is no comparison to be drawn, because there is none. We have nothing more than a letter.

It amuses me slightly to watch a debate on Brexit in the House become nothing more than a heckling and shouting match, while very good manners are demonstrated when others in government speak. It really is disgraceful that Members have come to the House today without even having an open mind to discuss how Northern Ireland will look and what the consequences will be. Why has the debate not

raised issues on single farm payments? Businesses are looking for leadership. Businesses are making decisions based on the uncertainties we face. This debate has offered nothing from the government parties to say to those people that we are even sitting down to consider what is happening. In fact, nowhere in the House can we look for an wider alleged position between the two government parties: one for "Remain" and one for exit. I say "alleged" position because I see neither party doing a whole lot about the position that it holds.

I look at them and think that the one agreed position that appears to have been adopted by this Government is "If we do nothing, the Opposition cannot scrutinise that. If we do nothing, nobody can say that we are doing it the wrong way. Nobody can say that our priorities are different from what they should be". Quite frankly, that is where we and this debate are. Nothing has been shared in the Chamber by the government parties today that is worth carrying out of the Chamber to those who have genuine concerns, those who are making decisions in the boardrooms of small businesses about whether their business will survive, those who depend on agricultural policies to keep their farm business open or those who are asking whether their sons or daughters will be able to carry on in their farm enterprise. There are no answers, there is no thinking, and no pathway has been pointed out here today that allows me to offer any assurance to any of those people.

The level of debate that has been offered here is nothing short of disgraceful. I have listened to debates in which people are very comfortable with breaking things down geographically and boastfully telling us that their constituency voted to leave, yet the mantra that this was a UK decision quickly follows. I also listened to Lord Morrow telling me eloquently about how the majority are unionists who voted to remain. He can cite that, and be dismissive of the fact that the majority of people in Northern Ireland voted to remain.

**Lord Morrow:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms S Bradley:** Yes, I will give way.

**Lord Morrow:** I think that the Member is slightly confused: I said no such thing. What I said, in addressing an issue that the Ulster Unionists were putting forward, was that the majority of unionists who were voting — 85% — voted to leave the EU. I have a high regard for the Member, but she is now treading very close

to what we have come to expect from those who voted "Remain". They want to talk down to everybody. The little people have spoken and said that they want the dead hand of Brussels to be removed. You, I, the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin should respect that.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** The Member has a minute added to her time.

**Ms S Bradley:** May I remind the Member that we are Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly? I am elected to represent the people of Northern Ireland, a truth that may sit uncomfortably with the Member when he makes his reference. I do not dismiss the majority voice of Northern Ireland. If you feel comfortable and take security from breaking it down into green and orange, do that —

**Dr Farry:** Will the Member give way?

**Ms S Bradley:** I will in a moment — but do not do it in the hope that people will not notice that this Government are doing nothing.

**Dr Farry:** Does the Member agree that there were ordinary people on both sides of the argument in the UK as a whole and in Northern Ireland? When Lord Morrow refers to 85% of unionists having voted "Leave", he has no basis for making that claim. That is an entirely fabricated statistic, just like all the other ones from the "Leave" campaign.

**Ms S Bradley:** I agree with that. We will put that into the catalogue of statistics that we can never really put our finger on.

What has come out of the debate today? If you stand on your feet to make any argument for or against Brexit and do not find yourself uttering the words "single farm payment" or words that are relevant to our business community, I ask you to please be seated and to go away and find a think tank.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** The Member should bring her remarks to a close.

**Ms S Bradley:** Perhaps the appointment of external bodies or people, which, apparently, we are not allowed to discuss because there is democracy with a small "d" on certain days, is not a get-out.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** The Member's time is up.

**Mr Agnew:** The Green Party campaigned for the UK to remain part of the EU, and it is unsurprising that that continues to be our position. Having seen a majority vote in Northern Ireland to remain, we continue to uphold that position and to seek to represent those who wish to remain. Northern Ireland did not vote to leave; Northern Ireland does not want to leave; and Northern Ireland would be significantly disadvantaged if we did eventually exit the European Union.

I listened to the debate and heard the statistic about 85% of unionism. I query that and I query continually breaking down this society into unionism versus nationalism — "green and orange", as it is often put, although there are shades of green. I look at my constituency. For those who like to view the world in such terms, it is a unionist constituency, with four unionist and no nationalist MLAs, yet a majority voted to remain. So, the statistic does not stack up under any proper scrutiny.

The motion asks us to envisage a Northern Ireland outside the EU. Let us address that. If we are to leave, how best can we mitigate the damage, as I see it, that it would do to Northern Ireland? It is important that we work together, and I know that the proposer of the motion has been constructive in cross-party discussions on how we can act together and get an agreed platform on how we should best act in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. That is why, to some extent, it may be a question of phrasing that makes the motion a bit disappointing. It calls on us to endorse an Ulster Unionist position, not an agreed cross-party position. If it is a proposal for discussion, yes, absolutely — many Members said that it was welcome in that regard — but I think that seeking endorsement at this stage is taking us a bit far.

I will address some of the aspects that I have difficulty with. I think that we will get cross-party consensus on securing maximum funding for Northern Ireland from existing EU funds and that type of issue. Then, however, there are some genuine policy decisions that we would have to make post-Brexit, if it were to happen. How do we want to address the issue of environmental protection? I am heartened by the document's call for the continued protection of our natural environment and biodiversity. That is excellent and something that we can agree to and sign up to, but the same document calls for Northern Ireland to be an enterprise zone, with the deregulation of planning. In general, planning functions are there to protect our environment. Do we want to protect, or do we want to deregulate? The two rarely go hand

in hand. In fact, the document calls explicitly for the protection of biodiversity but also for the scrapping of fishing quotas, which are designed precisely to protect our biodiversity.

In Northern Ireland, we have had the debate about corporation tax. The Green Party and I have long stood as opponents of the proposed reduction. There are further proposals to reduce taxation in this document, but, at the same time, we call for more for Northern Ireland. We go to the Government and say that we want to give back less but take more. Whilst it is not a bad place to start — it is not a bad ask, and I do not think that anyone here would disagree with our paying less in and getting more back — I suspect that we have to anticipate the possibility that the British Government will not be predisposed to that argument.

We do and can work together to make a coherent argument for why Northern Ireland should be made a special case. It was done for corporation tax and for air passenger duty, and I think that we can do it for the EU referendum —

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

**Mr Agnew:** — but we must work together and agree our asks first.

1.15 pm

**Mr Carroll:** I agree with some things in this document such as securing financial guarantees for those who are in receipt of EU funding, securing the common travel area, making sure that there is no hard border and making sure that there is increased investment in infrastructure. The document also briefly refers to the freedom of movement of labour, something that my party is resolutely in support of, particularly given the huge economic and cultural benefits that migrants bring to our society.

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

**Mr Carroll:** I will not. Indeed, our NHS would have struggled to survive if it were not for the vital work carried out by migrants in our health service. If we can have movement of capital around the world with the click of a button, the movement of human beings across the world should be a guaranteed right.

I suspect though that we would go further than the proposers of the motion. We are for the

freedom of movement of all people, be they EU, or non-EU, citizens. Today's demonstration at Stormont about the refugee crisis should serve as a horrible reminder of the reactionary role that the EU has played in creating "fortress Europe", which keeps refugees caged behind fences; which says nothing, of course, about the comments made by a Member of the House, a representative of the Ulster Unionist Party that proposed the motion no less, who thought it funny to equate refugees with dogs. Shame on the Member for such disgraceful remarks.

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

**Mr Carroll:** I will not.

That said, there is some common ground between what I might call the establishment Opposition in the Chamber and the anti-establishment socialist opposition that I am a member of on this side of the Chamber. However, I think that the difficulty and problem with this —

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

**Mr Carroll:** I will not. The problem with this establishment-style of opposition is that it does not really offer a radically different alternative to the one presented by the Executive. For example, this document calls for the creation of an enterprise zone, which, in reality, is just a slightly more right-wing version of the economic strategy outlined by the Executive. Take corporation tax; the anti-establishment opposition on this side of the Chamber has long warned that talk of reducing corporation tax would be a race to the bottom, costing working-class people and public services hundreds of millions of pounds and with only the wealthiest gaining from it. We have the evidence in front of us. Mr Nesbitt, in his party's document, suggests that we should go further and calls not for a 12.5% rate of corporation tax but for it to be lowered even further to 10% and then — who knows — maybe 8%, 6% or 5% in the future. The Executive might well have initiated this race to the bottom, but the establishment Opposition, and the Ulster Unionist Party in particular, now seem determined to take pole position in that race to the bottom. It is a failure —

**Mr Nesbitt:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I know that the Member is newly elected but, a moment ago, he made a very serious accusation and attack on a party colleague, who asked to make an intervention

to defend and explain herself. The Member did not allow it. I think that that is very poor form.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** If the Member wishes to register a complaint on that matter to the Speaker's Office in her own right, she is entitled to do so.

**Mr Carroll:** In my opinion, it is a failure that the motion merely calls for an accelerated and more extreme version of the Executive's own economic programme. There is no evidence that reducing corporation tax will be beneficial to the mass of people who live here. It will likely wipe hundreds of millions of pounds from the public sector and almost certainly lead to job losses rather than job creation.

The most important point to be made is that we live in a post-Brexit world but the contours of that have not been determined for the future. There are positives in the motion, but, all in all, it falls short of the radical alternative that we need. The kind of alternative that the anti-establishment opposition stands for —

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

**Mr Carroll:** — is one where we unite ordinary people across the North and the South and, rather than roll the red carpet out for corporations like Apple, Google and Starbucks, we make them pay.

**Mrs Palmer:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask the Member to withdraw his comments and apologise to me before I take up the opportunity to report it formally.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** That may well not be a point of order, but I suggest that, in regard to this matter, if the Member subsequently, during the debate, wishes to intervene and if he interprets your remarks to be correct, he may do so. However, if you have a complaint, as I outlined earlier, you may make it directly to the Speaker's Office.

**Mr Poots:** We are used to shrill voices, excitement and animation when it comes to discussions around Brexit. Today has been slightly less shrill, although some Members have been working themselves up quite well. We were told before all of this, in an attempt to browbeat and scare the public in the United Kingdom, that houses prices would collapse: they have not. We were told that interest rates would go up: they have gone down. We were told that food prices would go up: they have not.

We were told that farmgate prices would go down: they have gone up. We were told that share prices would go down: they have gone up. And we were told that an emergency Budget would be initiated, and it has not been.

**Mrs Long:** I thank the Member for giving way. Will he concede that we have not actually left the European Union yet? People seem to have missed that in this debate.

**Mr Poots:** The problem is that people told us that it would happen immediately; we were not going to have to wait until we left the European Union. We now see the delayed apocalypse predicted by the Alliance Party, the SDLP and others in the House. Thankfully, that has not been the case.

I heard someone speak today about farmers as if he was representative of farmers. The farmers voted heavily to get out of Europe. Nationalist farmers voted quite heavily to get out of Europe. That is the feedback that I got. They were told that they were mad, and people said, "You are going to lose out so much". The single farm payment has been guaranteed by the United Kingdom Government for this period of time, and anybody who has an ounce of sense will know that, beyond that time, the single farm payment was going to come down. The accession countries were promised in the previous negotiation that they would get more. The only way that they would get more would be if it were taken off the countries that get it now or, alternatively, if Europe were to take more money off the taxpayer to give to farmers in eastern Europe. Greater subsidies were going east, and farmers had the common sense to see that.

Farmers voted to get away from over 2,700 different regulations that applied to them as they carried out their daily activities. Farmers were sick to the teeth of being regulated by Europe. Many other businesses are sick to the teeth of being regulated by Europe. The red tape that is being applied to them is unnecessary and holds business back. Businesses will be better off outside Europe because they will have the opportunity to get on with the job in hand.

**Mr O'Dowd:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Poots:** Mr O'Dowd did not give way to me when it was requested, so I will not reciprocate kindly to him on this occasion.

People wanted rid of the shackles of Europe. People wanted democracy restored. The public

wanted democracy. In my opinion, the first line of democratic government is local government, then it is regional government and then national government. Europe is the most undemocratic element of our governance, yet on environmental issues, for example, over 80% of the decisions taken in the House are cascaded down from Europe. The public rightly voted to get out of Europe.

I am not sure where the vision is in the document. Mr Aiken did not do a great job of demonstrating much of a vision. Perhaps the person who makes the winding-up speech will show us where that clear strategic vision is.

Let us be clear: we are in a negotiation period and that negotiation will be led by our national Government. I am proud to be part of the United Kingdom and to put my faith in our national Government to negotiate on behalf of the United Kingdom as a whole. Our Executive will be consistently and constantly in contact with our national Government during those negotiations outlining the issues that are of strategic importance to Northern Ireland. It will not be done by being blasted across the media; it will be done in a very positive manner in the way that government should do it. It will be done privately and will deliver the deal for the people in the United Kingdom.

**Mr Lyons:** I thank the Member for giving way. His point was that the Northern Ireland Executive would be involved. Is it not the case that the Northern Ireland Executive are already involved, that they are having discussions with other Ministers and have told their officials to get on with the work of preparing? If the opposition parties were so good, they would have questioned our Ministers, found out that detail and would have it. That work is going on, and that torpedoes the argument that other parties have made in here, which they have got away with, that nothing is being done.

**Mr Poots:** You see, a little knowledge is dangerous, and, thankfully, the Member has dispensed some good knowledge to us. The Ulster Unionist Party has little knowledge because it decided to go outside the camp. It does not know what is going on and then tries to create speculation —

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

**Mr Poots:** — that things are not happening, when, in fact, things are happening. We will be involved in those negotiations and will deal with

Theresa May, David Davis, Boris Johnson and the key people who will be making —

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Time is up. I call Jim Allister. Mr Allister, you have four minutes.

**Mr Allister:** In the day that is in it, Mr Deputy Speaker, I regret that you have not used your prerogative to extend my four minutes, but there you are.

I have to say that, in many places, the content of the document is quite haphazard and random, but the colour scheme is excellent. However, we need to recognise that the Ulster Unionist Party has produced more than any of the rest of us. It has produced a document, which is more than any other party in the House, my own included, has produced and more — where the expectation would be greater — than the Executive have produced. Hence, of course, the rather churlish and embarrassed response from the Executive Benches in the debate. Although the document can be properly critiqued and criticised on many fronts, it is, as I said, more than anyone else has produced, least of all the Executive. Of course, that highlights the fact that we have an Executive who are pulling in opposite directions on this seminal issue. We have Sinn Féin wanting to stay in Europe and the DUP wanting to leave Europe. It is no surprise, then, that there is no cogency or coherence to anything being said on behalf of the Executive as a whole and no surprise that there is no document from them.

I am saddened that, in the debate, many of the "Remoaners" are still fighting the battle that they have lost. On the Sinn Féin, SDLP and Alliance Benches, we have had some of the Japanese soldiers who are still fighting the war in the Philippine jungle. The referendum is over. You lost. We are leaving the EU. Get over it and get into a state of mind where we will grasp the opportunities that have opened up.

**1.30 pm**

I welcome the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party, in this document, has accepted that we are leaving the EU. When we leave, all of the United Kingdom must leave on equal terms. There can be no such thing as special status that keeps Northern Ireland half in and half out. We went in as one nation; we leave as one nation. There must be no compromise on that fundamental issue.

As I indicated, some of the content of the document does not impress me. I am not impressed, for example, by the suggestion that the issuing of visas should be devolved to Northern Ireland. That should never be devolved in a united kingdom: different visa arrangements are totally incompatible with a united kingdom. There is an incongruous proposal for a peace centre. It seems to come out of the blue, for whatever reason. There is a suggestion, too, of a war room. Well, there might be some from the ranks who might be in the war room who might have a little more paramilitary or military experience than others.

What we need is a cogency of approach —

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

**Mr Allister:** — that embraces the opportunities that lie ahead.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** Time is up.

**Mr Allister:** It is not about making the best of a bad job; it is about embracing the opportunities which are manifold in leaving the EU.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank all the Members who have been here, particularly those who contributed to the debate. The first formal Opposition day is next Monday. I am pleased that the final warm-up match, as it were, was on an issue as important as the future of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom outside the European Union. I am particularly pleased to see so many members of the Democratic Unionist Party with us. I am just glad that the debate did not clash with the Conservative Party conference, because I know that they are very keen on a little champagne reception at lunchtime. No austerity for members of the DUP there. Of course, they are in bed and in Government with Sinn Féin.

All Mr Murphy can do is make a tired, jaded reference to the 2010 general election. I would say to him, were he here, that I am very confident that historians can look at our association for one general election with the Conservative Party and tell us what damage that did to the vulnerable, compared with his party's lifetime support for the Provisional IRA campaign and what that did to the vulnerable in this country.

Mr Murphy was among those who were quite disparaging of the document, which, I think he said, was knocked off:

*"over a cup of coffee on a Friday afternoon".*

We then heard Mr Allister say that he thought that it was a bit confusing. Others have also been less than complimentary. That is fine, but this is not just our work. The Ulster Unionist Party brought together a Brexit advisory panel and populated it with industrialists, businesspeople, trade unions, universities, farmers, people from agrifood processing, economists and others. Lord Morrow, from a sedentary position, asked me to name them. My point to him is this: you do not know who they are, but they know who you are — those of you who criticise their work as shoddy.

This Opposition will do two things: we will scrutinise and, where appropriate, we will offer an alternative. Scrutiny does not necessarily mean criticising; it means taking a close look, although when criticism is due, we will criticise. We are highly critical of what the Executive failed to do in the run-up to 23 June and in its aftermath. There was no contingency planning for potentially the biggest development in the United Kingdom since the Second World War. There were only two outcomes, and the Executive planned for only one — business as usual. In response to a question for written answer about contingency plans tabled by me, the First Ministers wrote back to say that they had instructed Sir Malcolm McKibbin as head of the Civil Service to start doing things. There could be no clearer proof that nothing was done in advance.

We then had the letter of 10 August. Fair enough: they wrote to the Prime Minister, defining five areas of concern. They were quite right to do so, but I have to say that those five areas of concern were as obvious on 10 June as they were on 10 August. Then, for a two-party coalition — just two parties — not to be able to put on a united front when the Secretary of State responsible for the United Kingdom exiting the European Union came to visit is a sin. A house divided has no leverage in political negotiations. I know that Mr Poots is proud that his United Kingdom Government are going to negotiate on our behalf. He said that he has every confidence in the United Kingdom Government to negotiate on our behalf and to protect the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

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

**Mr Nesbitt:** I will not be giving way. I will use my 10 minutes.

I have four words for Mr Poots: the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

**Mr Poots:** That is three words.

**Mr Nesbitt:** That is four words, Mr Poots, not three. Clearly, you were never Finance Minister, and thank the Lord for it.

We will scrutinise and offer an alternative. This, of course, is not an alternative, because there is nothing to give an alternative to, but it is the next best thing. It is built on an approach that has three legs. The first is a vision. Again, for Mr Poots's benefit, our vision is of Northern Ireland as the United Kingdom's gateway to the European Union, because we have that land border. Then, there is a plan, which is built around the fact that we need to get together the intellectual capacity and the resource to handle six sets of negotiations: those about not just our withdrawal from the EU but our new set of arrangements with it; negotiations with the World Trade Organization; negotiations with third countries; negotiations with London; and negotiations among ourselves. What are our policy priorities? What are the options? What do we want to achieve?

As Mrs Hanna said, the UK's priorities will not necessarily be Northern Ireland's. Take our universities, for example. I have heard senior members of our universities articulate the fear that, while there will be additional money for research after Brexit has been completed, it is more likely to go to the triangle of the universities in London, Oxford and Cambridge than it is to come to the two universities in Northern Ireland. The fact that Queen's is a so-called Russell Group university does not guarantee it any special status over Ulster University, as it is now called, when it comes to resource.

Mr Aiken opened the debate very well by giving a comparison between what we have failed to do and the achievements so far of Scotland, Wales, the City of London and our Secretary of State. He spoke about the importance of universities and infrastructure rather than just the agrifood sector, on which we tend to concentrate first. The voluntary and community sector will potentially lose out big time on funding.

We then had a sparkling contribution from Mr Stalford. He said that our document is uncoded and untested. What about number 6 of our 10 asks, which is the common travel area? What is untested about the common travel area? It has been around for longer than the Member for South Belfast has been alive. He said that our proposals are uncoded. Of course they are. They are not proposals to take money from one Department and give to

another in the current block grant and Budget but the asks that we should get from the UK Government to take out of what we were told was going to be the tsunami of repatriated sterling that would no longer go to Brussels if we voted for Brexit. Of course the asks are a wish list that is not fully costed. Mr Stalford is still counting the votes. He is still fighting the referendum, even though 52% of the United Kingdom said that we should come out. He was followed by his partner in government, John O'Dowd for Sinn Féin, who said that the important vote was the 56% in Northern Ireland who voted to remain. A house divided has no leverage in negotiations.

It is time to move beyond Brexiteers and "Remainers". The people of the United Kingdom have voted: they have voted that we come out. We have to seize the opportunities inherent in that situation.

Mr Lyons opened by looking to the past. He accused us of walking away in some sense from the devolved institutions, yet we all voted to create an official Opposition. If we are going to talk about disrespecting the institutions, what about the use of the royal prerogative? What is democratic about Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness — particularly Mr McGuinness, a proud republican — conferring on themselves the privileges and authority of a monarch? Queen Marlene I decided, "We will have a new Executive press secretary". What is democratic about that?

There were wonderful interventions from Mr Poots and Mr Stalford, very sneering critiques of those who sneer. As Mr Smith, my colleague in Strangford, put it, we are in the most affected area yet are the least prepared.

There has been a lot of talk about the content of the document, not about the motion. The motion is not about accepting the content of the document; the document makes it clear that these are initial thoughts. What the motion calls for is that the House "adopts the approach" in the document, which is a vision, a plan and some key asks that will be tests of whether we have achieved what we wanted to achieve. You vote for this document, or you vote for this one. Nobody has given an alternative approach. I commend it to the House.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 15; Noes 70.*

## **AYES**

*Mr Aiken, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken and Mr Nesbitt*

## **NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer and Mr Robinson.*

*The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone):** As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The next debate will commence after Question Time.

2.00 pm

*Mr Speaker [Mr Newton] in the Chair*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### The Executive Office

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call the first Member to ask a question, I remind Members to keep rising in their place if they wish to ask a supplementary question.

### T:BUC: Summer Camps

1. **Ms Bunting** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Together: Building a United Community summer camps. (AQO 236/16-21)

11. **Mr Milne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the summer camps delivered under Together: Building a United Community. (AQO 246/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** Mr Speaker, with your permission I will ask junior Minister Fearon to answer the question.

**Ms Fearon (Junior Minister, The Executive Office):** Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer Questions 1 and 11 together.

A headline action under Together: Building a United Community was to develop a pilot programme consisting of 100 summer camps. This target was achieved with 101 summer camps delivered in 2015-16. The summer camp programme for 2016-17 opened for applications on 15 March 2016, and letters of offer were accepted by 103 groups.

Summer camps are about building positive relationships among young people aged from 11 to 19 on a cross-community basis. They represent an investment of £1.2 million by the Executive, and approximately 4,000 young people have participated in and benefited from programmes this year. Along with junior Minister Ross, I have had the opportunity to visit a number of camps. The young people involved demonstrated an appetite to take an active role in shaping our society. The summer camp programme allows young people to understand each other's perspectives and make new friendships. The programme is helping to create a shared society based on good relations and reconciliation. A reunion event will also be held in early 2017 that will bring all

camp participants together and provide an opportunity to further develop friendships and celebrate achievements. I am delighted to be involved with this programme, which has provided an opportunity for our young people to get to know each other through new enjoyable and shared experiences.

**Ms Bunting:** I thank the Minister for her answer. I note that she mentioned a reunion event, but what mechanisms are in place beyond that to ensure that the established relationships are built on and maintained?

**Ms Fearon:** I thank the Member for her question. As I said, junior Minister Ross and I visited many of the camps, and it has been a hugely rewarding experience to engage with those young people and hear their views and get feedback about the friendships that they have made — friendships that have taken on a life of their own thanks to social media. The young people said that, perhaps, the residential part was the most rewarding for them, as they got to spend so much time together in a few days. Participation in the camps is evidence that young people and parents want to work together and want to build a better society based on friendship.

Last year's pilot showed us that 95% of young people made new friendships, and 85% of them wanted to stay in touch. We need to do everything that we can to facilitate that. The Member mentioned the reunion event that we are holding next year, but, beyond that, it will be important for us to get some parental feedback to see if we can get a broader picture and try to make next year's programmes even better.

**Mr Swann:** How many of the 103 camps that took place were going to take place anyway, and how many were new initiatives brought about by T:BUC?

**Ms Fearon:** All of the summer camps were new. Summer camps were held in every one of the 18 Assembly constituencies, and positive feedback has been received on all of them. The summer camps were delivered in association with the Education Authority, and the districts were based on the old education and library board regions, so the summer camps were spread across the regions.

**Mr Dickson:** I thank the junior Minister for the response she has given. I welcome what the summer camps do, particularly in creating and fostering friendships, but can she tell the House how those friendships can develop into genuine reconciliation between communities in Northern

Ireland? Is that aspect of the Together: Building a United Community summer camps being audited by the Department?

**Ms Fearon:** The summer camps were based very much on a co-design approach, and young people were involved in the development of each stage to design it in accordance with what they felt would benefit them most. They were involved from the very beginning. It is important that we focus beyond the summer camps and put initiatives in place for our young people to maintain those friendships.

As I said before, a lot of the friendships have taken shape naturally, but, beyond that, I think that it is important that we put mechanisms in place.

**Mr Milne:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. What rural-proofing measures were taken to ensure access to the summer camp programme in all areas not just in urban ones?

**Ms Fearon:** I thank the Member for his question. It has always been the intention that the summer camps would be regionally spread, and I know from my experience how important it is to give opportunities to rural communities. I have said many times before that it is not the case that rural communities do not experience community relations issues; it is just that they manifest themselves differently.

I visited a camp during the week in my area of South Armagh in Kingsmills, Silverbridge and Lislea. Some of those young people live 15 miles apart, and their experiences are very different from those of someone in Belfast or Derry. I am sure that the Member will be happy to know that there are three very successful camps in his area. The summer camp applications were assessed by regional panels with local representatives, and the highest-quality applications were accepted for funding across each of the education and library boards in the district. The need for rural proofing was very much built in to designing this year's programme, and there is a rural impact statement available now on the Executive website with the detail of that.

## **Social Investment Fund: Update**

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund (SIF). (AQO 237/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** All £80 million allocated by the Executive to the social investment fund has now been committed to projects to improve the quality of life for people living in targeted areas of deprivation. The remaining letters of offer issued last week, including commitments for the Lanyon tunnels, the St Comgall's project and the Thomas Davis project in the southern zone. Not only are all projects now committed, but delivery is progressing apace. Some 38 projects worth over £48 million have commenced delivery, and 15 projects worth £26 million are operational. That includes four capital projects that have completed construction and which are delivering vital services in local communities.

Success equates to over 800 people benefiting from paid work placements and training to support employment worth £18.5 million, and over 80 have already secured jobs; over 1,300 children and families benefiting from early intervention projects, with £5.7 million allocated to support physical, intellectual, social and emotional development; almost 1,000 children and families benefiting from dedicated educational support projects worth £5.5 million. The social investment fund will continue to grow in success as more projects commence and become operational this year.

**Mr Boylan:** I thank the Minister for his response. Will the Minister highlight some of the successes of the programme?

**Mr McGuinness:** The greatest success of the social investment programme was the fact that we went out not with a top-down approach but that we went out to communities to ask them what their needs were and how we could prioritise their preferred projects.

The social investment fund has allocated £60 million to community projects. That is proof that the Executive are responsive to community needs and committed to promoting equality and opportunity for all. Our focus beyond spend, however, should be on the difference that the fund is making and will continue to make in our communities. The fund seeks to build confident and resilient communities; it seeks to invest in community assets and creates pathways in training and employment. Indeed, the delivery model developed by SIF is itself a model for future working that engages local people to identify priorities and to work collaboratively with partners to deliver tangible outcomes.

This model of delivery acts as a template for the effective delivery of Executive policy. The legacy of the social investment fund is that it is an investment in the future, an investment in

communities, and in the skills and life opportunities of our people. I have been at quite a few events where people have effectively graduated through it, and I can tell you from first-hand experience of talking to people who have benefited from it that they are deeply appreciative in every section of our community that the SIF programme has dramatically improved the quality of their lives.

**Mr McNulty:** Thank you for your answer, deputy First Minister. I hope that you enjoyed the match yesterday. We are going to get another day out. Will the deputy First Minister provide an update on how dormant bank accounts in the North, which amount to some £7 million, will be used for social investment strategies?

**Mr McGuinness:** That is an issue over and beyond that of the money we have allocated to the social investment fund. It is something that we continue to investigate. There have been decisions in the past to utilise whatever funds can be made available for the benefit of local communities. It is something that we will keep continuously under review.

On the match yesterday, it was a wonderful occasion — 80,000 people enjoying themselves. If you want to know what Irish life is like, go to Croke Park on All-Ireland Sunday, whether it be hurling or Gaelic football. It was a match littered with mistakes, but all the more exciting for that, and as the Member has said, we are all looking forward to another day out.

**Mrs Overend:** I thank the deputy First Minister for some of that information. Some groups in my constituency of Mid Ulster have had to resubmit their applications due to costings, and for other reasons. Can the deputy First Minister inform the House how many groups have had to resubmit applications or costings and how that will affect the delivery and timing of the projects?

**Mr McGuinness:** All of us know that, as capital projects progress, costs are, in many cases, increasing. This is natural, given the time span. This is primarily due to the passage of time, rising construction costs and unforeseen construction issues that typically arise throughout the lifetime of the projects. Officials are working closely with the Central Procurement Directorate, lead partners and project promoters to manage the costs of existing projects as far as possible — and of those going through approvals, to minimise the potential cost increases of future projects.

Similar cost-saving approaches are being applied at design and construction stage, where possible, to minimise the extent of increases in individual projects. However, we are aware that there is still a likelihood that costs will continue to increase for capital projects and, as such, we have secured revised business case approval to take account of the increased period of the fund, the type of project being delivered and the increased budget anticipated to deliver in full the projects prioritised by local steering groups. We intend to seek Executive agreement to amend and increase the social investment fund budget to allow all current prioritised projects to be delivered.

On the issue of how many groups have been affected, I do not have that figure off the top of my head, but we will write to you with an answer.

**Mr Poots:** The match yesterday was a truly wonderful occasion. Seeing United beaten 3-1 by Watford was absolutely brilliant.

In terms of the work being done, have you had the opportunity to look at Early Intervention Lisburn and how it is being supported by the investment fund? Can you look at how this might be rolled out in other parts of Northern Ireland? Because what you are seeing is transformational difference being made to the lives of youngsters who are almost destined to fail, and who will now have better educational opportunities and outcomes, better employment prospects and better health outcomes. This is an area that badly needs tackled in working-class communities right across Northern Ireland.

**Mr McGuinness:** The reference to Manchester United was a low blow, but I would expect nothing else. I said before José Mourinho was appointed that it was a dodgy appointment, and I still think it was.

More importantly, the Member is absolutely right in relation to the huge benefits that the social investment fund can bring for families and for local communities. Our fund is investing £18.5 million in employment-focused projects and, through this, supporting over 800 people in training and paid work placements. They are integrating local people with local employers. Over 80 people have already secured full-time jobs and credit their success directly to their engagement on these funded projects, particularly as most jobs are with the participants' host employers.

One of those now employed was previously unemployed for 26 years. She described, in

her own words, how the programme has impacted upon her life:

*"I would never have had the confidence to look for work, go for interviews or do up a CV without the support from the programme. I received excellent support and advice on a weekly basis and it has given me a new outlook on life. I have not only gained employability skills but built friendships and a social life all thanks to the programme".*

Some £5.7 million has also been invested in early intervention projects across the social investment fund zone, and it is providing a range of family support interventions in schools and communities to support physical, intellectual, social and emotional development. Almost 1,300 participants are already availing themselves of the services, and many are sharing positive examples of how the support has helped them.

The Member is right: we need to learn from those experiences and continue to work with communities, particularly communities in disadvantaged areas.

2.15 pm

## Programme for Government: Update

3. **Mr Smith** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government. (AQO 238/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The draft Programme for Government framework agreed by the Executive on 26 May 2016 sets out the ambition that the Executive have for all in our society. Its focus is on the major societal outcomes that the Executive want to achieve and provides the basis for the actions that we propose to take over the course of this Assembly mandate to bring about the conditions of well-being that we are seeking for our people.

Over the summer, a public consultation process was conducted to seek views on the approach taken in developing the framework as well as on its content. There were over 800 responses to the consultation, and, in addition to informing thinking on the shape of the Programme for Government, they were most helpful in developing the delivery plans needed to achieve the Executive's desired outcomes. We are grateful to all the individuals and stakeholders who contributed to the consultation and welcome the overwhelming support shown across all sectors for the

adoption of an outcomes-based approach to the new Programme for Government.

The Executive are now finalising their delivery plans, and they will be incorporated in the detailed programme that we aim to publish for further public consultation over the autumn period. We anticipate finalising the programme by the end of the year.

**Mr Smith:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Is the Finance Minister's proposal for a one-year Budget now agreed Executive policy? If so, what will be the impact on the Programme for Government?

**Mr McGuinness:** Everybody will appreciate that the Brexit vote puts us in a completely different situation. Yes, the decision by the Finance Minister to go for a one-year Budget has been endorsed by the Executive. We think that it is a sensible procedure, given the uncertainty that overhangs everything that we are dealing with at the moment as a result of Brexit. The big challenge for us is to ensure that, during that year, we are able to deliver the first-class public services that we are committed to delivering for all our people and, at the same time, try to manage our Budget in a way that allows us to be involved in other initiatives, which the community expects.

**Mr McPhillips:** A key commitments of the draft Programme for Government framework is to tackle regional imbalance in job creation and investment. Coming from Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I could rightly say that I feel that our constituency has suffered greatly over the years. Some 12 months ago next month, 800 Teleperformance jobs were announced for Enniskillen; to date, I have no knowledge of any job creation in that respect. Will the Minister give us an update on the position with those 800 Teleperformance jobs?

**Mr McGuinness:** We are not the employers, so we are not responsible for delivering when a company makes a public declaration of investing in an area and outlines how many people it intends to employ. Obviously, there has been some delay, but there has been no suggestion that I have heard of any renegeing on the commitment. I work on the basis that, until such times as people indicate that they are no longer prepared to go along with it, it will go ahead. Hopefully, it can be expedited as quickly as possible.

The issue of regional imbalance is something that we are acutely aware of, particularly as the First Minister is from the south-west and I am

from the north-west. We are all conscious of the need to ensure that every area gets a fair opportunity to profit and benefit from the Programme for Government and the Budget that will be aligned with it.

**Mr Stalford:** Can the deputy First Minister confirm that, in the process of consultation for this Programme for Government, this is the highest level of engagement there has been in the history of drafting a Programme for Government and that, by allowing groups to comment on the draft framework and then the draft programme, we are effectively giving consultees two bites of the cherry in making their views known?

**Mr McGuinness:** Yes, that is an important point that the Member has raised. Obviously, it is hugely important in putting a Programme for Government together that there is the widest consultation possible. On this occasion, we are going for an outcomes-based approach. That has worked in Scotland, in various states in the United States of America and in Finland, for example. The fact that the consultation we had with stakeholders recorded huge support for that approach is quite striking when you consider that some political parties in the Assembly who are in opposition railed against it. That clearly shows them to be at odds with where the stakeholders and the general public are. Giving people two bites of the cherry is important, because it really shows people in the community that we are listening very carefully to what they have to say.

**Mr Lynch:** Will the deputy First Minister outline the next steps to be taken in the PFG process?

**Mr McGuinness:** We are finalising our delivery plans, and we aim to complete that work in the next few weeks. The delivery plans will be incorporated into the next draft of the Programme for Government, and a revised and expanded document will then issue for further public consultation.

A key feature of this Programme for Government is its dependence on collaborative working between organisations and across sectors. It is also a programme in which individuals and communities can play an active part. There have been extensive engagements already with organisations, groups and individuals, and the First Minister and I are keen that that process continue. I encourage everybody — individuals and organisations — to get involved and put their views forward. Departments will continue to engage with delivery partners and stakeholders throughout

the autumn with a view to refining and enhancing the delivery plans and ensuring that the final Programme for Government is as robust and complete as possible. Our aim is to finalise the new Programme for Government and have it endorsed by the Assembly before the end of the year.

**Mrs Long:** I note that the deputy First Minister — perhaps this week we should refer to him as "Your Highness" — has said it is important that we have outcomes-based measures. We agree with that as a party and believe it is the right approach. One way of ensuring that outcomes are met by Departments is to make sure that the quarterly monitoring rounds are used effectively by Committees to measure whether Departments have met the targets they set. Can the Minister reassure us that the quarterly monitoring rounds will continue to be presented to Committees, as there appears to have been a problem with that over the June monitoring round?

**Mr McGuinness:** Obviously, there was a problem over the June monitoring round. We will do everything in our power to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Committee. Obviously, we have a challenging situation before us in relation to the outcome of Brexit, for example. Clearly, however, it is important as we go forward that the Programme for Government and the Budget meet the needs of the Committees of the Assembly. I, for one, am very determined that the Committees are accorded the respect they deserve. They are as much a part of the process as anybody else, and it is very important that they have an input into what we are trying to do.

As for "Your Highness", the less said about that the better.

**Mr Allister:** If the implementation of the Programme for Government requires any fresh legislation on any subject, will the introduction and processing of that be left to the House — this legislative Assembly — or does the deputy First Minister anticipate again donning his royal persona and changing legislation by royal prerogative?

Does the deputy First Minister intend to further abuse the royal prerogative by usurping the legislative functions of the House?

**Mr McGuinness:** I suppose that the Member is speaking about the appointment of David Gordon. For me, that is not the issue here. The issue is the relationship and the new dynamic of politics. Some Members would do

well to remember that the world extends well beyond the gates of Stormont. We are committed to creating and attracting new and better jobs, improving our public services, investing in our schools, hospitals and roads and supporting the most vulnerable across society.

It would appear, though, that some Members of the Opposition have only woken up with the appointment of a press secretary. There was absolutely no secrecy or underhand dealings. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Allister:** Except when you changed the law.

**Mr McGuinness:** Some minority Members can laugh all they like, but the appointment of the press secretary was legally compliant. We have 55 press officers working in Government press offices — *[Interruption.]* — Yes, 55 — not the inflated figure that some others are trying to use. Perhaps if people asked a question rather than running to the media, they might get to the truth, or maybe they do not like or want the truth.

The important thing is that we are continuing to move forward. I have been made aware within the last half hour that the prerogative powers in section 23(3) have been used on a number of occasions. Amongst the Orders that were found was the Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001, which was signed by David Trimble and Séamus Mallon.

**Mr Speaker:** Before I call Mr William Humphrey for the next question, I remind Members that it is a constituency-specific question.

## Urban Villages: Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan Urban Villages project. (AQO 239/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Fearon to answer this question.

**Ms Fearon:** Strategic frameworks for all five Urban Villages have been launched. These have been shaped by local communities and reflect their ambition to realise the full potential of the people and places where they live. The frameworks identify collaborative opportunities in each area and provide a road map for a

comprehensive and joined-up approach by Departments and wider stakeholders to build community capacity, foster positive community identities and improve the physical environment. In Ardoyne and greater Ballysillan, this means a planned £300,000 investment in this financial year in a range of public realm and environmental improvements. This includes starting work on a new play park in the Glenbryn estate.

Work is also ongoing to shape community-based projects to enhance local partnerships and find better ways of working together. This year, in Ardoyne and Ballysillan, it will include a focus on initiatives supporting education and learning, women as community and peace builders and working with young people. Over the next four years, subject to final budget decisions, we expect a substantial programme of capital investment in Urban Villages, which would see in the region of £45 million in total delivered in partnership with other Departments and councils. Crucially, the strategic framework will help to align efforts by a range of stakeholders across all Urban Village areas and enable current and future investment to be delivered in more effective and sustainable ways.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the junior Minister for her answer. Will she expand on the £45 million investment and the larger investments that there will be in community infrastructure and capital investment? Is there a timescale for the completion of the investment, which I welcome? Both areas are hugely deprived and are in much need of that investment.

**Ms Fearon:** I thank the Member for his question. Hopefully, by the end of this year, there will be a spend of £3.6 million in capital and £1.6 million in resource and in supporting local projects to enable each of the areas to get ready for the delivery of the overall Urban Village project. We hope that £300,000 will be spent in Ardoyne and Ballysillan, in particular, by the end of the current financial year. Some of the projects that are being considered in those areas are remedial works at the Crumlin Road and Ligoniel Road junction, a play park in the Glenbryn neighbourhood and improvements to the Marrowbone Millennium Park, such as landscaping and a play area, which will enhance service provision there. There are other works in Ballysillan Park, including new surfaces, planting, signage and public art.

Urban Villages are part of a bigger strategy, and I look forward to support from all political representatives for every single headline commitment under T:BUC, and that includes

barrier removal. I am very happy to speak to the Member about that as well.

**2.30 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** We have time for a quick question from Carál Ní Chuilín and a quick response from the Minister.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Further to the response to William Humphrey's follow-on question, will the Minister outline the importance of community participation in the Urban Villages and T:BUC programmes?

**Ms Fearon:** I thank the Member for her question. The Executive's endorsement of the Urban Villages framework last week was hugely important and now allows Departments to work together in a truly collaborative way to deliver on that initiative. Engagement with communities is absolutely key, and the local reference groups have been key to advancing that. They have a function to keep all stakeholders updated on the progress of each of the projects. Experience shows us that we achieve better outcomes and better progress when we involve and engage with local people and allow them to be involved in decision-making, particularly when those decisions affect their everyday lives in their area. We are very committed to building on the foundation of community participation and on the momentum of T:BUC, which has really taken off in recent times.

Community involvement is particularly important when we are engaged in a process of community transformation and our work to build a better future, whether that be barrier removal, like that on the Crumlin Road earlier this year, or the huge participation across the North in our summer camps. Later this week, the Executive will host the Belfast launch of the Urban Villages framework, and I am sure that Members across the House will be welcome to attend to show their support for the initiative.

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

## **David Gordon: Powers of his Role**

T1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm the powers that David Gordon will have in his role as the Executive's press secretary that, as a civil servant, Stephen Grimason did not. (AQT 176/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** It is not a matter of what powers David Gordon will have. His responsibility, as a spokesperson for the Executive, will be to work very positively and constructively with everybody in the executive information service (EIS). It really does not concern me whatsoever, because I am absolutely convinced that the EIS and David Gordon will work very positively together, keeping in mind their job description, which is about presenting for public consumption all the tremendous work being done by the Executive and individual Ministers, and also putting the Assembly in a good light. It brings a different dimension and level of expertise to what is a very challenging job.

**Mrs Dobson:** There is certainly a lesson on how to spin a spin doctor. However, as we know, the role was created using the royal prerogative. Will you, as a proud republican, confirm how you feel about exercising the powers of a monarch?

**Mr McGuinness:** I feel grand — absolutely grand. *[Laughter.]* Anything that benefits the working of the Executive and, by extension, enriches the lives of the people whom we represent is a good thing. I have done many things over the last 20 years, none of which I am ashamed of whatsoever, because I think that my contribution to this process has put us all where we are today. We have some catcalling from Members on the Back Benches, but they should remember that they would not be sitting on the Back Benches were it not for the work that I and others in Sinn Féin and republicanism have been involved in.

I am not in the least concerned about the debate around David Gordon's appointment. As far as I am concerned, looking at the way that this has developed, mostly on social media, I see that it is all about the anoraks. It is all about the Opposition. We were criticised, when we had a five-party coalition, for being dysfunctional and unable to take decisions. Now, we have a two-party coalition, and we are taking decisions, and we are being criticised. The Opposition parties need to remember this: we will take more and more decisions, and we will show that we can work together as political parties.

We will leave the Opposition parties, who were very quick to jump out of the Executive because of the very poor elections that they had, in our trail.

## Dementia Services: Delivering Social Change

T2. **Ms Bunting** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what the Executive Office has put in place in the dementia services strand of Delivering Social Change, especially because, at the weekend, she had the privilege of participating in the Alzheimer's Society's memory walk at the Stormont estate, at which it was clear from the numbers present just how many people that horrible disease impacts. (AQT 177/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The previous First Minister Peter Robinson and I were very much involved in that announcement. Atlantic Philanthropies was also very much involved in contributing to it. The Member is absolutely right. The whole issue of dementia and Alzheimer's represents a huge challenge to not just our health service but our society as a whole and will continue to do so in coming years. Of course, great efforts are being made to try to find a cure. Huge expenditure is going in to assessing whether it is possible to find a cure and the type of drugs that are required to slow down the onset of these terrible diseases.

There was also a very well-attended walk in the Derry area. Martina Anderson, our locally elected MEP whose mother suffers from this, was there with the entire family. No family is untouched by this. There is a huge responsibility on all of us to do everything in our power to ensure that our lights in the Assembly and the Executive are contributing to what must be an overall effort to find ways forward that relieve the burden on families and the suffering of patients.

**Ms Bunting:** What do you anticipate will be the tangible impacts of what you have outlined for people who suffer from dementia and their families?

**Mr McGuinness:** The tangible impact has to be how we can relieve people's suffering and help those who care for them. We all have a responsibility, and Michelle O'Neill, our Health Minister, and the various stakeholders who contributed to the discussion around the Programme for Government continuously explore what more we, as an Executive and an Assembly, can do to contribute in a positive way towards relieving people's suffering. That obviously represents a huge challenge for us, but larger countries than ours and people with much more expertise are working day and daily to find a way forward on this. Every couple of months, you hear about new developments that

require years of testing. In the meantime, we will just have to ensure that we contribute in the best way that we can. The project that we were involved in with Atlantic Philanthropies is benefiting people here to some degree.

## NI Executive: Message Management

T3. **Mr Aiken** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that it was good to hear the deputy First Minister talk about the world outside Stormont, what further advice can be expected from Kim Jong-un on message management in the Northern Ireland Executive. (AQT 178/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** The Ulster Unionist Party went into opposition at the time of the last Assembly, and it was not the only party to do so. I think that that sort of language really does not reflect the importance of the work that we are doing in the Assembly. There were many remarks like that prior to the election. They came mainly from the Opposition parties and were pitched at the electorate, but they did not work. When it came to the election, the people of the North of Ireland decided that they wanted Sinn Féin and the DUP to be in the lead. They have more faith in us than the opposition parties have. I will not rise to that sort of language. It is silly and childish and certainly shows how distant some of the opposition parties have become from the people. It is only a few months since the election. People gave us a tremendous endorsement. They put their faith in us to take this process forward. Of course, we know that, because they did not get the result that they wanted, the opposition parties did not come into the Executive and they hope that, by staying out, they will make gains between now and the next Assembly election. God help them.

**Mr Aiken:** Yes. Can the deputy First Minister — thank you for those words — give an assurance that the appointment of David Gordon — *[Interruption.]* — has been conducted — listen — within the correct employment and equality legislation and that, as a member of the Government, he will be appropriately security-vetted as he will have access to classified and commercial-in-confidence documentation? Will the deputy First Minister confirm to the Assembly that the appropriate due diligence has been carried out?

**Mr McGuinness:** I wonder whether people who were appointed as advisers to the Ulster Unionist Party during the last term of the Assembly were security-vetted by anyone and, if not, why there was no demand from the Ulster

Unionist Party for that. This is all nonsense, folks. It is all a two-day wonder. The reality that you have to deal with is that David Gordon will soon be in post. We have every confidence in his ability to do the job. The fact that he is going to do the job is what is scaring the opposition parties more than most.

### **Hate Crime: Executive Office Action**

T4. **Mr Frew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the Executive Office is doing to reduce hate crime, encourage community relations and reassure members of the public, given that, this morning, the BBC's 'Good Morning Ulster' reported a hate crime incident at a tourist spot in the North Antrim constituency. (AQT 179/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** I absolutely and roundly condemn any hate crime anywhere. I am sure that it is not just restricted to the Member's constituency. We have it in probably every constituency throughout the North. The First Minister and I were delighted last week to attend and speak at the inaugural meeting of the new racial equality subgroup, which was very well attended. We are very conscious of the need to ensure that we give as much support as possible to people who have been targets of racist thugs. There is a huge responsibility on our police service to ensure that it is very proactive in trying to apprehend those who are involved in criminal and cowardly attacks on defenceless people. Working with the police and the representatives of our ethnic communities, it is very important that we continue to stand together and send out a very clear message that such behaviour is absolutely despicable and should stop.

**Mr Frew:** Thank you, deputy First Minister. He will be aware of the work of the Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area. Whilst the figures for hate crime have risen by something like 87% in the last five years, they have reduced dramatically in Ballymena and east Antrim. What more support can the Executive Office give to groups like the Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum to assist them in their work?

**Mr McGuinness:** We will give every support. I want to pay tribute to that group for the tremendous work that it is involved in. I know that, in every part of the North of Ireland, people from the unionist and republican/nationalist communities are working together to send out a very powerful message to our ethnic minorities that they are hugely respected, much loved and make a massive contribution to and enrich our

society. Our meat processing and agrifood industry would come to a halt if those people withdrew their labour and went back to their own countries. It is hugely important that we do everything in our power to support local communities that recognise the massive contribution that they make. Of course, we have policies and strategies, such as the racial equality strategy and others, but we also have to work with the police to ensure that we continue to bear down on people — it is only a tiny minority in our society — who believe that it is OK to say "bravo" to attacking somebody who is thousands of miles from their own country and is basically defenceless.

I have great faith that our people in the unionist and in the nationalist/republican communities will continue to work together to defeat those people.

2.45 pm

### **Paramilitary Organisations: Disbandment**

T5. **Mr Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on disbanding paramilitary organisations. (AQT 180/16-21)

**Mr McGuinness:** I think that everybody knows that, during the Fresh Start negotiations, the political parties, mainly the DUP and Sinn Féin, came to an agreement. We established a three-person panel to bring forward a strategy. It is a strategy that we have accepted in total and are absolutely committed to implementing.

That work will roll out over the next while. Of course, working closely with the Police Service, it is very important that we send a clear message to the tiny minority that exists in our community that being involved in criminality or paramilitary activity of any description is a total abhorrence to the people who want to get on with their lives and build a better future for their children. The work that was done was good work. A report was published with many proposals, all of which have been accepted by the First Minister and myself, and that will be a huge benefit to the people whom we represent as it is rolled out.

**Mr Speaker:** Time is up. We do not have time for a supplementary question. I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

## Infrastructure

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Question 11 has been withdrawn.

## Taxi Legislation: Update

1. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the review of taxi legislation. (AQO 251/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure):** Following my meeting on 3 August with a new taxi group established in the North, I made clear my intention to deal as quickly as possible with this legacy issue. It is vital that there is clarity for consumers and those in the taxi industry on the way forward, and my decision to instruct my officials to commence work immediately on a review demonstrates my commitment to finally putting in place a taxi industry that fully meets the needs of consumers here.

I have also been aware that rumours are being spread among taxi operators and drivers that the requirement to have an approved meter and printer is being scrapped. Let me reiterate that that is not the case and that the legislative requirement to have an approved meter and printer installed in all class-A and class-B taxis remains in place. My officials have also commenced work to set up a taxi forum, which will include statutory bodies, stakeholders from across the taxi industry and consumer groups. That group will help to inform the content of the review and how it will be progressed.

I trust that Members, those in the taxi industry and other key stakeholders are now left in no doubt that I intend to ensure that, at the end of the review process, we will put in place a taxi industry that fully meets the needs of local people and those who visit this part of Ireland.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he agree with me on the importance of communicating the proposed changes to taxi drivers and operators? There is also an October deadline for some taxi drivers. Maybe the Minister would respond to that.

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I agree entirely. I was very clear in the summer when I met the operators and went to the public to lay out my concerns about the legacy issues that we took on. I was also very clear today, and I think that

people will understand that the date is still in place and that there will be no further periods of grace. I will meet officials in the morning to discuss enforcement issues and the best way forward for those who, through no fault of their own, given the huge scale of those applying, have not been able to put a meter in place. Let the message be very clear: meters and printers will be part of our taxi industry going forward.

**Ms Mallon:** I record my apologies for not being in my seat last week when called for a topical question to the Health Minister.

Can the Minister outline how changes to legislation may impact on the operation of Uber in the greater Belfast area?

**Mr Hazzard:** I do not intend to take action in relation to any particular industry, such as Uber. Like every taxi operator in the North, Uber must adhere to the law. I understand that, along with some others, it has adopted class-C licences for at least some of its taxis. As I intend to take action to ensure that the scope of the class-C licence reflects the original policy intentions, all those using class-C licences will have to comply with the requirements of class C.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Minister give an assurance that he will look at the issue of new taxi drivers, in particular, wanting to sit the examination? If he speaks to his officials about it, he will be aware that I have had meetings with them recently about this — I appreciate the help that they have given. There is a concern, however, that the current process to ensure that the system is open and transparent is not working in the best way that it possibly could.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Has the Member a question? That is a very long question.

**Mr Storey:** Will the Minister look at the test to ensure that taxi drivers are given the appropriate test for the best possible outcome?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before I call the Minister, I ask Members to make their questions brief.

**Mr Hazzard:** I agree entirely. It is one of the issues that I discussed with industry stakeholders. I believe that there is an employment opportunity here, if it is got right. Some small changes can be taken on board, and my officials are looking at it.

**Mr McAleer:** The Minister is clearly aware that the misuse of the class-C licence is causing a great deal of grievance among many taxi operators. What steps is he taking to address the issue of class-C licences?

**Mr Hazzard:** I am very aware of concerns about how class-C licences are being adopted for what might be termed "normal taxis". The class-C licence was designed for use by special or novelty vehicles such as limousines and wedding cars. It was not intended for use by normal taxis. As a result, I have instructed officials to examine the issue with a view to keeping the scope of the class-C licence as intended in the Taxis Act 2008, and I expect action to be taken in the very near future to achieve this.

**Mr Dickson:** I thank the Minister for his answers. He has part-answered my question with regards to vintage wedding cars and drivers. Given the mess left behind by the previous Minister, will he guarantee that, in this mandate, he will resolve the issue and sort out the nonsense?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his comments. I am certainly determined to do my best to ensure that our taxi industry meets the needs of the industry and consumers alike. That is very achievable in partnership with my officials and the new taxi stakeholder group.

## **Flooding: High-risk Areas**

2. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on his Department's contingency plans for flooding in identified high-risk areas. (AQO 252/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department has a major emergency response plan that provides the overarching framework for the strategic management and coordination of a major emergency such as significant flooding. There are close working relationships across government in the area of flood management, and I am keen to see them enhanced going forward. They should be further strengthened now that the three organisations involved in flood management — Rivers Agency, NI Water and Transport NI — are all within my Department. My Department is the lead Department for the coordination of the emergency response to flooding and makes other organisations aware of the risks, allowing them to be prepared to react to a flood event. Rivers Agency, NI Water and Transport NI all have specific arrangements to deal with flood emergencies, and these include liaison with the

Met Office, placing staff on standby, managing their drainage assets during a flood event and carrying out preventative maintenance to grilles. The flooding incident line is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to facilitate public requests for assistance. By working together across government and with communities, we can be better prepared for flood events in the future.

**Mr Anderson:** I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware of the devastation caused to my constituents and businesses in Upper Bann by flooding over the new year period, specifically along the lough shore at the Kinnego marina and in the Maghery/Birches area of Portadown.

What assurances and comfort can you give to those people, businesses and rural dwellers that, if a similar or worse situation were to develop this year or further into the future, sufficient contingency plans have been put in place?

**Mr Hazzard:** The Member will be very aware that, when we deal with major flooding incidents, it is a matter not of "if" but of "when". With climate change and the very nature of weather, it is not something that we can stop, but we have to manage it. The Member will also be aware of the Alan Strong review: he is a highly acclaimed civil engineer who has compiled an extensive and detailed report that I am due to see shortly. I have no doubt that it will plot out not only the pitfalls and strengths of the 2015-16 winter floods but the best road map for going forward. I look forward to receiving the report shortly. No doubt the Member will have an interest in it, too.

**Mrs Barton:** Thank you, Minister, for the money that was made available to Transport NI in County Fermanagh to help alleviate some of the flooding. What extra finances were allocated directly to Rivers Agency in its quest to alleviate future flooding through managing the drainage system?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member very much for her question and her kind regards. I am travelling to Fermanagh this week to have a look at some of the remedial work that has taken place to future-proof some of the transport corridor roads and infrastructure in Fermanagh that was badly hit, as you made reference to. I do not have the specific financial information in front of me, but I am more than happy to correspond with the Member.

**Mr Boylan:** What arrangements are in place to communicate with local government?

**Mr Hazzard:** Where an emergency response to significant flooding is necessary, council-led subregional emergency preparedness group meetings or conference calls can set up a team to provide interagency coordination for those involved in the response. Those forums provide wider situational awareness, inform mutual decision-making, facilitate the easy exchange of information and coordinate the multi-agency response across the affected areas.

## A26 Improvements

3. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed improvements to the A26 from Ballee Road roundabout to Dunsilly roundabout. (AQO 253/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Road safety is one of my Department's key priorities. In the light of the recent fatalities along that stretch of road, Transport NI carried out a review of safety in consultation with the PSNI, looking at the collision history and the causation factors identified. The review made a number of recommendations, which are now being followed through.

My Department is currently consulting on proposals to prohibit right turns out of Woodgreen Road, Maine Road and Cromkill Road on to the A26 Lisnevenagh Road. I understand that there are some objections to the proposals that will have to be addressed. That will delay progress for a number of months and will potentially prevent the prohibitions being implemented. Some work has already been completed to renew white lines at junctions and provide new direction arrows. New warning and direction signage has also been designed and procured and is expected to be installed before the winter season. The remaining works to renew advance direction signs, warning signs, cat's eyes and lines and to cut back vegetation growth are planned to begin shortly and continue over the following months.

**Mr Swann:** I thank the Minister for his update. I am sure, from that detailed response, that he will be aware specifically of the Woodgreen junction and the work that is needed there. It experiences a disproportionately high number of fatalities per road accident and per traffic movement. He said that some of the proposals from his Department had met with objections,

which is holding back the road, but will he not acknowledge that they are not objections but merely responses to the consultation that his Department asked for, where locals have input on what they think may be a better fit?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his answer, and I take on board his comments. When we go out to consultation, we want to ensure — I am adamant about this — that road safety is a priority for us. We want to take on board everything that is said during the consultation project. We need to bear it in mind that, where there are objections, we have to look at them. We have a legislative duty to do so. I am more than happy to meet or correspond with the Member in that regard in the future.

## 3.00 pm

**Mr Mullan:** Minister, you will be aware that the new road has been diverted west. Will you update us on what will happen to the old road and the surrounding land?

**Mr Hazzard:** Thanks very much for the question. I am not actually aware of the road the Member refers to. I do not have that information in front of me, but I am certainly more than happy to correspond with him on it.

**Mr Frew:** The Minister has already outlined the fact that his Department is consulting some of the objectors. I have facilitated some meetings with officials from Transport NI. One of the concerns I have is that it is meeting individual objectors, as opposed to having a public meeting where they may be able to address more concerns more quickly —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Has the Member a question?

**Mr Frew:** — in order that this would be placed on the ground as quickly as possible. I fear there could be more fatalities. Can the Minister give an assurance that this will be on the ground as quickly as possible?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member. He should rest assured: we want to get to the same place as quickly as possible. I have to put it on record that, if the objections are not withdrawn, it is likely the proposals will be subject to a public inquiry, so you will very much have that public sphere. The only outcome of that, of course, is that you will delay the implementation of the scheme by at least a year.

**Mr Allister:** It is over 18 months since the sad fatality of the young married woman at Woodgreen cross gave rise to the review, yet, 18 months on, we are still having excuses for why action cannot take place.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Has the Member a question?

**Mr Allister:** Is there no urgency in the Department to address the issue?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Has the Member a question?

**Mr Allister:** Why has it not been costed, and why has it taken so long to date?

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Can the Member put his question to the Minister, rather than making a statement?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his comments. If he reviews Hansard, he will see that I laid out a number of programmes and schemes that will take place to address some of the concerns. I very much want to see a successful conclusion to this, one that makes these roads safer for road users.

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Minister for his response to Mr Swann's question. Having on one occasion rendered first aid at a thankfully not-quite-fatal accident at Woodgreen, I endorse everything he said. There are other junctions further south, particularly at Tannaghmore and Creavery in the Antrim area, that are almost equally bad: is any action being taken on those?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question. Again, although I do not have great detail in front of me about specific junctions, I know a review has taken place over the length of it. I have no doubt that officials have been looking at this. If this is something the Member wants to correspond with me about, I would be more than happy to do so.

## Blue Badge Backlog

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how he is addressing the backlog in blue badge scheme renewals. (AQO 254/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Historically, the blue badge unit carried a number of agency staff to assist with application processing. However, in December 2014, due to a ministerial directive, all

temporary staff contracts were terminated as a cost-saving measure. That created a backlog that was not addressed until July 2015, when agency staff were recruited. The unit lost staff under the voluntary exit scheme (VES) in December 2015 and in January and March 2016. Those staff have not been replaced.

The estimated number of blue badges in circulation in 2016 will be over 125,000. Application numbers have increased dramatically since the introduction of the personal independence payment (PIP) earlier this year.

The Department had expected to link to the blue badge service in Britain in April 2016, but no provision was made to allow us locally to access that contract. The situation has now been resolved, and it is hoped we will be allowed to access the service in April 2017. That situation meant that the Department had to locally procure new blank badges to enable it to continue processing. The new blank badges arrived on 7 July 2016, and the process of issuing those held up in the backlog began immediately.

Five agency staff are currently employed to process blue badge applications, with another due to start next week. There are approximately 9,900 applications to be processed. Preference is being given to first-time applications, whilst other cases are dealt with in date order. Applicants who hold an expired badge and have sent in a renewal application are being advised that traffic attendants on streets and in council car parks will not issue parking tickets to any badge displayed that has expired after 1 May 2016. That information is also available to the public on the NI Direct website.

Organisations with responsibilities for disseminating information to hospitals and businesses, including private car park operators, have also been informed about the situation and will be re-notified in mid September.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Minister, you will be aware that I wrote to you as Chair of the Committee last week. The Committee discussed this, and there was unanimous agreement on the unacceptable situation that prevails in Northern Ireland. A constituent of mine, Elaine, who wrote to me, actually submitted her application on 4 August but has been told that she will not get it until 17 November.

This is affecting people negatively in Northern Ireland. If people really need to be able to park in a disabled space —

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Does the Member have a question?

**Mr Humphrey:** — it is life-limiting for them. I appreciate that there is extra resource. Will the Minister do what he can to address the issue? It is simply not good enough.

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question and the interest that the Committee has shown in the issue. I agree with your sentiments: it is something we need to get through. As I outlined, I think that there is light at the end of the tunnel — April 2017 but the message must go out — I think that it has — that, if applications have expired, people will not be punished. I am more than happy to look at cases that have fallen foul of that.

**Mr F McCann:** I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Many people who got tickets after submitting their applications will welcome that news today. Can we get a constituency-by-constituency breakdown — this was partially answered for the previous Member — in the near future of what areas have badges?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question. I have not seen a constituency-by-constituency breakdown, but I am more than happy to chase that up. We are dealing with approximately 200 applicants a day. Anecdotally, in 1999, you were looking at 12,500 blue badges, and the estimated figure that I outlined is now 125,000. There are many reasons for that huge surge in blue badge applications, but I want to get through the problem and get to the other side.

**Ms Armstrong:** What consideration has been given or could the Minister give to a customer care charter that confirms that no person with disabilities will in future have to wait more than 30 days for their blue badge to be processed?

**Mr Hazzard:** That is a new idea to me, and, if the Member wants to correspond with me, I am more than happy to consider it.

**Mrs Palmer:** I thank the Minister for his comprehensive report on delays with blue badges. Minister, I hope that you will agree with me that, if a current holder's badge has expired, although your interventions have allowed that they will not be punished, that does not apply across the border. Anyone travelling

across the border cannot use that blue badge without being punished in another jurisdiction. Have we got the resource in place now to make sure that the delays will not be longer than 30 days?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for her supplementary question and welcome the Ulster Unionist Party's all-Ireland approach to the issue. I am more than happy to take this up with counterparts in Dublin. As you say, the issue has maybe suffered from the unintended consequences of other initiatives.

Two hundred applications a day, for no matter what size of a team, is a huge amount of work to get through, but, as I outlined to Members on the other side, there is light at the end of the tunnel. As we progress through this, the backlog will be eaten through considerably.

## **Ticketing: Public Transport**

5. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans for ticketing on public transport. (AQO 255/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** This important project has a number of aims: to transform public transport and deliver customer growth in line with a key Programme for Government indicator; to deliver an innovative ticketing system with a focus on integration, flexibility and convenience; and to develop and deliver replacement ticketing equipment and associated systems nearing the end of their useful life, while modernising with additional operational, technical and customer-led enhancements.

Ticketing requirements for the new Belfast rapid transit system will also be delivered through this project. Customers using concessionary fares will continue to avail themselves of them in the new system. The new, modern ticketing system will be equipped with wider-ranging functionality and capabilities and be scalable to allow for integration with other operators.

Expected key benefits include improved bus boarding times; reduced use of cash; improved data and communication channels; integrated travel; rewards for regular passengers; and simplified and more accessible ticketing for customers.

I recently announced that Parkeon, a global leader in this industry, was awarded the contract to design and deliver the ticketing system in partnership with Translink. Improvements will be seen from 2018.

**Mr Milne:** Mo bhuíochas fosta leis an Aire. Will integrated ticketing also be available on a North/South basis?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his supplementary. No doubt he will be aware that joint services are currently on offer across the island, but we currently do not have the ability to have joint ticketing arrangements. This facility, while not directly creating the opportunity for integrated ticketing straight away, certainly has the scope to do so. I will pick it up with Southern counterparts as we go forward, and I certainly want to engage in a positive way on the way forward.

**Ms Bradshaw:** What plans does the Minister have to incorporate into the new ticketing system the needs of post-primary children who use trains and who are not eligible for free transport?

**Mr Hazzard:** At this stage in the development, we have not looked specifically at that, but the Member has raised an issue that I think warrants further discussion and further scoping. We want to have a shift from the car to rail. We want to expand our rail services, and I certainly want to be able to meet that need. Part of that, of course, is children travelling to school and the opportunities that exist for them to do so by rail. I will look at that in the months ahead.

**Mr McNulty:** Will the Minister give his assessment of student travel concessions, especially for those at university? Does he think that those concessions are reasonable at present?

**Mr Hazzard:** Concessionary fares are very important to us, and the Executive have protected them year-on-year. We spend some £40 million a year on concessionary fares. Having student fares is very valuable to our young people, who feel financial pressures from a large number of corners. If we can alleviate some of that pressure by doing all that we can in public transport, I will be more than happy to work on that in the future.

**Mr Aiken:** I thank the Minister for his comments. I am delighted that the smart card is to be rolled out, but why will it take until 2018? In the Republic of Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, Leap cards and Oyster cards were rolled out within a much shorter period. In particular, I note that many Northern Ireland companies are involved in the development of Leap card, smart card and Oyster card technology. I would like the Minister to assure us that everything is being done to

improve the timescale for delivery of this project, because, as I am sure the Minister is aware, by 2018, technology will have moved on.

**Mr Hazzard:** I am sure that the Member will be well aware that, due to the operational complexities of the project, the need for wider consumer and customer educational experience and the staff training required, technology enhancements will be phased in with a longer run-in. That will give us a far greater adoption of the new era in Translink ticketing. This is not about leaving people behind. There has to be a message that you will still be able to use cash. Some people out there think that we are going entirely cashless, but that will not be the case at all, so an education process is involved in this. The advance of the Belfast rapid transit system will be very important as we start to roll these out.

## Ballynahinch Bypass

6. **Mr Smith** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Ballynahinch bypass. (AQO 256/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** Significant work has been completed on the A24 Ballynahinch bypass to progress the scheme through the preliminary options, preferred option and proposed option scheme assessments. This work enabled the publication of the environmental statement, draft direction and draft vesting orders in March 2015. The former Department for Regional Development received a number of objections during the statutory consultation period for the draft orders, and it was determined appropriate to convene a public inquiry to examine the cases for and against the proposed scheme. The Inquiry was held on 26 and 27 January 2016. The inspector's report of the inquiry was subsequently received in March 2016, and my Department's project development team has considered the report and recommendations and is finalising a report for my consideration. Subject to a satisfactory outcome, my Department will publish the environmental statement notice of intention to proceed and make the direction order for the proposed scheme. I expect that the making of the vesting order for the scheme will be delayed to align with the construction programme for the bypass.

**Mr Smith:** Thank you for your answer, Minister. When do you believe the Department will be in a position to respond to the inspector's report and will funding be allocated for this essential

long-overdue project in the upcoming four-year capital budget?

**3.15 pm**

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question and for raising the issue. As someone who comes from that part of the world, I would be more than delighted to be able to fund the construction of this very important project in the morning. As you have alluded to, it is something that local populations, including the population of Strangford and south Down, have been looking for. Local campaigners have been campaigning for this for the best part of half a century. I expect the report to be with me very shortly. Regarding the financial situation, while this project is not a flagship programme for the Department, it is something that is very important and I want to see delivered.

### **Water Infrastructure: Carrickfergus**

7. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the impact the new water infrastructure project on North Road, Carrickfergus, is having on local business. (AQO 257/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** The replacement of the water main at North Road commenced at the beginning of July and was scheduled to take 14 weeks. From January 2016, NI Water has been in continuous contact with all key stakeholders including elected representatives, schools, private households and businesses to minimise the impact locally. Impacts such as traffic management and providing sufficient local access were key priorities in the works programme.

The initial phase saw a single lane closure at the Prince Andrew Way junction, followed by a full road closure in both directions from Prince Andrew Way junction to Middle Road. However, this resulted in problems for a number of businesses at the top of the North Road, in Oakland Park, and their concerns were raised during a meeting between a number of local representatives, NI Water and Transport NI. As a result of these discussions, NI Water agreed to reopen a single lane to allow access to the area.

I am happy to report that the work is now substantially complete and there are no further full road closures proposed. The remaining work, to connect the existing customers to the new water main and sewer pipe, can generally be carried out on the road verge and footway. The scheme is expected to be complete by the

end of October, well within the original programme.

I would like to thank local businesses and the wider community for their patience and cooperation while this essential work was carried out.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** There is no time for a supplementary question. That ends the period for listed questions and we will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions. The Member listed for topical question 1 has withdrawn his name.

### **Pedestrian and Cycle Pathway: Bangor Ring Road**

T2. **Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, assuming he is aware of the recent creation of a lengthy stretch of joint pedestrian and cycle pathway on the Bangor ring road, between the Gransha Road and the Donaghadee Road, on which, last week, directional arrows, accompanied by the outline drawings of a cycle, were painted at regular intervals, directing cyclists to ride on the right-hand side of the cycle pathway as opposed to the accepted rule of the road to ride or drive on the left-hand side, whether this was human error or the result of some technical reason to depart from the Highway Code. (AQT 187/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his very topical question. He will understand that I would need to see some images of what he is talking about to get a good grasp of the situation. I am more than happy to sit down with the Member and have a look at it.

**Mr Chambers:** I have the images here and they are causing a bit of fun in the Bangor area. Regarding the pathway, cyclists are reluctant to use this particular carriageway due to the amount of road debris and stones being thrown up by vehicles using the very busy ring road. What measures have been put in place, or could be put in place by the Department, to address this problem?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. You have touched on the very important issue of the confidence and ability of local people to go out on their bicycles to commute and to take to our roads in a manner in which they feel safe, and are safe. It is an issue that I have been aware of since coming into post. I will be publishing my greenways strategy shortly and a bicycle

network plan for Belfast. My wish and that of my Department is to have as many segregated cycling pathways as possible. Of course, it comes down to finances at the end of the day. Often, roads with cycling, pedestrian and vehicular traffic are more than safe. However, the message has to go out to all road users to be aware of those beside them — pedestrians, cyclists or those in cars — and to have a little more respect for everybody who uses the road.

### City of Derry Airport

T3. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the huge financial pressure experienced by local ratepayers and taxpayers over many years in maintaining the City of Derry Airport at Eglinton, whether he and the Executive would consider the sale of the airport to the private sector, where regional airports are normally placed. (AQT 188/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question, and to be very blunt, no, it is not something that I have thought of or am likely to give much consideration to in the near future.

**Mr Kennedy:** Surely, any responsible Minister in any responsible Executive should at least look at the option to include private management of the airport so that jobs can be protected in what is an essential subregional airport?

**Mr Hazzard:** I repeat: if the option is sitting in front of me, of course I will look at it, but the option is not sitting in front of me.

### A6: Progress

T4. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on progress with the A6 road scheme. (AQT 189/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** With the A6, it is important to say that the vesting orders went out a number of weeks ago. We were at the stage where we were launching the A6 and people in the north-west were delighted that we had got there. We are talking, of course, of the stretch from Randalstown to the Castledawson roundabout. I am delighted to announce also that, in the years ahead, work will continue to advance on the Dungiven bypass towards the city. The period for vesting orders will close next week, and construction will begin in October.

**Mr Middleton:** I thank the Minister for his response. He will be aware that infrastructure in the north-west is very important to our local

economy, and, of course, we welcome the announcement by the Executive Office today about the airport. Can the Minister outline whether he foresees any issues that could possibly delay the upgrade of the A6?

**Mr Hazzard:** It is important to stress that, as with any large infrastructure project, there are always issues that may cause problems or delays. With the A5 and the A6, as well as any other large infrastructure project that we look to take forward, something is likely to happen. My office received notification this week of the possibility of legal action with regard to the A6, and it is something that officials and I are working through.

### Ballyclare and Doagh: Relief Road

T5. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in his capacity as a representative of the premier town in Northern Ireland, Ballyclare, whether the Department for Infrastructure is undertaking any work to alleviate the infrastructure problems associated with the proposed relief road and the timing of its delivery that are being experienced by Ballyclare and Doagh. (AQT 190/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question. Certainly, it is an issue that is close to his heart, and we have chatted about it. As I have outlined before, while there is no specific work going on to look at the distributor road he referred to, it is something that I am more than happy to correspond with the Member on in the years ahead.

**Mr Girvan:** I thank the Minister for his answer thus far, but the difficulties associated with the relief road mean it could take up to 15 years for development to take place. Is there any possibility that engagement could be taken on with the local authority to take the lead in the delivery of such a major project, but with some payback from the development as it goes forward?

**Mr Hazzard:** I agree. There are a number of locations throughout the North where local councils stand in a prime position to play a leading role, following the devolution of various powers to them in recent years, such as their capacity for financial borrowing, to give one example. Certainly, either on their own or in conjunction with the Department, and with local developers, there is the potential to look at this. There are a large number of towns where congestion is a problem, and my Department will do whatever it can to alleviate it when looking at the strategic road network, but there

are places where the local council can play that role, and I have no doubt that I will work in partnership with them, going forward.

### **Road Maintenance: Fermanagh**

T6. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on road maintenance work on key Fermanagh roads, given his predecessor's announcement of £1 million to improve flood alleviation measures and drainage systems following heavy flooding last winter. (AQT 191/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I do not have an update on the specific roads that you talked about. Coming into position, it was clear to me that rural roads in particular needed attention. I was delighted to secure the funding to roll out a rural roads initiative where 1,000 rural roads will be involved in a scheme that will see resurfacing and some drainage works, which is very important. Local divisions have been carrying out that work to date and will continue to do so in the months ahead.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the Minister for the answer. As we approach another winter, many residents and road users have been raising concerns with me on a daily basis about the condition of the roads and the state that they will be in in a few months' time. What assurances can the Minister give that planned work will be completed in a timely manner?

**Mr Hazzard:** As divisions roll out their works programmes, it is important that they do so in a timely way. For want of a better phrase, you get better bang for your buck when you do it when the weather is good. Carrying out such works in the winter is not productive for the Department or local communities, as you suggest.

### **Brexit: Infrastructure Funding**

T7. **Mr Kearney** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has an assessment of the EU funding likely to be lost to his Department following Brexit. (AQT 192/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** My Department established a Brexit unit in July. The unit has engaged with a number of key stakeholders to identify the most critical issues of concern and to fully understand how those concerns can most effectively be addressed. Only last week, my Department met officials from the Brexit unit in the Department for Transport in London and colleagues from other devolved

Administrations. That provided a useful platform upon which to raise awareness of our unique circumstances and challenges, and I have asked my officials to remain active in this respect. I remain determined to pursue all opportunities available to us as members of the European Union. As the overall framework for Brexit begins to take shape, we will continue to actively participate in the European arena. In that regard, we will continue to prepare and present applications for EU funding for major projects where we can. For my Department, it is business as usual.

**Mr Kearney:** Flowing from your answer to my earlier question, will you detail how you intend to prioritise direct engagement with the European institutions in order to ensure that current funding levels are maintained and that we do not lose our special status as a region with the European Union?

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question. When the news broke on 23 and 24 June, it was important that all Departments in the Executive and, of course, the Department for Infrastructure, continued to engage directly with Europe. I had been to a TEN-T transport conference in Rotterdam just before that and saw with my own eyes the opportunities that exist. I met the EU Commission in the weeks leading on from that, and, today, I met representatives from Flanders, and it is something that I will continue to do in the weeks ahead. However, as I outlined in my original answer to you, for me and my Department, it is a case of business as usual. We must not let this tidal wave of bad news, when it comes to my Department and Brexit, overcome us. We must stand. There are important infrastructure projects. If we are to prioritise places like the north-west and are to continue the modal shift from car to rail, it is important that we do so from a position of business as usual.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Trevor Lunn is not in his place. Alex Attwood has withdrawn question 9.

### **Magherafelt Bypass**

T10. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the completion of the Magherafelt bypass. (AQT 195/16-21)

**Mr Hazzard:** I am delighted to announce that the Magherafelt bypass will be open shortly, and, in the next couple of weeks, I will be in that part of the world to meet the divisional team and see the project with my own eyes.

**Mr Milne:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister outline his thoughts on the benefits that the bypass will give not just to the Magherafelt area but to the greater mid-Ulster area, bearing in mind, hopefully, the A6 in the future?

**3.30 pm**

**Mr Hazzard:** I thank the Member for his question. As alluded to in answer to those on the Benches opposite earlier, there are a number of regional towns and locations throughout the North where congestion is bad news for the local economy and local traders who want to see the congestion alleviated and cars flowing in and out — not just for the air quality, but for the local economy. It is something the wider Magherafelt area will be interested in.

Coming into post I was very clear that I wanted to tackle an historical infrastructure deficit in the west, especially west of the Bann. Whereas the Magherafelt bypass has been in the system for years, I think it is an example of the sort of project we want to see rolled out. Going forward, there are other towns, such as Cookstown and Enniskillen, which need similar investment.

## Private Members' Business

### Used Tyres

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind up. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to wind up. All other Members will have five minutes.

**Mr McMullan:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes with concern the dangerous emission of toxic fumes and gases into the atmosphere from the public burning of used car tyres; notes that the residue is sent to landfill and still poses an environmental danger; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to establish a used-tyre register to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.*

I accept the thinking behind the amendment, but it is factually flawed. The amendment states that it is the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, when it is actually the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government who regulates waste tyres in the Southern Government.

The motion before us today is one of the most important environmental issues we have to deal with. Used tyres and their overall environmental use, and indeed their misuse, is one of the top discussions in nearly all Government regions, both here and in Europe. It is hard to believe that there is very little, and in some cases no, real effective ongoing regulation. The last figures available for the number of tyres collected for disposal or recycling was 13,370 tons. That sounds a lot, but when you consider tyres from heavy machinery such as tractors, lorries etc and the number of cars we have on the roads, this is indeed a very low number. These figures show the problem that we have with regulation. Furthermore, it is unclear at present whether the NIEA (Northern Ireland Environment Agency) holds its own disposal records.

When a motorist takes his or her car to get a new tyre they are charged approximately £1.50 for a tyre, and when a lorry changes its tyres it is approximately £10-£12: both of these

charges are for disposal. This is where the whole issue of regulation starts to fall down. We do not have an up-to-date register to enable us to monitor who has the tyres, who sells the tyres, where the tyres go, who takes them away and where they are taken. More and more tyres are being dumped illegally for burning or just being dumped illegally around the countryside. I am talking about fly-tipping, and still we cannot get the culprits. The legislation on the management of waste is still not clear about the disposal of tyres.

The illegal practice of dumping leads to another problem which affects us all. Cleaning up the residue of burning at illegal dump sites falls into the responsibility of the council. This is where the cost per tyre escalates. The council now has to pay to dispose of the tyres, and therefore the ratepayer foots the bill.

It is at this stage that we see the second charge put on the disposal of the tyre. That is due to little or no regulation. It is, if you like, a loophole in the law that allows some tyre dealers, carriers, businesses and the general public to increase their profits by avoiding the present method of disposal. When I say "profits", I mean that, from the money that you are charged for your tyre, the tyre dealer is supposed to pay for disposal. Therefore, dealers can accrue quite a bit of money. If they do not dispose of their tyres in the proper way, they can make a lot of money.

Members, tyres are classified as controlled waste, and it falls to the NIEA, which has the responsibility for granting licences:

*"to authorise the deposit, treating, keeping or disposal of controlled waste in or on any land, or the treatment or disposal of controlled waste by means of mobile plant."*

I go back to what I said. The NIEA is the controlling body for the disposal of controlled waste in or on any land.

Businesses that only transport, broker for or deal in certain types of waste are eligible to register as lower tier. All other businesses must register as upper tier, and that, Members, is where we see one of the best examples of unfairness in the present regulation. If a farmer needs tyres for his silage clamp, for use on his farm, he must apply to the NIEA for a paragraph 16 exemption, which is a three-year permit allowing a farmer to bring tyres on to his land for agricultural use only. Members, the catch in all of this is that that permit will cost the farmer £867. We are told that the cost is for reviewing the application and for a site visit

once a year. Members, I ask this question: who else do you know who uses waste tyres has to pay for that privilege?

I return to the subject of regulation. There is no doubt that the current system is complex, bureaucratic and in need of urgent change. On 29 June 2015, a question was asked of the then Environment Minister, Mr Durkan, on:

*"what action his Department takes to ensure that company records of tyres that have been taken off customers marry with the records of disposal for those tyres".*

The Minister replied that the Member should know:

*"the complexity of this area of work and the complications in trying to grasp the issue and deal with it in a conclusive manner."*

He went on to state that the NIEA:

*"and other areas in my Department are working hard, along with other agencies and jurisdictions, to come up with a producer responsibility scheme for tyres." — [Official Report (Hansard), 29 June 2015, p35, col 2 to p36, col1].*

Members, that answer was given in 2015.

On 28 October 2013, the same Minister had written to the then Chair of the Environment Committee regarding the Department's response to the Committee's final report on used tyres and its 12 recommendations. What has happened since? The answer is nothing. The status quo remains. The criminality around waste tyres continues, and all the time our environment continues to suffer.

I ask the Minister to act on the issue, and there has never been a better time to do so. The Government in the South of Ireland are bringing forward legislation to deal with the same issue. The issue could also involve the problem of cross-border waste. We know it happens, and I am sure that the Minister is aware of it.

Members, let us not pass up the chance that we have here. We have a chance now to deal with tyres. We need a central register. We need a paper trail from the time a tyre is made to the time it goes from the producer to the wholesaler, the retailer and the man in the street who buys the car. There has to be a paper trail for that tyre. We can do that very easily. There can be a paper trail through VAT or whatever. We have done that with the

plastic bag levy. There is a paper trail of sorts there, and it is working very well. We need to do the same with the tyre industry because it is unregulated and, as I say, is causing more and more problems every day. Our environment is suffering, and the people are suffering. How many people out there are suffering from, say, inhaling the fumes from burning tyres?

There are other ways we can be innovative with used tyres, and that will be dealt with by my colleague beside me. It will take commitment from everybody here to buy in to this. We must get commitment from everyone. This is not aimed at any one person or side; this is an environmental issue. In 2016, we still cannot tell anybody where waste tyres are going and how many tyres are being used. We are still dealing with approximate numbers: we think they are here; we think they are there. We cannot go on blaming children for taking tyres out of a yard.

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

**Mr McMullan:** Minister, I ask you, with this chance today, to support the motion.

**Mr McGlone:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an rún seo a chur os ár gcomhair. I beg to move the following amendment:

*Leave out all after "register" and insert*

*"and to work with the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment to introduce an island-wide tyre producer responsibility scheme to monitor the movement and disposal of tyres."*

I thank the Member for proposing the motion, which has been accepted as a competent motion. On a slight technical issue, the Department we refer to embraces within it the Environmental Protection Agency, which has responsibility for, among other things, environmental enforcement. I am not going to quibble over it; that is just information.

Where our amendment is concerned, we are very supportive of the motion as we believe a used-tyre register should be established as soon as possible to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres. Data on tyres and used tyres could be collected from a number of sources, namely producers, suppliers, used-tyre collectors, authorised treatment facilities and licensed recycling facilities. However, we believe the motion

should go further, and we are calling on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to work with her counterpart in the Irish Government to establish an island-wide tyre producer responsibility scheme to monitor the movement and disposal of tyres.

We are keen to approach the issue on an all-island basis as we believe it makes common sense to cooperate on the matter. I am sure many Members have heard on occasion that it is not unknown for the disposal of tyres to take place, cross border, at different times of the year, irrespective of which festive season it might be or which community might be involved. Orange or green — it does not really seem to make a whole lot of difference to those criminals who hope to dispose of tyres in that manner. It makes common sense to cooperate on the matter, and it is our hope that the Minister works with her counterpart to form a producer responsibility scheme, which would be counterproductive unless, as I outlined, it is introduced in both jurisdictions.

The system of the Irish Government is much the same as the process we have here, whereby wholesalers and retailers must use authorised waste collectors to take away waste tyres and provide details of tyres taken by and transferred to authorised collectors. We recognise that any considerations and change to the scheme or to a mandatory compliance scheme must be subject to review and consultation, but we believe that, if that is the case, the scheme should follow a similar approach to that in the South to help organisations that operate in both jurisdictions.

In the context of used tyres, under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, it is the responsibility of anyone who produces, collects, stores, treats, reuses or deposits waste or used tyres to minimise the risk to the environment, human health and animal welfare.

The storage of used tyres can represent a huge risk to the environment, human health and animal welfare.

### 3.45 pm

We have seen at first hand that major fire incidents can occur at sites used for the large-scale storage of waste, as we saw fairly recently in Belfast, or used tyres. Everyone should be aware that burning tyres generate extremely toxic fumes and by-products that are very dangerous to human and animal health. Tyre fires can be extremely difficult to

extinguish and have been known to burn for many weeks. In addition, when waste tyres are stockpiled, leaching of chemicals onto land and into rivers may also occur, posing a big risk to animal and human health and to our waterways. In particular, tyres pose a considerable risk to the environment and must be handled and disposed of properly. The potential risks are numerous and include the use of waste or used tyres on bonfires, generating toxic fumes. They are dangerous to health, produce unsightly burnt residues, damage properties — as we saw in July in Belfast — roads and open spaces and impact on Northern Ireland's economy; indeed, we saw that in Derry, where the road was significantly affected by one of these bonfires. The leaching of chemicals from stockpiled tyres can have a devastating impact on farmlands. Leaching into local rivers kills the fish and potentially puts our drinking water at risk. The use of unsafe part-worn tyres can cause road traffic accidents that result in serious injury and loss of life.

Under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, it is the responsibility of anyone who produces, stores, collects, reuses or deposits that waste to do so in a way that minimises that risk. In 2013, the Department of the Environment (DOE) and the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) in the Republic jointly commissioned an all-Ireland used tyre survey, which recommended that consideration should be given to placing additional obligations on producers and suppliers, either through voluntary best practice schemes, which rarely work, or a mandatory compliance scheme.

A further recommendation of that report stated:

*"In order to obtain an overall picture of illegal disposal of tyres from Northern Ireland it is recommended that consideration be given to a central recording system to be administered by the DOE or NIEA which would require all public bodies to report the used tyres which are discovered either through illegal dumping, fly-tipping or activities."*

While the motion makes no direct reference to bonfires, it would be very remiss of me to make no mention of the issue. The use of waste and used tyres on bonfires generates toxic fumes that are dangerous to human health, produce those unsightly burnt residues and, as I said, damage properties, roads and spaces. During the respective parading seasons, there were reports of hundreds of tyres appearing on bonfires under the cover of darkness, with the

police even placed on high alert at ports to tackle shipments of tyres. Each Member will recognise the impact that burning tyres has on the community. In answer to a written question, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs highlighted her concern about the impact of burning controlled waste in an uncontrolled manner, particularly in those built-up areas. She went on to say that the impacts include potential damage to human health and the environment. Materials such as tyres and treated pallets are burnt, which produces a huge risk to human health and has a detrimental impact on the environment.

We have all seen the black smoke gushing up into the air. We are running around controlling emissions from cars and the like and then we see that. Many people, depending on what season it is, take advantage of all that smoke going up in the air to put their own commercial smoke up into the air. Round and round it goes with no solution. Of course, private property is affected, and the high associated costs of the clean-up are met by ratepayers and taxpayers. In some instances, these activities are associated with low-level criminality and, in certain cases, behaviours that can be antisocial and create or increase tensions between communities.

I am glad to see the line that the Minister has taken and look forward to hearing about the actions that she will develop to manage the disposal of used tyres. I recognise that lead responsibility for bonfire management rests with the councils, but I ask the Minister to follow in the steps of the previous Environment Minister — my colleague Mark H — and work with and support the councils to reduce and, hopefully, ultimately eliminate the burning of tyres on bonfires.

As I said at the beginning, we support the motion tabled by Sinn Féin, but we believe that it can go further. If it goes that little bit further, as our amendment suggests, we can have an all-island approach, and that would help greatly to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.

**Mr Irwin:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. In an era when awareness and treatment of the environment are high on the agenda, the issue of what happens to end-of-use tyres is an important one. When tyres are fly-tipped and, of course, when they are burned, sending toxic fumes and particles into the air, it is a concern for everyone. The previous Committee for the Environment conducted its own inquiry into the management of used tyres in Northern Ireland, and that was a useful piece

of work in drawing attention to the issues arising from the thousands of used tyres that accumulate annually in the Province.

I know that, in agriculture, farmers are under duty-of-care rules concerning the use and disposal of tyres. We know that tyres are the most logical system for weighing down a silo cover. Farmers who already have tyres on the farm for that purpose are permitted to keep them, but, should they add to that number, they require an exemption certificate under NIEA regulations for the beneficial use of waste. I add, however, that agriculture is certainly not where the problem lies. The bigger problem arises when large quantities of tyres are dumped by the roadside. I have reported a number of fly-tipping incidents in my constituency. Of course, it then falls to councils to foot the bill for the clean-up and legal disposal of dumped tyres. The other obvious concern is that tyres may end up being burned, either maliciously in an arson attack or in other circumstances. The smoke from the burning tyres poses a serious health risk.

At the moment, tyre suppliers are able to charge a levy to a customer to retain that customer's worn tyres for future disposal by a registered waste tyre disposal company. However, there is no in-depth record created of where the tyre was bought or where it will end up, because there is no requirement to do so. I have read through previous Committee minutes of meetings at which tyre suppliers presented to the Environment Committee, and they appear to want and be willing to respond in terms of a register and having in place a system whereby tyres could be traced to a final destination. There is an issue of what marking would be used as a way of identifying where tyres came from, which supplier distributed them and so on. However, that is not an insurmountable problem.

There are, of course, retailers selling part-worn tyres in Northern Ireland. There are also dismantler yards that accumulate a stock of part-worn tyres for resale. There is no monitoring at all of that type of resale market, and that remains a concern.

With so many tyres being used and disposed of in Northern Ireland and the apparent lack of any form of traceability of their end use, there is certainly a case to be made, along with the full involvement of the tyre trade, for moving towards a system whereby a tyre can be traced from point of sale to a suitable, registered recycling centre. How that is achieved in a way that does not overly hinder the tyre retailers, does not create an overly bureaucratic burden

and, importantly, does not add significant cost to the consumer will require much more deliberation. I will be interested to consider the matter in more detail in the AERA Committee.

**Mr McKee:** Used tyres are an inevitable by-product of our increasing reliance on motor vehicles. The problem of what we do with them once they have reached the end of their roadworthiness is not new. Ten years ago, under the landfill directive, it was rightly decided that it was no longer tolerable to bury these items. Unfortunately, whilst we can all agree on that, getting complete agreement and buy-in on what to do with used tyres has been much more difficult.

Naturally, it costs money to recycle a tyre, and some people have decided that it is not worth abiding by the law. A small minority of people and businesses have decided to blatantly flout the agreements that are in place. Many of them think that it is acceptable to simply dump tyres. Unfortunately, however, it is most often landowners in rural areas who are left to literally pick up the mess after them. It is not unusual to drive around rural roads in a constituency, such as my own of South Down, and see locations where van- or trailer-loads of waste have simply been dumped. Fly-tipping remains a major problem here, with not just tyres but all sorts of other waste finding its way over hedges and lying scattered across fields of grass or crops. This also presents a real threat to livestock. I ask the Minister for an update on the fly-tipping protocol between councils and the NIEA, including which councils have yet to sign up to it.

There remains a major problem with the traceability of tyres coming into Northern Ireland. Has the Department not adopted a system of accurately quantifying the tyres coming into Northern Ireland? I believe that this was a recommendation in a Committee inquiry a number of years ago.

The problem of what to do with used tyres remains. The best environmental solution would probably be to retread or re-groove them, but I understand that the cost of doing so rules this out as a practical solution for everybody. I met a tyre company and was informed that it takes 22 litres of fuel to retread a tyre but 86 litres to manufacture a new one. A problem, however, is that retreading and re-grooving can be applied to commercial vehicles only.

Burning tyres under very controlled circumstances to generate heat is a fairly new idea, with businesses such as that one in Cookstown using progress in technology to do

so, and always with an eye on the environmental implications. Recycling old tyres into materials such as crumb rubber looks set to remain the common solution for several years to come. That does, however, produce some residue, which the motion correctly mentions and which, unfortunately, still finds its way to landfill.

One proposal I would like to make to the Minister is this: do not dismiss outright the idea of using old tyres as sea defences. This is an idea with a growing body of support across the UK. Whilst there was a well-known case relating to the north coast in the courts recently, that was because there was no permission for the tyres and not because they were harmful to the sea or land around them. I call on the Minister to task her officials to explore this.

Finally, farmers have found waste tyres to be an effective alternative to silage clamps on manure. Is it not about time that the Minister considered abolishing the current fee of £842 for a three-year paragraph 16 exemption? It is 13 years since the Waste Management Licensing Regulations came into effect, so it is about time that the Minister looked at this issue with some rationality.

**Mr Ford:** I congratulate Mr McMullan and his colleagues for bringing the motion to the House today. This is clearly an issue of great significance to us, judging by the number of people who are in the Chamber, which is rather more than we generally get for Back-Bench debates.

There is no doubt, as highlighted in the motion, that failure to recycle tyres properly leads to a number of problems, particularly environmental damage but also very significant potential health damage. We have already heard that even proper landfill of tyres can create toxic effluent. There is no doubt that fly-tipping is a major problem where it involves tyres and other materials but, of course, a lot of the tyres that are not properly disposed of do not go to landfill or fly-tipping. They are frequently burnt in urban areas causing major human health issues. There is not just the short-term nuisance that all of us experience but potentially major chronic problems, respiratory diseases, skin diseases and even effects on the central nervous system. All of those can arise from the burning of tyres, which is another reason why the issue needs to be addressed very seriously.

**4.00 pm**

Mr McMullan referred to the £1.50 charge for a car tyre, or the higher charge for commercial tyres, that is paid for recycling purposes. He also highlighted, as Mr McKee has just done, the issue of the cost of having an exemption certificate for people who, for example, wish to put used tyres on a silo cover. We all know that the practical reality is that, in many cases, when people pay the appropriate fee to have their old tyres recycled, they are not recycled but go out through the back door to criminal activity and to paramilitary groups and a variety of other people who burn them illegally. That is a key problem that needs to be covered if we are to make any changes in the legislation. We need to ensure that any disposal is done properly and that matters are regulated all the way through. We all know that there are plenty of other uses for waste rubber, whether it is used for safety surfaces in playgrounds, various bits of athletic equipment and even things like carpet underlay, if it is not possible to do the retreading that was referred to earlier.

For me, the key question is this: why is the current system not working and how do we ensure that any changes that we make to it are made to work so that we protect the environment and protect human health? We cannot just assume that another set of regulations will automatically make things better when, unfortunately, the current set of regulations does not work. It seems to me that, at the moment, there is little incentive for people to deal with this waste properly because the penalties are almost non-existent for failing to deal with it properly and, indeed, the charges can be so high for doing things properly.

I probably should not mention in public the advice that I gave to Mr McMullan when this was discussed at the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs a while ago, but the fact is that we all know that illegal burning is going on in huge quantities at particular times of the year, and, unless something is done to stop those tyres going into bonfires, we will see little to improve the environmental or human health aspects.

I am not absolutely sure whether the precise wording of the motion or, indeed, the amendment is absolutely the right way forward, but I am sure that they both hint at necessary action and at the broad point that we need to ensure that we have proper controls of this waste and that it is dealt with in an efficient way that does not allow it to go to fly-tipping, landfill or, worst of all, burning. We need to ensure that we have a proper joined-up approach on a cross-border basis. We are well aware that, in the recent past, in this jurisdiction, waste has

been shipped across the border, creating further difficulties for us in Northern Ireland after people have made illegal profits in the Republic. There is a lot that needs to be done in this area, and I certainly support the principle of the motion and the amendment. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some reassurance as to exactly how she will take things forward from now on.

**Mr Anderson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion on used tyres. The Health Protection Agency reported in 2003 that, in the United Kingdom, more than 35 million tyres are manufactured each year. It also estimated that the number of tyres in use would increase by up to 60% by 2021. The all-island used tyres survey also estimated that, by 2010-11, there were over 18,500 tons of used tyres in Northern Ireland, equating to approximately 1.8 million tyres. It is therefore quite clear that there is a significant amount of used tyres across the country, and that brings great challenges in how we dispose of them and how they are reused and recycled.

We are all well aware that tyres continue to be disposed of improperly across Northern Ireland. In particular, the burning of used tyres poses a health risk, releasing heavy smoke and dangerous chemical substances into the atmosphere. In addition, in recent times, in my constituency of Upper Bann, I have had to deal with a case in which a significant number of tyres were illegally dumped. Thankfully, on that occasion, I was able to liaise with the local council — Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council — to see that the tyres were taken away and properly disposed of.

Unfortunately, however, there are many cases of tyres being dumped. That, along with other examples of fly-tipping, continues to take place to the detriment of areas across Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has an important role to play as we seek to dispose of waste tyres in a proper fashion. As such, it must continue to work in conjunction with tyre retailers to make sure that waste tyres are properly handled and disposed of by licensed waste operators. Where there is evidence of improper disposal, enforcement must be strenuously imposed. I also believe that we must continue to focus our energies on ensuring that a collaborative approach to dealing with used tyres is adopted. Such an approach would not only involve central government and key agencies such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency but local

councils, tyre distributors, tyre retailers, farmers, and the wider community. All those groups should continue to engage with the wider population to ensure that used tyres are properly disposed of, reused and recycled.

In the past, documents have been published — there are many I am sure — such as 'Used Tyres - What's all the Fuss About?', and efforts should be made to highlight to communities the dangers and problems that arise from the burning and illegal dumping of tyres. I believe that the Executive and the business community can help to develop further opportunities for the recycling and reuse of used tyres across Northern Ireland. There are numerous ways in which used tyres can be reused effectively, and, therefore, we must encourage commercial opportunities that focus on reusing and recycling tyres in a variety of ways. We must also help to ensure that proper guidance and direction is given to those who seek to set up businesses and ensure that they do not become unnecessarily burdened or obstructed in their efforts to establish such businesses.

I am of the view that the Department should continue to liaise with other jurisdictions and key stakeholders in the tyre industry to see how effectively we can develop a used tyre register. Clarification would have to be secured on the viability of such a register, and questions arise regarding how it would be policed effectively and what the financial implications might be.

In closing, the issue of used tyres and their disposal is of great importance and one that causes much debate. To have any chance of successfully reducing the number of tyres, we should continue to work with all key stakeholders on that issue. As we go forward, there needs to be a willingness for cooperation to improve our chances of success. As I said, we must try to provide additional opportunities to recycle and reuse tyres and to engage with the community to deter the burning and illegal dumping of tyres, which are harmful to people and to the natural environment. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

**Ms Archibald:** I speak in support of the motion and the amendment. I welcome the opportunity to contribute. My party colleague Mr McMullan has outlined the background, and we have heard from several of my Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs colleagues on why this is a very important topic for discussion.

As we have heard, the illegal dumping and burning of tyres has a very negative impact on the environment. Tyres that are illegally

dumped are a significant environmental concern, even directly on land, because, while they can remain intact for decades, some of the components can degrade and toxic additives can leach into the ground. There is also a concern about tyre fires, with the acrid smoke containing many hazardous chemicals, including carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and many others. The residue from those burnt tyres can cause the contamination of land and water from the phenolic compounds, heavy metals and the significant quantity of oil that is released through burning.

Members, we must take all possible steps to ensure that that type of environmental contamination is reduced and eliminated. The motion calls on the Minister to look at the establishment of a used tyre register to improve the regulation of the tyre industry to make it easier to monitor and regulate the disposal of tyres. Indeed, measures should be looked at that would trace tyres from manufacture to end of life and make it more difficult to dispose of them illegally.

One example of this type of producer responsibility measures has already been implemented for waste electrical and electronic equipment. Responsibility is placed on manufacturers and importers to maintain records regarding the amount of material placed on the market and to arrange for the recovery and treatment of waste. Those principles could be applied to waste tyre regulation.

In the South, following the publication of a report on the current system for managing waste tyres, which showed an apparent failure to comply with regulations, a lack of accurate data being recorded and between 25% to 50% of waste tyres being unaccounted for, the Minister has announced the introduction of a full producer responsibility initiative. Lessons could quickly be adopted from that initiative and a similar scheme introduced in the North. Indeed, these measures were included in the Environment Committee's 2013 report on its inquiry into used tyre disposal, which recommended the introduction of producer responsibility schemes, coordinated North and South for greatest effectiveness. We therefore urge the Minister to work with her Southern counterpart on this.

Waste management in general poses a significant challenge as we attempt to meet targets on landfill reduction through increased recycling and reuse. That should be our focus for waste tyres. We have already heard from other Members on the potential uses of tyres

through remoulding and retreading or in artificial sports surfaces and playgrounds. I do not particularly advocate their use in furnaces, but it has to be acknowledged that tyres and tyre chips have a calorific content that exceeds that of coal, and a similar or lower sulphur content. Tyres have also been used, with varying degrees of success, as underwater reefs, where a large quantity of tyres is bound together and dropped into the ocean to act, like a reef, as a habitat for breeding fish and crustaceans. As tyres are relatively stable in water, there is also the potential for use as river and coastal defences, as previously mentioned.

The use of waste or end-of-life tyres should form part of the strategy to monitor and control distribution and disposal. The aim should be to encourage, or even incentivise, producers and distributors to recover waste tyres to put them to other uses, and to make it easier for those who want to be involved in processing what would otherwise be waste. As we look to develop our policies and encourage environmental protection, waste management is a vital part of any environmental strategy or policy. We should be as innovative as possible in our approach, and that is what we are calling on the Minister to do in today's motion.

**Mr Poots:** This issue has caused problems for a number of years. Thankfully, it is not as big a problem now as it was. Considerable work has been going on to reduce the problem.

Mr Ford mentioned tyres burning at particular times of the year. Perhaps he is a bit out of touch, because the burning of tyres on bonfires around the eleventh night is considerably less common now than in the past; the vast majority of bonfires do not now burn tyres. However, a few years ago in Londonderry 90,000-odd tyres were burnt on one occasion. It was nothing to do with loyalism or bonfires. People were being paid —

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

**Mr Poots:** Yes, I will in a moment.

People who were being paid to collect used tyres and were not disposing of them properly caused huge environmental damage, both to the air and our waterways, through the burning of the tyres.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the Member for raising the issue. My understanding is that at Campsie between half a million and one million tyres were burnt, and that someone might well have become a millionaire as a result.

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

**Mr Poots:** I thank the Member for that information. That sort of thing is wholly unacceptable. When we get a tyre changed on our vehicle, we pay the company an extra £1 or £2 to dispose of it in a proper fashion. The people who collect those tyres from licensed tyre dealers should therefore be doing their job properly.

The crux of the problem with used tyres is that there may well be individuals — I know that, in the early days, it was very common, and the Minister can inform us of how successful clamping down on all this has been — who are taking money for disposing of tyres but not doing so properly.

#### 4.15 pm

There are so many opportunities to dispose of tyres in a safe manner. The science has moved on. Pyrolysis and all those things enable us to dispose of tyres in a way that recycles the material for further use, whether in playgrounds or at equestrian facilities. Those are good things. I know that, at one stage, Lafarge wanted to burn tyres with flue liners and so on to ensure that the environment was not damaged, but the process with the NIEA seemed to drag out for a long time. I am not sure whether it is still a runner in a period in which fuel prices are considerably lower, but it would certainly be a great opportunity to produce heat and energy from that source in a way that a company could benefit while getting rid of a waste product at the same time.

I welcome the fact that we have the motion before us. I am not sure that the problem is as great as it was in the past. I do not believe that that is the case. It has not been entirely resolved, and it is still a work in progress. We need to get to a situation in which used tyres are disposed of entirely in a legal manner and in a way in which they are either used for recycling or for producing energy.

**Mr Beggs:** I, too, support the motion, which highlights the toxic nature of compounds given off as a result of burning tyres in an uncontrolled fashion. I also have some sympathy for the amendment. It is important that we do not create gaps between legislation in Northern Ireland and the Republic from which criminals could profit.

The most succinct and informed document that I have come across on the dangers from

pollutants as a result of burning tyres is the chemical hazards and poisons report of December 2003 produced by the Public Health Agency in England and Wales. We are talking about poisons being given off. It lists the atmospheric pollutants and other pollutants to water and land that cause contamination. It makes for very interesting reading about some of the compounds in the atmosphere. The thick black smoke contains many hazardous chemicals, such as carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide, as a result of incomplete combustions. Then, of course, there are the dioxins and furans, which can cause cancer. There are also polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) due to the combustion of benzene and chlorine, both well-known hazardous substances, in the tyres. There is then the particulate material itself — the soot — which can blacken houses, land on cars, blacken areas of concrete and disrupt neighbours where such fires occur. There is also contamination to water and land. During combustion, heavy metals, phenolic compounds and PAHs leach from tyres. A significant amount of oil, as others mentioned, is liberated from each tyre during combustion. Those contaminants may leach into the ground or be washed into nearby watercourses by the firefighting exercises that ensue.

There is a well-known problem of stockpiling tyres throughout the developed world, and there have been many instances of sizeable fires in Canada and the USA. On our shores, in England in the 1970s, some 9,000 tyres were burnt in Rochdale. The water supply reservoir was closed and remains closed. Arson was suspected. In Selby, over 1,000 tyres were burnt. Twenty-one gallons of an oily leachate were removed from the site, and drinking water intake was closed for two days as a precaution. Again, arson was suspected.

In Powys in Wales in 1989 some 10 million tyres were burnt, and arson was suspected. In Cheshire, England in 1999, it was half a million tyres. Oil ran off the site and contaminated areas. Again, arson was suspected. As I mentioned, we, too, had sizeable fires in Pennyburn and Campsie, where, in one case, it was suspected that over half a million tyres were burnt and an individual profited as a result. He did not have to pay for any more recycling but will have received, at least in those days, probably about £1 per tyre going into that site. Of course, public services also had to spend some £800,000 as part of the clean-up. When we do not take action, we have to accept that costs will follow that cannot

be avoided. It is worthwhile making some investment to deal with it.

Some Members mentioned the problem of fly-tipping, which is simply dumping tyres in the countryside. Then there are the bonfires that local communities can suffer from, where fires are excessive and cause difficulties. Clearly, we need to take greater care and avoid that. How we manage tyres is not sufficient, and it is clear we need to do better. There is a discrepancy in the number of tyres actually being collected and recycled. I noticed that, in the all-Ireland survey, which is highly questionable, given some of the poor responses it received — I think 2% of retailers in the Republic responded — some 1.8 million tyres were collected in Northern Ireland but 1.6 million were recycled. What happened to the other 200,000? That really does beg an answer.

We need spot checks. It is a simple process of asking, "How many tyres did you buy?" My understanding is that most people, when they buy a tyre, allow the garage to take the old one away.

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

**Mr Beggs:** It is important we do spot checks, manage the system, avoid creating unnecessary bureaucracy and do so in an efficient manner. Let us get to the bottom of this so that honest businessmen can continue to trade and those who profit from criminality can be held to account.

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

**Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** First, I thank Mr McMullan and his colleagues for tabling this private Members' motion on the very important subject of the regulation of waste tyres and the environmental and harmful effects of their disposal to landfill and public burning. I will also address the need to ensure that this is an issue not only for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but the wider United Kingdom.

I want to be clear from the outset that my approach for the management of all waste streams, including waste tyres, is to apply the waste hierarchy. Where possible, through our waste strategy and the regulations, we must prevent the production of waste in the first place. We must prepare waste streams for reuse, recycling and recovery, with disposal to

landfill last of all. To help to deliver that aim, my Department's current tyre action plan includes legislative considerations, as well as regulatory and communication measures. In addition, alternative uses for waste tyres are being examined.

Current regulation for waste tyres is delivered through the implementation of duty of care legislation. Its requirements provide a basis for ensuring that movements of controlled wastes, which, in this case, are tyres, are properly identified, transported and otherwise handled in ways that are consistent with environmentally sound practices for the management of these wastes. To meet the needs of duty of care for waste tyres, NIEA audits the disposal of waste tyres at tyre-retailing facilities to ensure they are properly handled and disposed of by a licensed waste operator. As an example of that, NIEA has carried out over 90 inspections of tyre retailers, with 21 enforcement notices issued for waste offences this year. I want to be clear about this: where the evidence exists, NIEA will take enforcement action against any illegal storage or handling of waste tyres. I am fully aware that a typical car tyre costs around £2.00 to dispose of legally and that, therefore, there is a huge saving to be made in illegally dumping them.

The Republic of Ireland has been engaged in developing proposals for a full producer responsibility scheme for used tyres in the Republic of Ireland for a number of years and has set up a tyres working group involving all major stakeholders to take proposals forward.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is in the lead, and my officials attend the working group meetings, which take place about every three months.

If such a scheme were to be implemented in Northern Ireland, it may follow that approach. All producers of tyres would be required to register and provide evidence of the number of tyres placed on the market. Used tyres would be left at designated collection facilities, typically retailers and garages, but they may also include council civic amenity sites. The used tyres would be collected by registered waste carriers under contract to the scheme and would deliver them to approved reprocessors. The flow of used tyres to reprocessing would be monitored by the scheme, which would report regularly to the NIEA.

All operators in the management of used tyres required to register with the scheme would be required to pay a registration fee. Customers

buying new tyres would be required to pay the retailer a levy — a visible fee — set by Government. The retailer would be required to pass that fee to the scheme for every tyre sold. The scheme would establish contracts with waste tyre collectors and pay the fee to the registered collectors when they delivered the tyres to an approved reprocessor.

The introduction of a scheme would have significant legislative and resource implications. I understand that, although the Irish Government are keen to press ahead with the introduction of such a scheme in the Republic of Ireland, the necessary legislation has been delayed on a number of occasions, in part due to substantial opposition from the Irish used tyre industry. Minister Kelly announced the introduction of the scheme in 2015. Originally, the legislation was scheduled for the summer of 2015. It is now scheduled for January 2017, but, at this stage, there is no guarantee that the proposals will proceed.

My preference would be to consider proposals for the introduction of a producer responsibility scheme in a UK-wide context. Critical to the success of any scheme will be the identification of producers, which will mainly be importers of new tyres into Northern Ireland. If Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with such a scheme, it will be difficult to obtain accurate information on tyres coming into Northern Ireland from England or Scotland, which is the normal route. I also anticipate that there may be opposition to the introduction of such a scheme from sections of the tyre industry here, and that is likely to be exacerbated if they can argue that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom with such a scheme. The key to all this will be in ensuring that appropriate and effective enforcement action is taken against operators seeking to bypass the regime or to operate the scheme fraudulently.

It is essential that we continue to assist in providing advice and guidance to the key sectors involved in the management of used and waste tyres. We have communicated, for example, with key sectors through the development of guidance documents. These include a regulatory position statement, 'Used Tyres: The Risks and Your Responsibilities', for those dealing and handling part-worn and waste tyres, and specific guidance for farmers on the use of used tyres on farms.

A number of Members referred to alternative uses for waste tyres. My Department has been working to encourage and support commercial ideas for the reuse and recycling of waste tyres. One example that my colleague Edwin Poots

referred to has been through a partnership agreement with the Lafarge cement company. The NIEA is continuing to explore opportunities to reuse waste tyres as an alternative fuel for the company's cement kilns. Lafarge has been seeking funding from its parent company to allow equipment to be bought that will automate the process, but, as yet, that is not forthcoming. We are also looking to support innovation by three other companies seeking to commercialise new ideas for the reuse and recycling of waste tyres. That will help to prevent substantial amounts of waste tyres from being dumped or used illegally.

I am fully aware that burning tyres is harmful to the environment and to human health. My Department has found that high levels of particulate pollution are frequently detected at local air pollution monitoring sites during bonfire events. Waste tyres are extremely combustible and produce thick clouds of sulphurous black smoke that contains up to 50 toxic chemicals and gases. Smoke and chemical damage can persist over a number of days as bonfires are left to smoulder.

#### 4.30 pm

I want to put today's debate in context. A used-tyre survey, published in 2012, indicated that there are around 1.8 million used tyres in Northern Ireland each year, and only a very small percentage of them end up on bonfires. As Members will be aware, the regulation of bonfires is a complex social and cultural issue. Legally, the ultimate responsibility for a bonfire rests with the landowner, often a public body, although those engaged in associated activities also carry certain responsibilities. While district councils often take the lead responsibility for the overall management of bonfires, a number of bodies have enforcement powers, including the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the NIEA and, of course, district councils. My Department will play its part in helping to manage this complex issue.

It is pleasing to note that our work on the control of waste tyres is having an impact. Recent evidence from Belfast City Council indicates that the number of significant bonfires reduced this summer, from over 100 to around 80; there has been an increased uptake of celebrations marked with beacons rather than bonfires; and the number of bonfires containing tyres has reduced. Indeed, on several occasions this year, under council-led initiatives and with community support, NIEA has removed over 1,000 tyres from bonfires, and progress has been made in improving their management and design. My Department will,

of course, continue to support the councils in this work.

Mr McGlone raised issues in relation to the disposal of tyres to landfill. My Department has found no evidence that tyre residues sent to landfill pose a danger to the environment. All of the leachate in a permitted landfill is collected and treated. Normally, after initial treatment at the landfill, the leachate is tankered away to a waste water treatment works for further treatment. The treated discharges from waste water treatment works are closely monitored to ensure compliance with their authorisation. Similarly, landfill gas is collected and treated using gas engines to produce energy, and the emissions are monitored to ensure that they comply with the limits in the landfill permit.

Mr McKee asked for an update on the fly-tipping protocol. NIEA has been working closely with councils on a fly-tipping pilot project over the last three years. A report on the pilot is due in the next few months. Whilst a detailed approach is still to be agreed, my Department has spent approximately £300,000 each year over the last three years on resolving fly-tipping incidents throughout Northern Ireland.

**Mr McMullan:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss McIlveen:** Yes.

**Mr McMullan:** Minister, we have moved away from the NIEA, the licensing authority for waste tyres. It does not have accurate records. If we were to introduce a producer liability scheme, which you are talking about, it still would not deal with the fact that the statistics that you have given us, which I am not saying are wrong, do not deal with the more than 80% of tyres that go missing every year and end up everywhere. We need this register, and we need the NIEA to update its records.

**Miss McIlveen:** I accept the point that Mr McMullan makes, but I am trying to put this into context and will not deviate from that.

Mr McKee made a comment about coastal management. Obviously, the creation or improvement of a sea defence requires planning permission and/or a marine construction licence. It also needs to be noted that annex II of the OSPAR convention specifically prohibits the disposal of waste in the marine environment. Tyres that have reached the end of their useful life are classified as waste. Therefore, the use of waste tyres to protect against coastal erosion cannot be considered as a licensable activity on the coast.

In closing, I thank all Members for their contribution to the debate. I will continue to ensure that we implement fully the waste hierarchy in respect of waste tyres. It is clear that we need to support commercial opportunities for their reuse and recycling, and I have given examples of where my officials are working with companies to try to achieve this.

In relation to setting up a register for used tyres, my officials are closely monitoring developments in the Republic of Ireland and their proposals for the producer responsibility scheme for used tyres. Officials have also discussed the potential for such an approach with colleagues in England, Wales and Scotland. It would be prudent to await the outcome of developments in the Republic of Ireland and to obtain more certainty about the position of the Scottish Government before considering, in detail, the feasibility and desirability of introducing a similar scheme here.

**Mr Ford:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss McIlveen:** I am running out of time, sorry.

Due to the nature of the tyres market across these islands, perhaps the best outcome would be to consider the introduction of this sort of scheme across the entire British Isles.

**Mr Durkan:** I welcome the opportunity to give a winding-up speech in what has been a healthy and positive debate. From today's contributions, it is clear that there is political unanimity that used tyres are a major problem and that there is a need for the appropriate Department and statutory agencies to get a grip on the problem and remove the environmental risk and the economic cost of used tyres. Therefore, we welcome the motion that has been brought to the House. We have proposed an amendment, which I think the Minister has now confirmed was correct, as we feel that to successfully tackle the issue, we cannot do so in isolation. We are all aware that the environment does not recognise artificial borders and neither do environmental criminals. We should not let them hamper us or restrict our attempts to ensure greater environmental protection.

I think it is fair to say that considerable work has been done on the issue — the Minister outlined some of it — by the Environment Committee in the last mandate and by past Environment Ministers. Last year, when I was Minister, I launched a used tyre action plan informed by

and, importantly, in liaison with the Environment Committee. From listening to Members today, it is clear that we are not where we would like to be on the issue, but we are moving in the right direction.

It is worth pointing out that a lot of the problems mentioned during today's debate are not exclusive to Northern Ireland — maybe with the notable exception of bonfires — and nor are the difficulties in eradicating the problems that we have discussed exclusive to us in the North. The amendment calls for collaboration with the Department in the South as there has already been a partial producer responsibility scheme for tyres in place there. The review of that scheme, maybe two years ago, recommended a full producer responsibility scheme, and Mr McGlone mentioned that.

The Minister outlined how there has been huge resistance, unsurprisingly, from some in the very lucrative used tyre industry. It is fair to say that we can expect similar resistance here, but that should not deter us in any way from proceeding with positive initiatives that are for the greater good. Mr McMullan mentioned the carrier bag levy during his contribution.

I will address some of the points that contributors made today. Mr McMullan cited something that the former Environment Minister had done in 2015 and then said that nothing had been done since 2013. A few Members referred to Lafarge: in 2015, the prosperity agreement was finally, Mr Poots, signed between the NIEA and Lafarge Tarmac, which allowed the company to use tyres as a waste-derived fuel, burning tyres in their kilns instead of coal and, in doing so, reducing their carbon emissions by 10%. That is a good example of the reuse or recycling of waste tyres. New ideas like that will help to prevent substantial numbers of waste tyres being dumped or used illegally. Other uses have been touched on today, including surfacing in playgrounds, safety measures at level crossings and, as Mr McKee and Ms Archibald suggested, sea defences. The Minister pointed out that that cannot be done, although, in the case of compressed bales of waste tyres, it might be permissible. Maybe we could discuss it in the future; I know that she is very interested in coastal erosion.

A few Members mentioned bonfires. It is important that the work continues with councils and communities to eradicate tyre-burning on bonfires at any time of the year. The point that Mr Poots and Mr Beggs made about commercial crime around used tyres is

something that really needs to be clamped down on.

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

**Mr Durkan:** Certainly.

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

**Mr Beggs:** You will hopefully get an extra minute for this, as well. Do you agree that it is important to remove the financial benefits for those who sometimes supply tyres to local bonfires for profit at the expense of local communities?

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

**Mr Durkan:** The cost of these crimes to the public purse and to the planet is staggering, and the penalties associated with these crimes really ought to reflect that.

Mr Anderson spoke of the need for a collaborative approach. We certainly concur with that, and any producer responsibility scheme and/or used tyre register will need input and will expect and demand output from a range of agencies. In our opinion, that can only be truly successful if implemented on an all-island basis, and I ask Members to support the amendment.

**Madam Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before I call Linda Dillon to wind on the motion, I remind the House that loud conversations should not be taking place. Members need to be heard.

**Ms Dillon:** We have heard from all contributors about the harmful effects of the pollution, criminality and antisocial behaviour that derive from used tyres. Bonfires are only one element of that antisocial behaviour, so we should not concentrate on it too much. As Mr Beggs said, there are people who drop tyres off at bonfires and encourage the use of tyres that maybe would not ordinarily have been sought by those who are lighting the bonfires in the first place.

We have heard about the cost to farmers of a permit when they find a use for used tyres, and the Minister should review this charge with a view to abolishing it. I welcome and support the amendment proposed by the SDLP. However, it is unfortunate, given that the issue has come up in the Chamber before, that the previous Minister was not able to move forward with the Committee report, as one of its

recommendations was that any scheme should be developed in close liaison with the Twenty-six Counties.

A number of people mentioned councils being the first port of call and having the first responsibility for tyres, particularly tyres on bonfires. We probably need to be a wee bit cautious about that. As one who comes from one of the 11 new councils, I know that we often leave issues to councils to deal with, but we need to make legislation and rules in central government that mean councils are able to do what they need to do without incurring additional cost. If there is additional cost, we need to look at helping them with it.

The fact that we are discussing the issue in the Assembly again indicates the failure to properly address it, and I call on the new Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to act on the motion and be the Minister who implements real and effective action on the issue rather than paying lip service to it.

I welcome the support for the motion and the amendment from across the Chamber, and I genuinely hope that we will see plans come to the Committee as soon as possible. As has already been said by some Members, we cannot take the fact that there will be some opposition to this as a reason not to act on it. There is opposition from some quarter to every piece of legislation that we bring to the Chamber, but that does not mean that we cannot move things forward. I call on the Minister to act on the motion and finally get something done about used tyres so that we do not need to bring the issue back to the Chamber again.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The Assembly divided:*

*Ayes 42; Noes 49.*

## **AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Hanna and Mr Mullan*

## **NOES**

*Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes with concern the dangerous emission of toxic fumes and gases into the atmosphere from the public burning of used car tyres; notes that the residue is sent to landfill and still poses an environmental danger; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to establish a used-tyre register to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.*

*Adjourned at 5.01 pm.*

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