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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 24 May 2021

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

The draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021

Mrs Dodds (The Minister for the Economy): I beg to move

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 be approved.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed that there should be no time limit on this debate.

Mrs Dodds: I am seeking the Assembly's approval for this draft order, laid before the Assembly under article 66(2) of the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. My Department makes the order under powers conferred by articles 52 to 55F and 66(3) of the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. It is subject to the draft affirmative procedure and therefore must be approved by a resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly before it can be made. This is a temporary amendment, lasting for one year, to the Renewables Obligation Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 and is necessary in order for Northern Ireland to maintain consistency of approach across the UK and to ensure that eligible combined heat and power (CHP) operators in Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged.

The combined heat and power quality assurance programme (CHPQA) is a UK-wide government initiative providing a practical, determinate method for assessing all types and sizes of combined heat and power schemes.

CHPQA aims to monitor, assess and improve the quality of UK combined heat and power. The programme provides the opportunity for CHP schemes to demonstrate that their CHP is

good quality in accordance with the criteria of the CHPQA standard.

Successful certification provides eligibility to a range of benefits, such as, for Northern Ireland operators, climate change levy exemption. The programme is administered by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in consultation with the devolved Administrations and has been in operation across the UK since 2001. In 2019, 41 CHP schemes in Northern Ireland were accredited under the programme. CHP operators expressed concern to BEIS that COVID-19 and the associated nationwide and regional restrictions changed the demands of customers and that that had an adverse impact on heat and power ratios.

The CHPQA programme operates on a calendar year basis, and the concern is that some CHP schemes will be unable to obtain the required benchmark to qualify as a good-quality CHP for 2020 and, therefore, will be unable to qualify for certification in 2021.

BEIS published a UK-wide consultation on 15 December 2020 seeking views on a temporary proposal to amend the certification process that will allow effective participants who can provide appropriate evidence on the impact of COVID-19 to choose to use the 2019 operational data in place of their disrupted 2020 data for their 2021 certification. The consultation closed on 29 January, and BEIS decided to implement the proposal. The legislation is temporary, lasting for only one year from the date of coming into operation and allowing Northern Ireland's CHP operators to submit 2019 data. Implementation in GB will necessitate a minor legislative amendment to update the CHPQA standard.

The order seeks to maintain a consistency of approach across the UK, and no additional cost to business, charities or voluntary bodies is anticipated.

In advance of today's debate, the proposal was shared with Executive colleagues and the Committee for the Economy. I received no

comments reflecting the technical nature of the amendment and, I presume, there was a recognition of the need to maintain consistency of practice across all UK jurisdictions that operate the scheme. The Utility Regulator and the Consumer Council have indicated their support for the amendment.

I seek the Assembly's support for the order to be made.

Dr Archibald (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Economy): I will speak briefly on behalf of the Committee for the Economy to support the motion.

As the Minister indicated, the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (NI) 2021 will ensure that certification for combined heat and power quality assurance schemes is not adversely impacted by COVID and allows for the changed demands of customers and the impact on heat and power ratios.

BEIS is implementing a minor legislative amendment to update the combined heat and power quality assurance standard by allowing operators to submit 2019 data. In order to maintain consistency of approach, a similar amendment to the Renewables Obligation Order (NI) 2009 is required, which will ensure that eligible operators here are not disadvantaged.

The Committee agreed the statutory rule (SR) at its meeting on 28 April 2021, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The rule will come into operation on 1 June. The Examiner of Statutory Rules has no issue with the rule, and I support the motion to confirm on the Committee's behalf.

I also support the motion as the economy spokesperson of Sinn Féin. The consequences of the pandemic are far-reaching and, in some ways, unforeseen. The SR could seem quite niche and technical. It allows the previous year's data to be used to certify CHP quality assurance schemes. It is temporary, but, as with other such SRs, we have acted to mitigate and limit the negative impacts of the pandemic and, therefore, are happy to support the motion.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Minister to make a winding-up speech and conclude the debate.

Mrs Dodds: I thank the Chair of the Committee and, indeed, the whole Committee for their support of the SR. It is important that we help those who have suffered during the pandemic. The SR is temporary, and it will help to alleviate

some concern and ensure nationwide consistency for the accreditation.

Thank you for your support, and I thank the Assembly for allowing the SR to proceed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021 be approved.

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

Committee Business

Climate Change Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed that there should be no time limit on the debate. I call the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Mr McGuigan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 17 December 2021, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Climate Change Bill [NIA Bill 19/17-22].

For accuracy, I should point out that I, as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, am standing in for the Chair. The Chair is unable to be with us.

Mr Speaker: Pardon me for elevating you. Sorry. Go ahead.

Mr McGuigan: Go raibh maith agat. The private Member's Climate Change Bill, which passed Second Stage on 10 May 2021, has been referred to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee for scrutiny. The Bill proposes a framework to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and sets out a series of measures to enable our society to achieve a net zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2045.

The Committee recognises the profound impact that climate change has on our environment and understands that the Bill could have profound implications for many sectors of the economy, including farming, agri-food, energy production and transport. Therefore, the Committee, to ensure that it has sufficient time to gather views and evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, has tabled a motion to extend Committee Stage until 17 December 2021.

The Committee launched its call for evidence on Thursday 20 May 2021. That will last for eight weeks, and it is using the Citizen Space platform to collate written evidence from interested stakeholders and members of the public. The Committee has also organised oral briefing sessions with organisations in the agri-food, environment and energy sectors. Given the wide-ranging scope of the Bill, it is important that the Committee has enough time to

consider the views of all those who will be affected so that it can ensure that the Bill delivers an effective, collaborative and sustainable model to mitigate climate change, which will impact not only on how we currently live and work but on future generations.

Mr Speaker: No other Members have indicated that they want to speak on the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 17 December 2021, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Climate Change Bill [NIA Bill 19/17-22].

Mr Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a moment, please.

12.15 pm

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

Restrictive Intervention and Seclusion of Children and Young People with Additional Support Needs

Mr Lyttle (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern at the lack of statutory guidance from the Department of Education on the use of restrictive intervention on children and young people, particularly those who have additional support needs, including those with physical or learning disabilities or who are neurodivergent; calls on the Minister of Education to develop and introduce, in partnership with teachers, parents and all other relevant stakeholders, up-to-date statutory guidance on therapeutic-based, non-aversive, positive behaviour strategies; and further calls on the Minister to fund mandatory training on this approach for all staff working directly with children and young people, provide statutory guidance on restraint definitions, last-resort definitions, and human rights-based guidance in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), introduce mandatory recording and reporting of all incidents of restrictive intervention and abolish the use of isolation rooms.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Lyttle: Some people say that emotion can be an enemy of good oratory, and I am going to wrestle with that enemy today. As Chairperson of the Education Committee, I have advocated for the outstanding teachers, non-teaching staff and schools across Northern Ireland, particularly our outstanding special schools, at times when they felt that the Education Minister did not do so. However, in the absence of appropriate Department of Education guidance, accountability and support on restraint, serious mistakes have been made by schools, boards of governors and employing authorities such as the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), which have caused significant harm to the children whom they were entrusted to protect.

The motion is for the children who have been harmed by the inappropriate use of restraint and seclusion in Northern Ireland. It is for the parents and guardians who have experienced distress and trauma because of the harm that their children suffered. It is for parents, guardians and, on many occasions, mothers who were not believed, who risked their reputation, mental health and well-being to challenge people of standing in their local community to hold child protection failings of respected institutions to account, who became experts in law and policy and who refused to give up.

It is for children such as Harry Shakespeare and parents and guardians such as Deirdre and Rodney Shakespeare, whom I first met in July 2019 when they were lobbying for a Harry's law to include many of the recommendations that are set out in our motion. That family asked me to read out a short comment from them today. The Shakespeares say:

"It is difficult to describe the pain and heartache at knowing our child was restrained and frightened, that we didn't know and we couldn't stop it. This has left our family feeling vulnerable and alone, in pain and unsupported. All we ever wanted for Harry was acknowledgement of the harm done and accountability from those responsible for keeping him safe."

Please use your voices in this chamber today and support a Harry's Law to ensure no other family experiences this pain."

The motion is for families such as the Shakespeares and for all children and parents who have suffered similar harm from inappropriate restraint and seclusion, be that physical or mechanical restraint. We have heard harrowing accounts of children who have been told to sit, surrounded by cardboard boxes — a measure that supposedly helps with concentration — and of children who have been secluded in so-called isolation rooms that are no bigger than 8 feet by 4 feet in diameter. The findings of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) investigation into inappropriate restraint and seclusion are harrowing, and Margaret Kelly and her team's recommendations are consistent with those in the motion that I present on behalf of the Education Committee.

I first drafted the motion in July 2020. It is based on work with the British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland (BASW NI), all political parties and a wide range of people and organisations, such as the Children's Commissioner, the International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion (ICARS), Positive and Active Behaviour Support Scotland (PABSS) and Parent Action, to name but a few. The recommendations in the motion are clear: a requirement for the Department of Education to provide statutory guidance on restraint that is based on therapeutic, non-aversive, positive behaviour approaches, with restraint as a last resort; definitions of restraint that are based on the UNCRC; funded mandatory training for all staff working with children; the mandatory recording and reporting of all incidents of restraint; and the abolition of the use of isolation rooms.

In 2019, the British Association of Social Workers Northern Ireland released a policy statement expressing concern at the lack of standardised guidance from the Department of Education on restraint and seclusion. That statement coincided with a number of high-profile reports that revealed inappropriate restraint and seclusion and unmonitored practices in schools across the UK. As a result of those reports and sustained campaigning from charities and parent groups, the UK Government introduced a new framework in 2019 that was aimed at reducing reliance on restraint and seclusion in educational settings. The Education Committee has taken harrowing evidence and testimony from parents of children who have experienced the use of inappropriate restraint and seclusion. We must

make sure that no other children suffer as they did. The Committee noted with concern that the current guidance is over 20 years old and has not been updated to reflect children's rights protections and best practices adopted in other jurisdictions. The Committee remains concerned at gaps in the interim guidance, particularly that it does not adequately address the use of seclusion or particular types of restraint.

The Committee believes that new guidance should be focused on best-practice approaches on the needs of the pupil and that their rights should be enshrined in the UNCRC to give equal access to education for all children, including those with disabilities. Social and communication conditions can present in different ways, and they can be misunderstood as misbehaviour. It is important to be clear that we do not underestimate the difficulty of some situations for teachers, non-teaching staff and parents. We need teachers to have clear support from the Department of Education and to be equipped with all available skills and understanding of techniques to ensure that they respond in the best interests of the child.

That is a challenge that is exacerbated by the huge pressure on special educational needs (SEN) provision in Northern Ireland, and it is a challenge to which the Department of Education must respond.

The Committee has argued strongly for guidance to be produced in partnership with parents and relevant stakeholders and is encouraged by the Department of Education's inclusion of parent advocates and carers in its review process, as well as by recent updates that we have received on the progress of the established working group.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I will give way briefly.

Mr Allister: I heard the Member make fleeting reference to the situation with teachers. What is a teacher meant to do when a child is totally out of control? I saw that happen once, when I was chairman of a board of governors. I was in the school one morning and, from the noise, I could hear that a child was totally out of control. I looked into the classroom, and that child was utterly out of control. There was total disruption and violence. What was the teacher meant to do? Talking had failed. The class was being entirely disrupted. The parent could not deal with the situation. I read much in the motion about guaranteeing the rights of the child: that

is good and fine, but what is the teacher meant to do? We cannot just say, "Apply UN this and that"; we need to be real.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention. The recommendations in the motion go to the heart of ensuring that teachers are equipped to respond to that situation and ensure that there is no harm to the child or to anyone in the vicinity of the child.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that a key to resolving the issue is to ensure that staff in schools are properly trained and receive full access to that training and, indeed, that there is the necessary funding to ensure that there is support for children who are distressed?

Mr Lyttle: Absolutely. It is extremely rare that a child will be in that level of distress without it being an expression of communication. We have to equip all our professionals who work in those situations with the skills to respond to that.

I am almost out of time. The substance of today's Education Committee motion presents the Assembly and the Education Minister with an opportunity to be grasped to ensure that we protect all children from inappropriate restraint and seclusion. I sincerely look forward to other MLAs' contributions and the Education Minister's response and to ensuring that we progress the statutory guidance and legislation that is needed to move us forward on the matter.

Mr Newton: I support the motion. In every motion that comes before the Assembly, you look to see what the key phrases or words are. The subject of this motion has united the Committee since we returned after our three-year break. Representation was made to the Committee from the special needs schools principals' leadership group. The Committee started to look into the many areas that were giving concern to special needs schools, teachers and support staff. The Committee has unanimously supported the work that is eventually rolling out to address special needs. As I said, it is a matter that has united the Committee. We used these key words in forming the motion:

"the use of restrictive intervention on children and young people, particularly those who have additional support needs".

As was already referred to, we had an informal meeting with the mother of one young man, Deirdre Shakespeare, and her son, Harry.

Indeed, there were indications from the parent that that young man, who had changed schools, had endured some difficult situations in the school. You would have had a heart of stone if you had not felt for the parent in those circumstances.

12.30 pm

The motion also asks for:

"mandatory training on this approach for all staff working directly with children".

I am pleased to say that I believe that the Minister is listening to those kinds of words in considering how the matter can be fully addressed. It is a difficult matter, but the Committee has addressed it and concentrated some of its work on it. There is no doubt that difficult situations arise, and there is no doubt that we need to empower teachers and increase their skills. That should be done; it should not even have to be considered. There should be continuing professional development throughout a teacher's life, and, indeed, as that teaching career develops, they should have the opportunity to pick up on training. Given that they are difficult situations, it should be accredited training, and it should gear us towards international best practice. There is no doubt that we have a highly skilled teaching labour force and highly skilled support staff, and we have a career interest and a dedication among our teaching staff that may not be found in some other professions. I talked about the young man who moved school, and there needs to be a constructive ongoing relationship between the parents, the teachers and the school; indeed, that may well be helpful as the years of schooling run through.

Mr Allister referred to a particular incident; indeed, it is about how those incidents are responded to and about ensuring that, whenever an incident happens in a school, there is communication between the school and the parents so that there is a record of that. Hopefully, more professional advice can be offered in those situations. Ms Shakespeare talked to members of the Committee about the ability to physically handle a child. Her son Harry was a non-verbal pupil who had complex issues, and some of the actions that were carried out in his first school may well have made the situation even worse for Harry.

I welcome the fact that the Minister is picking up on the issues and is and has been listening to the words of the Committee on the issue and on special educational needs issues in general.

Ms Brogan: First, I would like to respond to Mr Allister's intervention on the Chair of the Education Committee. Mr Allister asked what a teacher should do in those circumstances: if he had read or listened to the accounts of the likes of Deirdre Shakespeare and heard about what her son has suffered, he would know that the last thing that helps in those situations is physically or mechanically restraining or secluding the child.

At the outset, I thank the parents and advocacy groups that have worked so incredibly hard and shown such determination. They have been encouraged, first, to raise awareness of the issue of restraint and seclusion in schools and then to work towards policy change. I have the utmost respect and admiration for all the parents and groups involved in this, and there are a number who have been involved in the campaign.

I want to pay particular attention to Deirdre Shakespeare and Beth Morrison. They are the co-founders of ICARS, which is the International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion. Deirdre and Beth addressed the Education Committee a number of weeks ago and eloquently told the stories of their sons, Harry and Callum. Listening to Harry and Callum's stories, I had tears in my eyes. It was hard to listen to them. At one point, I wanted to mute the computer; it was like watching a scary film where you want to put your fingers in your ears and close your eyes because you cannot listen any more. At times, I had to catch myself on because those children had suffered that treatment and the parents had to relive it time and again to try to get some sort of change, so the least that I could do was to listen and to try to be a voice for Harry, Callum, the parents and any other child who had suffered such cruel, restrictive practices and those who are vulnerable to it in the future. I commend and thank Deirdre and Beth. It is worth saying that those children have suffered cruel, restrictive practices previously, but they are recovering now and are safe. It is also worth noting that the families are still working hard and fighting so that other children and families do not have to go through the same heartache. I commend them for that as well.

We have received information and reports from the Children's Commissioner, from NIPSO and from the Association of Social Workers in the North. We have also heard evidence from a

wide range of stakeholders and advocacy groups, as mentioned. The reports highlight a number of recurring themes about restraint and seclusion in schools, but one issue that jumps out for me is that there is no mandatory duty to record or report an incident of restraint and seclusion. That means that we have no way of knowing how widespread the issue is across our schools and that no one is held accountable for those wrongdoings to our children. The NIPSO report, published today, tells us that NIPSO is currently dealing with 20 complaints or enquiries. However, that is only the tip of the iceberg; it does not reflect the true rates of incidence.

The following testimony that I received from a carer who worked in a pre-school setting might explain why some are reluctant to come forward with their concerns. This is her account:

"The restraining of children came in the form of strapping them into a high chair and turning them away from their peers. This restraint was used as a punishment for a child misbehaving or having a tantrum. The child would be visibly upset and crying when being strapped in. When the child was calm, they would still have been left staring out the window until it was deemed fit to release them."

The childcare worker goes on to say:

"The very fact that parents did not know that this practice was taking place made it wrong."

That childcare worker reported the use of restraint but lost her job as a consequence. She left, hoping that her actions led to the ending of the practice of restraint in that particular setting, but, like us, she does not know.

Without a mandatory duty to record, monitor and review incidents, not only do we, NIPSO, the Children's Commissioner nor any of the advocacy groups that we have mentioned not know the full figures, neither do the parents. That is wholly unacceptable in all cases, but with pre-verbal or non-verbal children, it is horrifying. No parent leaves their child in childcare, nursery school or school and thinks, "We will not know what happens to them today". A parent leaves their child, trusting an entire team of staff to act in the best interests of the child.

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

Ms Brogan: Parents want their child to feel safe, loved and supported in that setting.

I support the call, in this motion, for mandatory reporting and recording of the use of restraint.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for being here to listen to and respond to the debate.

The motion is brought by the Committee for Education following evidence gathered from organisations such as Parent Action, the Children's Law Centre, Autism NI, ICARS, PABSS and others. There has been a concerted campaign on the issue, and I am especially aware of Deirdre and Rodney Shakespeare — the Chair referred to them — who are from Strabane and whose son is Harry. They have been advocating a Harry's law to be implemented here. I thank them and other organisations that have engaged with the Committee and the SDLP on this issue. I also want to mention Shaunagh Kane, who has been very good at keeping me aware of some of the very serious issues and challenges that exist in SEN.

All those organisations have raised considerable concerns about the use of restraint and seclusion across schools in the North and about how our laws and guidance on them have been massively lagging behind, especially given developments in medical research and reviews that have been instigated in other parts of the UK.

There have been widespread calls for reform, including from the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner. This morning, we heard comments from Margaret Kelly of the Office of the NI Public Services Ombudsman, who also called for reform. Those voices compound the need for reform and have added to other calls, even from Paris Hilton in recent weeks, for immediate intervention on regulation of the practice.

The law governing the use of restraint in schools is 23 years old, while guidance on seclusion does not even define what it is. Therefore, it is an open book, a free run and self-defining; it is defined by the school. England, Scotland and Wales reviewed and updated their guidance in line with the current medical evidence, which has advanced significantly over the past two decades. The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland needs to do the same immediately.

The recent evidence sessions at the Education Committee brought a very real-life, human element to the discussion. We are talking about

children: children who are often in a very distressed state, who are trying to communicate and who cannot quite communicate the way that others can and, as a result of not getting their message across, become quite distressed. That creates some issues in the classroom, but it must be recognised that those children need support.

I speak as an uncle of a child of six years of age. His name is Ashton. I have been seeing, since he was very young, the meltdowns, the temper tantrums and the sheer frustration in that child when he cannot communicate the way that he wants. Now, he often just takes you by the hand. If you refuse to go, you will see the temper tantrum quite quickly.

The law governing the use of restraint in schools is, as I said, 23 years old. It needs to change. I want to ensure that today's debate is no way reflective of the many excellent special needs schools across the North. I am fortunate to have two in my constituency. They and their staff do amazing work to support so many of our young people.

The motion concerns resources, training and support, which simply have not been in place on the issues surrounding restraint and seclusion. Challenging behaviour is often cited as the reason why restraint or seclusion is needed in schools. Recent medical evidence suggests, however, that challenging behaviour among children with severe disabilities is, as already stated, a means of communication.

England reacted to that by recently updating its guidance to say that schools should have preventative therapeutic models, including positive behavioural support (PBS) strategies, with restraint and seclusion being used only as a last resort. Given that recent development in England, it is therefore concerning that we continue to rely on legislation and guidance that are over two decades old when so much has changed and, in the present day, there is so much more awareness.

It is very concerning that there is little to no data on recording incidents of restraint and seclusion in our schools. It came up in Committee that we do not know the extent of their use, and there is no central database that collates information on incidents, nor is information routinely shared with families. That needs to change. I know that the Minister will recognise that there should probably be a record of that so that we can have a wider understanding of where things are.

I will bring my remarks to a conclusion. The SDLP believes that there is an urgent need for Northern Ireland to catch up on how restraint and seclusion are used in our schools. We need reform, and we need it now. On that basis, I support the motion, and I thank Members for their contributions.

Mr Butler: As the education spokesperson for the Ulster Unionist Party, I am delighted to support the motion, which was tabled by the Education Committee to call on the Minister of Education to urgently develop new up-to-date guidance on restraint and seclusion. I am somewhat saddened that, in 2021, with all that we know about children and their development, we still have to talk about change.

As a parent of over 20 years, and, perhaps more significantly, a foster parent with over 15 years' service, I have some experience of children who, at times, display behaviour that is challenging and difficult to deal with. I will not diminish or sugar-coat the effort that it sometimes takes to de-escalate or normalise the behaviour of the child at that point.

However, I cannot be clearer in saying that not once did the time spent or the positive behaviour interventions approach fail to work or, more importantly, fail that child.

12.45 pm

It is important to recognise the fantastic work that is done day and daily in schools across Northern Ireland with regard to the education, care and safety of our children. Working in some of those settings can, at times, be the most rewarding and challenging of vocations. In special settings, that work can be even more challenging, due to increased communication difficulties for those pupils. My daughter, who is a third-year Queen's University learning and disability student nurse, often finishes a shift tired, challenged and having learned something new but always committed to understanding the individual better and to reinforcing positive behaviours and that messaging.

It is only right that we pay tribute, as a number of Members have, to the parental champions who have shared with us their personal testimony of how the system, at times, failed to care for and respect their child. Parents like Rodney and Deirdre Shakespeare, amongst others whom we will not name today, have bared their souls to us. At times, many of us, including the Member across the Chamber and me, were reduced to tears as parents shared the moments that they and their children had

suffered and the pain that those moments had caused them as a family. Those parents have brought us to where we are today. Well done to them.

The real-life stories, whilst hard to hear — parents talk about mechanical restraint and about isolation or seclusion rooms with no windows, carpet, ventilation, toilet access, water or direct supervision — are, in fact, even harder to read out. For me, the biggest failure is the lack of a requirement to inform parents that these things happened.

Today's motion does not seek to remove the ability for a teacher or qualified support staff member to restrain a child appropriately and safely when absolutely necessary for their own safety or the safety of others; rather, it seeks to address a dreadful imbalance. Good practice should be our minimum benchmark, practice based on positive behaviour should be the norm, and we should build on understanding and communicating with those children as a priority. We must never fail our children in the future in the way that we have failed them in the past. We support the motion.

Mr M Bradley: I note that there is broad agreement amongst all parties in the Chamber and all members of the Committee for Education. I also note that the British Association of Social Workers in Northern Ireland has raised several concerns about the current practices around restriction and seclusion, including the lack of standardised policies and guidance from the Department of Education on the use of restrictive practices and seclusion involving children and young people with additional needs, including those with physical or learning disabilities. The physical, psychological and emotional effects that restraint and seclusion can have on children and young people, their classmates and their families cannot be quantified. The association also suggests a need for mandatory training for all staff who work directly with children and young people with additional needs and opposes the use of seclusion or the isolation from others of a child or young person in a room or other area that they are prevented from leaving.

The existing guidance has remained unchanged since 1999. It needs to be updated urgently as it is no longer relevant. Although temporary guidance has now been provided to schools, recommending that every use of restraint should be recorded and noting that reasonable force restraint should be used only as a measure of last resort and never as a form of punishment, what can be learned from other

jurisdictions? Are there lessons to be learned from England, Scotland or Wales? Training and guidance are important, and staff need to have access to regular and up-to-date guidance and training on restraint and seclusion so that they are well informed about how to deal with a wide range of scenarios. It is key not to pass judgement unfairly on staff in our schools. I am in no way attributing blame. We are lucky to have such excellent staff, as evidenced throughout the entire pandemic. There should also be guidance for members of boards of governors, many of whom are not from an education background but from other fields of expertise.

Any use of seclusion or restraint must be recorded centrally. Moving forward, if that means changes to legislation to ensure that recording is mandatory, so be it. Parents must also be contacted after an incident of seclusion or restraint. It is stressful not only for the child but for parents, staff and other pupils. It has been a failure not to record any and all uses of restrictive practices and for parents not to have been informed or engaged with. Any incident in which a decision is made to intervene physically must be recorded and monitored.

The Department of Education has advised that it is setting up a working group, with part of its remit being to review current legislation, policies, guidance, training and audits and current recording, monitoring and follow-up processes. No child should ever be placed in a room unaccompanied and must be free to leave when they want to leave. Any use of that type of seclusion should cease immediately. We must learn lessons from the past and ensure that no child feels isolated or secluded in future. It is our duty to ensure that that happens. The Education Committee is united in its concerns and its desire to see change and reform.

Mr McNulty: As a member of the Education Committee, I wholeheartedly endorse the motion. I applaud the bravery, fortitude and determination of people like Deirdre Shakespeare. It was heart-wrenching to sit in the Education Committee and hear her story about Harry and the stories of other parents. I also thank Shauna Kane for her input on this important issue.

Seclusion or restraint is no way in which to treat a child, whether they have special educational needs, learning difficulty, physical disability or behavioural challenges. Seclusion is exclusion. Restraint is cruel. Our children deserve better. A learning disability is not a disease: it is a disability, and we cannot and should not accept any form of seclusion, exclusion or restraint, by

whatever means, in the care, education or treatment of a child.

Our society has a shameful record in its treatment of children with additional needs or challenging behaviours. For many years, children with additional needs were locked away, be that in the home or in an institution. They were hidden from the world and seen and treated as a burden on the education system and on society. That was horrendously wrong. In recent decades, we have seen welcome change in the way in which we care for, support and educate children with additional needs. We are rightly moving towards a place where we encourage and value their important and invaluable contribution to society and life.

Many of those children now attend mainstream schools. They engage in training programmes and enjoy the world of work. I know of many examples in my constituency: groups like the Appleby Trust, incredABLE, Support and Training to Realise Individual Development and Employment (STRIDE), Mencap and many others. The young people on those schemes did not become their confident, bubbly, engaging and hard-working selves by being told to sit in the corner or in a room away from their friends and being medically, physically or mechanically restrained. Those young people became the wonderful individuals they are by being cared for, supported, encouraged and cherished as important members of our society.

In recent decades, much of the support and care for those with special educational needs, additional needs or learning disabilities has changed for the better. However, we have a long way to go to get anywhere near where it should be or needs to be. Last week, I had the honour of hosting on Zoom a successful public meeting on special educational needs. We heard from the Children's Commissioner, the mental health champion and the Children's Law Centre. The women from whom we heard were impressive advocates for children and do really important work.

We also heard heartbreaking stories from the families of those with disabilities about their struggles with the education and health systems as they seek the support that their children need and deserve and to which they are legally entitled. There needs to be greater investment in services for children with additional needs and more comprehensive short-break respite services for the families of children and, indeed, adults with complex needs. There needs to be more support for children in schools and more post-19 support services.

We need to outlaw the cruel practice of restraint in education or healthcare settings and the practice of excluding or secluding a child. There needs to be greater support and guidance. The Department of Education must urgently provide up-to-date statutory guidance on therapeutically based, non-aversive, positive behaviour strategies. We need mandatory training in those for all staff working directly with children and young people. Any restraint must be human rights-compliant, and any instance in which it is used must be documented and recorded by law.

All that we ask is that someone with a disability or challenging behaviour be treated with gentle care, dignity and respect and treated as important members of our society.

Mr Humphrey: As Members have said, the Education Committee has spent considerable time discussing the issues, and we have met on a number of occasions the special schools' principals' group, which has always been very beneficial to those of us involved in education. I declare an interest as a governor in two schools.

I begin by commending our excellent staff in our special needs schools across Northern Ireland. They are extremely professional and dedicated in carrying out their job.

Recently, my colleagues and I met Deirdre Shakespeare, whom other Members have mentioned. She is Harry's mum, and she gave us very moving yet disturbing evidence about the problems that her son faced that rippled across her family and evidence about the detrimental effect that those problems had on the family and on that young man in particular.

It is my understanding that the Department is carrying out a review of the use of restraint and seclusion in education and that the report is due to be completed in March 2022. An acceptance that the existing guidance is out of date is important, and the Department and the Minister have accepted that. The regulations clearly need to be updated, although I understand that there is temporary guidance in place that provides advice on recording of the use of restraint.

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): I thank the Member for giving way. Each year, we produce an internal action plan that covers the period from April to March. I hope to see a situation in which that plan can be produced by way of a review and finalised considerably earlier than March 2022, which is the latest date.

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

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for that helpful clarification. The House will welcome that information from him.

As others have said, it is important to draw on the experience of jurisdictions across the United Kingdom and Europe to see how the situation can be improved for our young people. I welcome the fact that the Department of Education has established a reference group and that a working group is now considering how the issue has been dealt with, progressed and put into practice in neighbouring jurisdictions. Advocates of change have recognised that the non-statutory guidance on restraint and seclusion would be a welcome step, and the Minister is responding to that positively.

As I have said, I commend our staff. I have seen at first hand how staff across our education estate work, particularly in special needs settings. They are exemplary public servants and should be regarded and respected by us all. It is absolutely critical, however, that the views of teaching and support staff, young people and their parents and carers be central to any recommendations that come forward. Consultation is key to finding a workable solution. Training and up-to-date guidance is critical for staff, because, as I said, those people have a hugely difficult job. At times, they do it in very challenging circumstances and are on the receiving end of abuse. The recording of incidents therefore needs to be mandatory. That is a protection not just for the young people but for staff.

We must move to protect our children and young people in the classroom. I commend the Minister and the Department for the ongoing work. I welcome the fact that we may well get to a point at which we will have something positive and tangible for the classroom and for the benefit of our young people before March 2022. That is welcome news, but we must provide training and guidance in all things to support and protect our staff. We must protect the young people in the classroom and those who work with and protect those young people daily. It is absolutely key to get the balance right in the classroom between protecting young people and protecting the staff who work with them.

1.00 pm

Ms Bradshaw: I support the motion and thank the Education Committee for bringing it to the

Chamber today. I will make my remarks along the lines of human rights and, in particular, health issues. I will focus on the latter, given that human rights are mentioned directly in the motion, but it is worth emphasising the need to respond proactively in policy and legislation to the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child about the use of restraint and seclusion on children with psychosocial disabilities and, more generally, on the issues arising regarding the mental health and well-being of children and young people. I commend the work of the Children's Commissioner and her office in continuing to draw attention to that. She also raises the basic but important point that we do not know the scale of the problem with restraint and seclusion because of the inconsistency of approach and the failure to update policy and legislation, including around reporting.

On overall policy, as so often, we lag behind the rest of the UK. However, there is a real opportunity for the Education Authority to get this right, as I gather that it is reviewing its therapeutic approach. Regional roll-out could be a once-in-a-generation chance. The value of getting it right should be clearly stated: it would mean that children receive the highest standards of appropriate care and support from all the adults in their lives. When we state it in that way, we can see that it is not a matter for just the Education Authority or, indeed, Education but that there is a clear health aspect. We want all children to experience the same therapeutic interventions consistently across all sectors. That means having a commonality of approach between the Education Authority, health trusts and other agencies. Clearly, therefore, joint delivery between both Departments is required.

We have heard about some of the risks of the current scenario continuing. Fundamentally, the issue is that children may receive divergent levels of care in education and health settings, as staff are not necessarily equipped to deal with multiple and complex needs and reporting mechanisms may be unclear. It is small wonder that we have had multiple court actions. However, the main issue is that children lack a consistent approach on which they can rely, particularly in times of distress. That is the impact of getting it wrong. As it stands, the lack of consistency means that schools use Team Teach, but some may lack training or registered practitioners. On top of that, health trusts use therapeutic crisis intervention methods instead. That leads to inconsistency where we need consistency. Children need to experience the same language, care and support as often as possible and most certainly in times of difficulty.

When they are emotionally flooding through distressing and challenging episodes, any difference in approach or even in the training of those delivering that approach is troubling and inadequate. For staff, too, there would be considerable gain from having a consistent approach. Therefore, mandatory training is essential.

Where training is often represented as an add-on, it would, in this case, be the cornerstone of an assurance to staff that they are working within agreed guidelines and frameworks when facing extremely challenging situations. That would provide the added benefit of their knowing that, by following established guidelines, practices and procedures, they will be indemnified against any potential litigation. For that reason, I am strongly supportive of the British Association of Social Workers' call for statutory guidance, which is long overdue. However, I emphasise that that needs to be agreed by the Department of Education and the Department of Health. I strongly share the association's belief that mandatory training should be required for any staff working directly with children and young people with additional needs, including with reference to rights and obligations under the Mental Capacity Act. I therefore join the association in urging collaboration between the Education Authority and social workers in inputting into guidance and conducting appropriate investigations.

There is a moment of real opportunity, as my colleague Chris Lyttle mentioned, to get this right at a time when it will be of huge benefit to children and young people with additional needs and any staff working with them directly. Let us waste no time in doing so.

Miss Woods: I thank the Committee members for tabling the motion. I, like others, have been contacted by families and parents affected by this. I thank them for their determination to be heard. The motion may not have been on the agenda today without the continued lobbying and raising of the issue with MLAs by a few key parents out there. Listening to those parents, it breaks your heart to hear what has happened to their children and how it has impacted on them as a family.

There are key asks in the motion. They will require, at the outset, resourcing, working together and consistency of approach, as other Members have mentioned. We need to recognise that there are difficulties with definitions. Some parents and carers will not be aware of what was happening to their child or that it was something that could happen. We all need to look at that.

There needs to be a clear way in which parents can raise issues. Coupled with that, there must be data collection. The British Association of Social Workers has stated that it supports records of cases being shared with parents and guardians or with the young people involved, as well as with the school board, the Department of Education, the EA and the Children's Commissioner. I would certainly support that.

There must be clear avenues of communication, understood by everybody involved. I hope that the Minister and Department can implement those as a matter of urgency. We need to have a standardised policy in order to safeguard our children and young people. I note the NIPSO report published today, in which the ombudsman states:

"I am extremely concerned by the lack of acknowledgement and standardised policy in regard to the use of seclusion in schools in Northern Ireland ... in the absence of defining seclusion, and having a clear policy outlining what is and what is not permitted, the risk to the child is elevated further."

We must collect data and ensure that reporting mechanisms are in place and are understood. Whilst there will always be the hidden impacts that are not known about — granted that will always happen — we need the resources too to make sure that every relevant staff member is adequately trained.

They are not new recommendations, as we have heard. In 2016, the UNCRC expressed its concern about the use of restraint and seclusion on children with psychosocial disabilities, including children with autism, in schools. The committee urged the UK to abolish restraint for disciplinary purposes and to ensure that it was used exclusively to prevent harm to the child or others and only as a last resort. It urged the abolition of isolation rooms and recommended that the state should:

"Systematically and regularly collect and publish disaggregated data on the use of restraint and other restrictive interventions on children in order to monitor the appropriateness of discipline and behaviour management for children in all settings, including in education".

It has also been raised by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), NIPSO, the British Association of Social Workers, parents, carers, politicians and so many others, so we do not need any more reports and recommendations. The Minister

and Department, in conjunction with those involved — the parents, carers, children and young people themselves, the schools, teachers, unions and organisations — need to introduce mandatory training, data collection and reporting and to have a clear and well understood policy embedded in children's rights.

There are other options that we can look at. Many are listed in the motion. We need a bit of a system change. I hope that the Minister, in his summing up, will outline what he can do to ensure that that happens. Perhaps the Minister will also tell the House, specifically with regard to the review being carried out by NICCY and today's NIPSO report, what he and his Department will do in response.

All behaviour is communication, positive or negative. It is important that children's rights are front and centre of anything that we take forward. We thank and commend our teachers today for the amazing work that they do. I believe that we are all on the same page in wanting to see the changes. We will support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I call the Minister of Education, Peter Weir, to respond to the debate. You have up to 15 minutes.

Mr Weir: I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion. The subject is very important and potentially very emotive in its nature. I thank all who have contributed. Their contributions have been fairly constructive in their content and responsible in their tone. Hopefully, the House can unite around that.

I thank everyone who has been involved so far, particularly parents with lived experiences and their children. One parent acknowledged that Northern Ireland was going full steam ahead to protect children from unnecessary restraint and seclusion, and I agree with her. We are making progress, but, while much has been done, there is much more to be done.

I share the concerns expressed by Members today. They have met and heard from parents with lived experiences about how their children had been treated at school. Such treatment is wrong and should not have happened. I recently took receipt of a report from the NIPSO on number of cases, and that is another piece of evidence that will inform my Department's review of the use of restraint and seclusion in education settings. It is because of such cases being brought to my attention by parents, parents' advocacy groups, NIPSO, NICCY and the Education Committee that I have asked

officials to undertake a review of existing guidance and practices in this area. Prior to the launch of that review, the Department had already begun updating its pastoral care guidance on the use of reasonable force to restrain or control pupils, and some engagement with stakeholders had commenced.

I am acutely aware that children and young people and the parents, carers and school staff who support them have faced a challenging time over the past year. Hopefully, we are returning to some sort of normality, but the effects of the COVID pandemic have had a significant impact on our children's health and well-being. Now, more than ever, we need to provide clarity on physical intervention and isolation across all education settings but especially when supporting children who have complex needs and may require such intervention as part of their care plan. There is clearly a link not simply to education but to health as well.

Taking all of that into account and despite the fact that there is work ongoing on a comprehensive solution through the review, I took the decision to issue interim guidance to all schools and other educational settings by way of DE Circular 2021/13. The main messages of the interim guidance are as follows: the best interests of the child should guide all decisions taken by staff in relation to children in their care; all children have the same rights; there is a duty on schools to make reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities and not discriminate on the grounds of learning or physical disabilities; reasonable force or restraint should be used only as a measure of last resort and never as a form of punishment; and there is a requirement to record instances of the use of reasonable force or restraint. At this stage, we have not sought to define seclusion or what forms of seclusion, if any, are permissible in what circumstances. That is because seclusion and deprivation of liberty are still being considered as part of the wider review. However, we have been clear that children should never be locked in a room or left unaccompanied and must be able to leave when they want to.

I am well aware that the interim guidance does not deal with all of the issues or concerns raised here today, nor does it deal with all of the issues raised by parents and their representatives. However, it goes some way to clarify the provisions that are already contained in existing guidance related to the recording, reporting and monitoring of incidents. For the first time, the guidance includes provision for dealing with the isolation of children from the

classroom. The practice of a child voluntarily using a calm space or a sensory room — I have seen many fine examples of that throughout the schools estate — where they can regulate their mood can, sometimes, be a positive intervention that benefits the child. That is simply not the same as locking a pupil in a room, unsupervised, that they cannot leave. That practice should not happen, and the interim guidance states that clearly. I hope that that goes some way to alleviate some of the concerns of parents with lived experience. If the guidance is followed, no other child should go through experiences similar to theirs.

Mr McCrossan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way briefly, but I have a lot to get through.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for giving way and for his solid answer there to reassure parents that this will not happen again. That will send out a strong signal that he is dedicated to resolving the issue and moving it forward. That is a good leap forward, and I thank the Minister for it.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his intervention. As I have indicated, it is a step forward, but the work is not finished. There is much more to be done.

Prior to issuing the interim guidance to schools, my Department took receipt of detailed legal advice from the Departmental Solicitor's Office on the legal status of existing guidance.

I am concerned that I cannot stand here and provide you with an assurance that it is mandatory for schools to record all incidents of seclusion: it is not. It should not be forgotten, however, that existing guidance in that area, which is in the circular, provides clear instructions about who can use reasonable force, where it is appropriate to use it and the procedure for recording incidents where reasonable force is used. It also advises that schools should have a written policy on the use of reasonable force that should be made known to pupils.

1.15 pm

It appears clear that the guidance has not been followed in all cases. I completely acknowledge that that has led to distress. I believe it is the case that the overwhelming majority of education staff are very sensitive to the needs of our children and respect their dignity when providing them with support. The

professionalism of our teaching and wider education workforce should not be forgotten.

I do not want to pre-empt the outcome of the review or any proposals for change that will come from it. However, at this stage, I expect that any new guidance will clarify issues on the use of restrictive practice and will point to evidence-based preventative and therapeutic approaches, such as positive behavioural strategies, that will not only help children and their parents and carers but benefit school staff.

The consideration of future recording and reporting methods will form a central tenet of the review with a view to strengthening the provisions already in place. That will include the consideration of options for the central collation of data on incidents in schools. At present, data is not collected, with records held only at school level. That practice means that, to some extent, the Department and the EA are unsighted on the prevalence of the use of restraint and seclusion. Mandatory recording will require legislative change, but if, as is likely, that is a recommendation of the review, I will not shy away from implementing it. I understand that my officials are already exploring how that might be done so that any proposals for change can be informed.

I note that the motion mentions the availability of training for teachers and other school staff who may deal with autistic pupils or pupils with other complex needs. The Education Authority's children and young people's services has in place a wide range of specialist training courses for teachers, classroom assistants, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) and parents. Those courses include the autism advisory and intervention service; behavioural support service and provision; critical incident support in emotional health and well-being; nurture advice and support services; SEN early years inclusion services; SEN inclusion services for learning and medical needs; and the special educational needs and disability (SEND) 2016 implementation team. Along with the EA and other training providers, the review will consider whether additional or, indeed, mandatory training for teaching and other school staff is required. Consideration will be dependent on an agreed position on the changes that will emerge from the review. It is clear that any form of mandatory training will come at a considerable cost. We are all aware of the limited budget, so we have to make sure that training requirements must be not only fit for purpose but compatible with resources.

It is important that we move ahead with urgency to protect children from the unnecessary use of

restraint and seclusion. Perhaps in the few minutes that are still available to me, Members will afford me the opportunity to update them on what, I believe, is the significant progress that has been made in recent months on moving the review forward. A working group consisting of officials from my Department and other relevant Departments, alongside the EA and the Education and Training Inspectorate, is well established and is meeting regularly throughout 2021 until the completion of the review. The group is researching guidance and other relevant reports on the issue from across neighbouring jurisdictions with a view to extracting best practice that may be adopted in schools in Northern Ireland. I have also established a reference group comprising associated professionals and statutory bodies such as NICCY, the Children's Law Centre and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which have all agreed to act as a critical friend to quality-assure and assess proposals for change as the review progresses.

Officials have undertaken significant engagement with parents and have met Positive and Active Behaviour Support Scotland and the International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion. Those meetings included evidence from local parents with lived experiences who, supported by their parent advocates, made presentations to a joint meeting of the working and reference groups just over a week ago, on 11 May. The Department continues to liaise with those parents and their advocacy groups and has opened a two-way channel of communication. Their voices are and will continue to be central to the review.

The Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner is undertaking a separate review of the issue, with NIPSO acting in an advisory role. NICCY will review the information available from schools on restraint and seclusion, including training, guidance, usage and follow-through, with processes being assessed against best practice and the experience of children and their parents. The NICCY review will include evidence gathering from pupils and parents with lived experiences. The Department is liaising with NICCY with a view to utilising the evidence collected to inform its review, and we are keen to work in partnership with NICCY on that.

My Department is also liaising with the Department of Health. As Ms Bradshaw, I think, mentioned, it is important that this does not sit only in the Department of Education; indeed, the Department of Health has undertaken a review of the use of restrictive practices in health and social care settings. While my

officials are not directly involved in the work that Health is doing, they are being kept fully abreast of developments and will ensure that future definitions of restraint and/or seclusion align with those emerging from the DH review, suitably adapted for use in education. It is important that Departments do not go in different directions.

Members will be interested to know when I expect the guidance to be published. It is part of the Department's 2021-22 business plan, which has a commitment that it will be completed by March 2022 at the latest. I expect that guidance will issue in the forthcoming academic year. I would like to complete the review as quickly as possible, and I have made it a priority for the Department's inclusion and well-being directorate. The large number of stakeholders involved and the complexity of that area of work preclude me from making promises on the timing of completion that may not be realistic.

Despite the urgency, we should do the job once and do it thoroughly and correctly. We have further engagement to do. We want, above all, to get this right, and our children and young people deserve no less. Any and all proposals for change emerging from the review, including any that require legislative change, will be subject to approval. Clearly, where legislative change is needed, the House will have a key role, and I hope that the same united voice as we have today can be carried through into any legislative change.

Mr Sheehan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Education): On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister and all of the other contributors to today's debate.

The Committee Chairperson began the debate by referring to the need for updated guidance on how and when it is suitable to use restrictive interventions on some of our most vulnerable children. The Committee has heard over recent months from Parent Action and the parents of children affected by those practices. We sought the views of, among others, the Children's Commissioner and the Children's Law Centre. We had a special briefing from the Public Services Ombudsman on her work on the matter. We are grateful to the International Coalition Against Restraint and Seclusion for its international perspective, and Paris Hilton's attention to our Committee hearings amplified the coverage of this heartbreaking issue.

The Committee calls on the Minister to work urgently:

"to develop and introduce, in partnership with teachers, parents and all other relevant stakeholders, up-to-date statutory guidance on therapeutic-based, non-aversive, positive behaviour strategies".

I welcome the fact that the Minister referred to all of those issues. In the last two months, the Committee has heard from departmental officials twice on the issue, and it is clear that no one is in any doubt about the need for reform. However, the COVID pandemic that has diverted so much time and effort from other policy aims has served only to prove this central social truth:

"The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable".

Our schoolchildren, particularly those who, as the motion states, have additional support needs, including those with physical or learning disabilities or who are neurodivergent, are among our most defenceless citizens. Our decisions on their behalf must be in the interests of their inherent dignity and their equal opportunity to develop their talents and personality through education.

The review that is under way and the interim guidance published by the Department have been well rehearsed today. They are stepping stones, and we are committed to the end goal of compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, be it through statutory guidance alone, legislation on restraint and seclusion or incorporation of the convention on its own or via a local bill of rights.

I do not intend to rehearse today's contributions. They were very much all on the one theme, with everybody singing from the same hymn sheet, with the possible exception of the Member for North Antrim's ill-advised and ill-informed intervention. He saw a child in a distressed condition. I think that he may have said that he was the chair of the board of governors, and he said that he could not do anything. Why would he be able to do anything? Was he given special training at the Bar on how to intervene on children with challenging behaviour? No, probably not. He said that the teacher could not do anything. He, as a member of the board of governors, should then have been responsible for ensuring that staff were trained on how to intervene properly, whether with de-escalation techniques or positive behaviour strategies. I see that the Member is not in his place. He made that ill-informed intervention and then departed.

I now want to say a few words as Sinn Féin spokesperson on education. During the debate, reference was made to the harrowing nature of the evidence that we heard over the past number of weeks and months, particularly evidence from parents. Deirdre and Rodney Shakespeare and their son Harry have been mentioned on numerous occasions, but we heard from other parents as well. It reminded me in many ways of the evidence that we heard about the ill treatment of patients with severe learning disabilities in Muckamore, where there were clear guidelines on when seclusion was to be used. Despite it supposedly being used as a last resort, patients were, in some instances, being put in seclusion 70, 80 or 90 times a month. That certainly was not a last resort.

In Muckamore, all that was recorded. When the regulator went in, it was able to see those recordings, but it did not do anything about it. That is also important in this situation. It is not just about clear guidelines or legislation or about reporting and recording; it is about ensuring that those who have responsibility for oversight and supervision are held to account. The regulator in Muckamore saw that patients were being placed in seclusion 80 and 90 times a month, and that did not raise a red flag. If the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) had done its job properly, perhaps the situation in Muckamore would have ended sooner. We need to ensure that there is oversight and accountability.

We also heard disturbing evidence from parents on stimming.

That points up instances in which teachers are not trained properly, particularly for working with children with special needs. Stimming is something that autistic children use often. It is repetitive physical movements or sounds that children make. It usually happens when they are stressed or suffering from anxiety. It may be rapid hand movements, rocking or making particular noises. As someone said earlier, however, it is about communication. It is an attempt by the child to communicate that there is some sort of problem.

1.30 pm

We heard from one parent about a child who was stimming by using repetitive hand movements. The child was tied to a chair with its own school bag. That is absolutely unacceptable, under any circumstances whatsoever. I agree with the points that Robbie made and that practically everyone else made. There needs to be proper training for teachers

in how to deal with such situations. Many people who are involved in dealing with children with special needs, or even with adults with learning disabilities, who may at times present —.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Member for giving way. He has made a solid and strong contribution. Does he agree with me that training is absolutely necessary and that resourcing is critical? For a class of 15 children, would it not be to their benefit, and to that of the school, for there to be someone specific in the school who could be called on to come in and help roll out the techniques, or whatever, in those situations? Would that, as well as training, be a solution?

Mr Sheehan: It sounds sensible to me. I am no expert, but the issues of training and resourcing go hand in hand. I notice that the Minister made reference to resourcing. He also said that we have to get this right. If we have to get it right, we have to make sure that the proper resourcing is there in order to get it right.

Miss Woods: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member and, indeed, the Minister mentioned resourcing and pressures in their speeches. Does the Member agree with me that, given that, in Northern Ireland, we have the Children's Services Co-operation Act, which legally requires relevant Departments to work together, utilising it is something that the Minister and the Executive can perhaps do together on resourcing and budgets?

Mr Sheehan: I absolutely agree with that.

I have nothing more to add. I thank everyone again for their contribution, and it is good that everyone seems to be on the same page.

I commend the motion to the House. Go raibh maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern at the lack of statutory guidance from the Department of Education on the use of restrictive intervention on children and young people, particularly those who have additional support needs, including those with physical or learning disabilities or who are neurodivergent; calls on the Minister of Education to develop and introduce, in partnership with teachers, parents and all other relevant stakeholders, up-to-date statutory guidance on therapeutic-based, non-

aversive, positive behaviour strategies; and further calls on the Minister to fund mandatory training on this approach for all staff working directly with children and young people, provide statutory guidance on restraint definitions, last-resort definitions, and human rights-based guidance in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), introduce mandatory recording and reporting of all incidents of restrictive intervention and abolish the use of isolation rooms.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs): I ask Members to take their ease for a few moments.

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

Private Members' Business

Green New Deal

Mr Blair: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises that recovery from the pandemic and tackling the climate crisis go hand in hand, requiring an investment-led, green recovery that delivers on social and economic justice and rapidly decarbonises our economy; and calls on the Executive to deliver a green new deal that will create an equitable, sustainable economy filled with well-paid, secure, low-carbon jobs in care, education and health as well as in industry and infrastructure, and to ensure well-being and inclusion are at the centre of government decision-making.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Blair: In the wake of the catastrophic coronavirus crisis, our immediate priority must now be to avoid further disasters. The world faces a climate emergency with potentially disastrous consequences. Average global temperatures have risen by about 1°C. A report by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (UNIPCC) on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C warned that the effects of climate change are already irreversible and that we have only about one decade to act before it is too late. The report found that human activity is the dominant cause of observed climate change over the past century and that a changing climate is causing sea levels to rise and an increase in damaging fires, severe storms, droughts and other extreme weather events. Global warming at or above 2°C will cause famine, disease, mass migration, climate-driven floods and heat waves and will cost the UK billions of pounds. Current trajectories show a global warming increase of 3°C by 2100. We are on track to take the planet to an unprecedented climate.

The motion calls for the creation of a green new deal. The Assembly must make radical changes and it must act now, not because it is convenient but because it is the right thing to do. The motion also addresses the need for

Northern Ireland to play its part in global challenges.

The past decade of rising inequality has shown us that austerity is not the answer to a crisis. Under the existing economy, we will never overcome climate change. Throughout history, periods of great upheaval have sparked incredible change. Look at the creation of the welfare state and the NHS after World War II, for example. Those changes were indeed radical and perhaps previously unimaginable, yet they remain absolutely critical to our lives generations later. The pandemic provides us with a similar historic chance for change; real change that could provide better opportunities, protect our planet and better protect us from future crises so that we never again need to face what we have faced during the past year. We are not alone in our demands either. Climate and economic experts are clear that we need a green recovery, with huge investment and urgent radical changes to our economy. To be frank, while we have felt that our lives have been at a standstill during the last year, climate change has continued to accelerate. Radical change is not just sensible, it is critical.

Industrialised nations such as the UK bear disproportionate responsibility for climate change. Just like in the pandemic, all of us will feel the impact of climate change but we will feel it disproportionately. Millions of people across the globe are already immediately threatened. Climate change is destroying livelihoods, infrastructure and communities and forcing people from their homes, towns and countries. That is neither just nor fair. The pandemic has laid bare the injustices and weaknesses in our society and economy. We have seen the damage caused by Governments acting too slowly, chronically underfunded public services and flawed short-term and self-serving decisions. We simply cannot make those same mistakes when tackling the climate crisis. In Northern Ireland, we need a new deal: a green new deal that recognises that tackling the climate emergency goes hand in hand with economic and social justice. A green new deal is about rapidly decarbonising our economy and, in doing so, creating an equitable, sustainable economy filled with well-paid, secure green jobs in existing and emerging industries.

The Alliance Party recently brought forward its own green new deal. The policies in that document show how we can simultaneously combat the climate emergency and inequality through investment and radical change and by breaking down the barriers of division. We have seen, from recent discussions in the Chamber,

that movement towards a sustainable future has been divided by the false notion that we have to choose between our planet and our economy. The Alliance Party's green new deal not only rejects that notion but brings forward proposals to create 50,000 secure green new jobs by stimulating our economy and reskilling workers. It is about preserving our planet for future generations, achieving the greenhouse gas and toxic emission reductions that are needed to stay under 1.5°C, restoring critical infrastructure, the repurposing of housing, expanding access to transport and having an all-encompassing approach to ensure that no community is left behind in the process towards aggressive climate goals that will transform the economy.

We need a vision for a united community: an inclusive, dynamic, prosperous and sustainable Northern Ireland, where we can all thrive, enjoy living freely and securely, and be treated with dignity in a region that is rich with opportunities and biodiversity. We have a chance for change: change for the good of our people and our planet. We have an opportunity to deliver a recovery plan that better protects us in the future. There is historical precedent that fiscal stimulus measures are sound prescriptions in a crisis. We need serious investment to mitigate and adapt to climate change, but it will cost us more both financially and existentially in the long term if we do not act now.

Experts are increasingly stressing the need for a major investment-led green recovery, because addressing the climate emergency goes hand in hand with economic and social transformation. The fight against the climate emergency requires more than environmental policy tweaks. The gravity of the situation requires the green new deal to demand urgent, radical change on how we make policy in the longer term for our security and collective prosperity. That should be our vision for an urgent, radical overhaul of the policies and practices that hinder our progress and exploit our people and planet. Going forward, we must grasp the enormous opportunities for a sustainable green economy with a bespoke green new deal for a better future. Investing in infrastructure and industry, securing clean air and water, climate and community resilience, healthy food, access to nature and a sustainable environment for all are vital components and required actions.

We know that developing countries have a limited capacity to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. We can and must contribute our fair share to enable mitigation and adaptation activities that uphold environmental justice

across the globe. Developed countries can help developing countries in that regard. Developing countries are on the front line of climate change the most, though they have contributed the least to the causes. A green new deal will recognise that we need to build resilience in the face of worsening and more frequent climate-related disasters that marginalise the communities that often bear the brunt of those disasters.

We need serious investment in our infrastructure and transportation systems. We need to invest in green roof technology and innovative urban architecture to address not just the carbon emissions of the agricultural and architectural fields but the intersectional issues of food security and climate change. Any green new deal is not sector-specific. All sectors have a major part to play in tackling our carbon emissions.

As we seek to recover from COVID-19, I hope that all Departments and sectors will work together to protect the environment and existing jobs and to bring forward new green jobs. The Alliance Party is committed to having a just, green recovery and an urgent and radical overhaul of the policies and practices that have hindered our progress to date.

Alliance Party colleagues, who will speak later in the debate, will give further detail on the departmental responsibilities. In tabling the motion, our intention is to highlight the urgent need for a green new deal that epitomises environmental justice for front-line communities, especially under-resourced groups, and calls for a just transition to a clean economy.

We have learned many lessons from the pandemic, but distressing lessons have been that high-impact threats must be acted upon in a timely fashion and that delay is costly. We must act now. The decisions that we make in our response to the global health pandemic, and the actions that we take to rebuild our economies, will determine whether humanity succeeds or fails. It is vital that we work together to reduce, urgently, our carbon emissions, and mitigate the impact of climate change. I commend the motion.

1.45 pm

Mr Middleton: I thank the Members for tabling the motion. It is timely to recognise that today marks a positive step forward in the recovery. It is good to see many of Northern Ireland's cafes, pubs and restaurants open. That is a good step forward.

Obviously, the Democratic Unionist Party fully supports the need to ensure that the economic recovery is underpinned by initiatives that are not only sustainable but environmentally responsible and support decarbonisation. It will also be important that investment is inclusive of, and fair towards, all communities, households and industries across Northern Ireland. We agree that sustainable solutions can benefit standards of living for people across Northern Ireland and help tackle deprivation and isolation. There is no doubt that the motion cuts across all Departments. I will speak about that shortly.

Democratic Unionist Party Ministers continue to champion the green recovery and the need to address climate change around the Executive table. The inter-ministerial group on green growth has been established by Edwin Poots, the AERA Minister. The Executive's overarching, multi-decade, green growth strategy and delivery framework for Northern Ireland aims to transform our society towards net zero by 2050, protect and enhance our environment and deliver sustainable economic growth.

We recognise that the desire expressed in the motion is to decarbonise our economy rapidly. Of course, at the same time, we have to ensure that the transition is fair and just, and that it does not place a disproportionate burden on certain industries, particularly our agri-food sector. There is a need to take on board independent, expert advice, including the clear finding by the Climate Change Committee that even the reduction of meat and dairy production to 50% and the increase of tree planting would not be enough to allow us to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

There are other departmental initiatives within our remit. In recent weeks, the Economy Minister launched the 10X Economy plan. It is her vision for a decade of innovation in the regional economy. One of the guiding principles of that plan is around supporting a greener, sustainable economy. That links in with the economic recovery action plan, which the Department has also launched. That plan includes a number of headline commitments, such as delivering a net zero carbon energy transition, improving the energy efficiency of buildings and industry and encouraging green innovation in renewables and low-carbon technologies. Those are areas on which we need our Departments to be working.

There will also be massive opportunities to exploit emerging green technology across various sectors, including energy, transport and

manufacturing. It is important that we have the right skills mix, and that we ensure that our skills strategies are aligned with that potential for growth, moving forward. Training and upskilling our young people must be at the heart of that. It is one thing to pledge to create thousands of green jobs, but there needs to be buy-in from private industry and education and training providers in order to ensure that the capacity and skills exist.

My final point relates to hydrogen technology. Northern Ireland is uniquely placed to use renewable electricity to produce green hydrogen. It would make use of the wind that is available when the demand for electricity is lower. Onshore wind provides more than 80% of Northern Ireland's renewable capacity, and we need to exploit that. There is real potential for Northern Ireland to become a global centre of excellence for the hydrogen economy. That would see local manufacturers rapidly growing in order to try to meet the worldwide demand.

In closing, I thank the Members for tabling the motion. We will support it.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He raised a valid point about hydrogen and the use of wind. In some cases, there is an inherent contradiction in those who advocate a green new deal, new energy and so on. They are sometimes the ones who champion opposing planning applications for installing some of those facilities. How do we ensure that they appreciate that they cannot have it both ways if we are to move forward on the issue?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Member for raising that point. When looking at planning issues, it is important that parties recognise that, in order to further a lot of the aims that I outlined, we need to make sure that planning is processed as quickly as possible.

That leads me on, finally, to the Department for Infrastructure. More needs to be done. For example, the Electric Vehicle Association Northern Ireland (EVANI) recently highlighted the number of broken chargers across Northern Ireland. Other Ministers very much need to step up. It is all fine and well to bring motions like these, and we will happily support them, but we need Ministers to take them seriously in order to ensure that we can deliver on the many objectives that we need to meet.

Dr Archibald: I am glad to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I thank the Members for tabling the motion.

The recovery from COVID needs to deliver a more fair and equal society and economy. It has been said many times in the Chamber and beyond that we cannot just return to where we were previously but that we need to build back better, as the saying goes. The imperative of tackling the climate emergency is clear, but it has to be done on the basis of a fair and just transition to decarbonisation. Those who can afford it least must not pay the most. The transition to a decarbonised society must be planned with workers, trade unions and communities. Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that ordinary people do not pay the price for the current crisis, and it will resist any attempts from the Tories to place the burden of the current crisis on the backs of ordinary, hard-working people.

Businesses, particularly our small businesses, need to be supported in order to sustain existing jobs and to create new jobs. We need to support workers and families. That means giving people opportunities to work in jobs that have decent pay and fair working conditions. Sinn Féin is committed to banning zero-hours contracts and to strengthening workers' protections in the workplace. We also need to remove barriers to work by ensuring that people have opportunities to gain skills, start their own businesses or have access to more affordable childcare. I welcomed Deirdre Hargey's announcement last week of the upfront childcare grant to help people to get back to work.

Our young people have been very badly impacted by the pandemic and will need particular support. Sinn Féin wants a youth guarantee that means that every young person aged 16 to 24 has the opportunity to be in education, training or a job. I am very glad that the Job Start scheme has now opened, and I know that businesses in my own constituency of East Derry have already taken it up.

Businesses need to be supported to rebuild and recover. As Gary said, with so many businesses reopening, today is a great day. Our recovery must focus on protecting jobs and livelihoods in the hardest-hit sectors as well as on creating new jobs in sectors that will help to meet our climate obligations, as outlined in the motion, and create a more resilient economy and society.

We need to have a greater focus on community wealth and the social economy in order to

ensure that our communities benefit and develop in tandem with the economy. During the pandemic, lots of people have been working remotely. That has benefits for work-life balance as well as for their local areas. Supporting that to continue can help to promote greater regional balance. One way of doing that would be to expand the regional hubs, which were announced by Minister Murphy, into the private sector. We should look at that. Our economic recovery must also maximise our economic potential as part of the EU single market and an all-island economy, bringing jobs and investment to the North. Disappointingly, that has been lacking from any of the plans that have so far been brought forward by the Economy Minister.

In reference specifically to the motion, central to delivering a fair and just transition and recovery is a green new deal. A green new deal can bring together all the other aspects of economic recovery: creating jobs; providing skills and training opportunities; delivering better health and well-being outcomes through tackling fuel poverty, for example; more active transport; and more green spaces. It should be one of the key pillars of our economic recovery strategy, but, given the plans that we have seen to date from the Economy Minister, I am not convinced that it is. Green recovery is mentioned, but there is a lack of detail on what it means, and it has no coordinated green new deal element.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Not for the first time, the party opposite takes every opportunity to have a go at the Tories and the Economy Minister, but the Executive are never mentioned. Will the Member clarify for me whether the Economy Minister's deal was approved by the Executive, or is the Economy Minister on a solo run? Do the Executive pick and choose when they are in favour of something? That would have serious implications for what will happen over the next few months.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Dr Archibald: I thank the Member for his intervention. Last week, when that question was put to the Economy Minister about her 10X plan, we heard that it had not been endorsed by the Executive. The motion calls on the Executive to deliver, and it is important that we develop strategies on a cross-departmental basis, because recovery will be delivered by all Departments.

My final point is that, in my opinion, well-being should not just be part of the decision-making process; it needs to be measured. We all know that what gets measured gets managed, and we certainly need to ensure that our society is measured by more than its economic output.

In conclusion, Sinn Féin will support the motion. I agree with its content, as I imagine that everyone here does, not least because a green new deal was a commitment in New Decade, New Approach.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Given that it is almost 1.57 pm, and Question Time is due to commence at 2.00 pm, I propose that the House take its ease until 2.00 pm. The debate will resume after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Mark Durkan.

The debate stood suspended.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Infrastructure

Sydenham Wastewater Pumping Station

1. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the Sydenham wastewater pumping station is being replaced. (AQO 2076/17-22)

Ms Mallon (The Minister for Infrastructure): I confirm that, subject to the necessary funding being available, Northern Ireland Water intends to replace the Sydenham wastewater pumping station. Northern Ireland Water has reached agreement in principle with Belfast City Council on the preferred location of the replacement facility, and I have been advised that environmental modelling and design development to deliver the best engineering solution is under way. Geotechnical investigations that were completed in March 2020 will inform the design and help to establish the most suitable construction method. The completion of the outline design, along with planning and other approvals, is expected in summer 2022, followed by the procurement and award of the contract in autumn 2023. It is hoped that construction will commence in spring 2024 and that construction, testing and commissioning will be completed in autumn 2026.

I stress that the dates depend on the outcome of ongoing environmental modelling, on obtaining the necessary statutory approvals and on the availability of funding to deliver the project. The current estimate for the investment needed to replace the pumping station is around £32 million, which is included in Northern Ireland Water's overall PC21 business plan for the six-year period from 2021 to 2027. The replacement of the pumping station is part of the Living with Water programme, which is a 12-year drainage and waste water plan for the greater Belfast area costing in the region of £1.4 billion. In line with the Executive's New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) priorities, I will make a strong case for the pumping station scheme, along with the wider Living with Water programme, to be funded.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her reply. She will be aware that the pumping station has been a problem for quite a number of years. In fact, on two occasions, seven, eight or nine houses were completely flooded with raw sewage. Moreover, those who live directly opposite, in a street — a residential area — live in the shadow of the building.

Five years is a long time to wait with that potential flooding at the back of your mind or an inappropriately sited facility directly opposite your house. Will the Minister try, as best she can, to accelerate the programme beyond the current five-year timescale that she outlined?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. I appreciate how concerning the situation is for residents and for him as their elected representative. The outcome of the recently completed drainage area study of the area served by the pumping station highlighted the need for a further environmental modelling study to assess the effects of outflows from the station on the Connswater river. That study is ongoing and will take time to complete, but I assure the Member that I will make sure that my officials do what they can, working with Northern Ireland Water, to accelerate this important work.

Mr Lyttle: Having spent New Year's Eve volunteering with the Red Cross and delivering sandbags to the people of Sydenham, I am acutely aware of the extent of the problem in the area. I add my voice to the request for the programme to be expedited as quickly as possible. When the scheme is completed, how positive will it be for the area?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. The scheme will make a huge difference to residents in the area. As I said to Mr Newton, we will do what we can to accelerate the programme. I also assure the Member's constituents that Northern Ireland Water will consult with the local communities affected by the proposals in advance of construction so that they will be involved. I will ensure that they are kept fully updated.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister provide an update on the Living with Water programme?

Ms Mallon: 'Living with Water in Belfast: An Integrated Plan for Drainage and Wastewater Management in Greater Belfast' was published for consultation on 11 November 2020. The consultation closed on 29 January 2021. Officials are considering the responses received and will prepare a consultation report

that will be taken into account as they draft the final plan.

The draft plan indicates that approximately £1.4 billion of investment is needed over the next 12 years to upgrade drainage and waste water infrastructure in greater Belfast in order to protect against flooding, enhance the water environment and facilitate growth. The focus of the programme is on developing integrated, catchment-based solutions to manage rainwater on the surface and, where possible, avoid hard-engineered drainage solutions that involve long-term operating and maintenance costs. I intend to bring the final plan to the Executive for approval in the coming weeks.

Ms Dolan: Will the Minister provide an update on the steps that her Department has taken to adopt the Ravensbrae waste water treatment plant in Garrison?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for her question. She will be aware that Northern Ireland Water has been trying to be helpful, but the difficulty is that the area is unadopted, so it is outwith Northern Ireland Water's statutory responsibilities. I am keen to see where we can be further supportive, however, and detailed work is going on to understand exactly what work is required and what the costings are. I have asked my officials to continue to work constructively with residents to see what we may be able to do, even given the restrictions, to assist them with what is a difficult situation.

Climate Change

2. **Mr McGrath** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline her Department's actions to address climate change. (AQO 2077/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The New Decade, New Approach agreement commits the Executive to tackling climate change and addressing its immediate and longer-term impacts and to creating legislation and targets for reducing carbon emissions. In my tenure as Minister for Infrastructure, I have taken forward several projects that will help to mitigate the climate emergency and ensure that Northern Ireland adapts to the impacts of climate change.

The projects include a range of initiatives to facilitate modal shift to more sustainable travel options, including investment in new and existing cycleways; working with councils to deliver sustainable local transport plans; and £30 million of investment in low-emission buses for Translink, £66 million of investment in low-

and zero-emission buses for Translink and investment in excess of £60 million to purchase new train carriages in order to encourage more people out of their cars and on to rail.

I have also invested £20 million in a blue-green infrastructure fund to make public transport and active travel a more attractive and efficient alternative to the use of private cars. As I said in my previous answer, I have also brought forward the Living with Water programme, which will revolutionise the way in which drainage and waste water are managed in order to prevent flooding that is caused by climate change.

I appreciate the role that tree planting can play in mitigating climate change and the multiple benefits that woodland creation can provide for society. I am also rolling out LED lights across Northern Ireland. That work has resulted in a significant reduction, by about 24%, in energy consumption. I intend to make further allocations to LED retrofitting in 2021-22. To date, I have allocated £3.7 million of capital to greenway projects through the blue-green infrastructure fund.

I remain committed to doing what I can, working with councils and local communities so that we all play our part in tackling the climate emergency.

Mr McGrath: I thank the Minister for her answer. It is obvious that she is making real progress on tackling the climate crisis. We in South Down want to be able to play our part. For example, many people have contacted me — I know that this is not her direct responsibility — about e-car charging points, which they would like to see more of in the community.

Will the Minister commit to meeting me so that we can discuss ways in which the community can respond to and assist with the shared ambition of tackling the climate crisis?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. He raises a very important point. He rightly highlights the fact that the e-car public charge point network in Northern Ireland is owned, operated and maintained by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). Recently, I met ESB and representatives of the motor industry to identify further opportunities for collaboration in order to advance the e-charging network so that it plays its part in tackling the climate crisis. My officials are assisting ESB as it seeks to replace up to 60 charge points that were installed as far back as 2011-12 and are now experiencing faults.

Members will know that I have made changes to the planning system through permitted development rights to make it easier to install e-charging infrastructure. I am pleased that my Department has been able to provide funding from the EU INTERREG-funded Facilitating a Sustainable Transition to EVs in the Regions (FASTER) project, which will see a number of charging points put in place across Northern Ireland. Of course, my Department has also been leading a transport working group to inform the elements of the energy strategy for Northern Ireland. A key part of that work involves the electrification of vehicles.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister has kind of answered the question, but she knows that the electric-charging network is worsening and definitely needs upgraded. Can the Minister clarify whether or not she will support ESB with funding to repair and upgrade that network? It is important that we encourage people to use electric vehicles.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, I met ESB and my Department is working with it on retrofitting. The Member is absolutely right. We need to improve and expand the charging network and people's ability to charge their vehicles at home. My officials have been working with the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles, because it has funding. We are working with councils to enable that funding to be drawn down. As I said, I recently met representatives of the motor industry. As discussed, affordability is a barrier, but there is also anxiety around range. I will continue to work with the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles. I have written to the British Government, asking them to identify what funding is available in Northern Ireland so that we can meet our targets. I remain very much committed to doing much more in that area, working with all the relevant partners.

Mr Nesbitt: As recorded by nirect, there are 337 electric-charging points across Northern Ireland. Anecdotally, I have been told that up to half of those are not working at any given time. Can the Minister confirm that and also that, as it appears, there are none in the Strangford constituency?

Ms Mallon: The Member is correct to identify that there is an issue with faulty e-charging points. The difficulty is that those were installed many years back. That is why I am pleased that my Department is working with ESB to retrofit a number of e-charging points. However, we also need to provide additional e-charging

infrastructure. A key part of that will be enabling people to charge their vehicles overnight at home. I continue to work with Ministers in London and local councils to make sure that we can draw down the maximum amount of funding, so that we can improve the e-charging infrastructure and have charging points in the Member's constituency.

Mr Muir: This is an important issue. It is fair to say that the e-charging network is a shambles. The Department has 1,283 staff car-parking spaces but only two e-charging car-parking spaces. Will the Minister commit to doing what her counterpart has done down South and rebalance her budget towards priorities that will tackle climate change, such as e-cars, active travel and public transport?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. As I have stated in the responses to other Members, I have made a number of changes to improve the e-charging infrastructure, whether through retrofitting or changes to the planning system itself. As I said, I am working with a range of partners to identify funding. I established, for the first time, a £20 million blue-green infrastructure fund to achieve the very outcomes that the Member highlighted. I have asked officials to look at what we can do in the area of e-charging infrastructure in particular and, with financial support, what role my Department may be able to play. I recently met Minister Poots on this issue and am keen to meet the Economy Minister as well, because we need to work across our Departments and situate this very much in an Executive-led approach to tackling the climate emergency.

Northern Ireland Water

3. **Dr Aiken** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether her Department has started a review into the future of Northern Ireland Water. (AQO 2078/17-22)

Ms Mallon: The Department has not started a review into the future of Northern Ireland Water. Northern Ireland Water was established in 2007 and, today, holds dual status as a Government-owned company and a non-departmental public body. Since its formation, Northern Ireland Water has significantly improved the delivery of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. Throughout the most recent regulatory price control, PC15, Northern Ireland Water consistently exceeded the levels of service and efficiency required by the Utility Regulator. Northern Ireland Water now makes recurring annual savings of around £65 million, compared to the legacy Water Service pre 2007.

When compared with the most efficient water and sewerage companies in England and Wales, Northern Ireland Water has closed the efficiency gap from 49% in 2007-08 to within 7% today.

2.15 pm

Given those achievements, I see no clear benefit to reviewing the future of Northern Ireland Water. What I have done and will continue to do is to present the argument to my Executive colleagues for sufficient public funding for Northern Ireland Water. I recognise that modern, well-maintained and sufficiently funded sustainable water and waste water infrastructure is essential to deliver economic growth, address regional imbalance and tackle the climate emergency.

Dr Aiken: I thank the Minister for her reply. Recently, at the Finance Committee, we discussed Northern Ireland Water and its future funding mechanisms; indeed, having heard the Minister's previous answers to the Assembly, one realises that around £1.5 billion is needed, even as an interim figure, to meet Belfast's waste water requirements, never mind those of the rest of Northern Ireland. Bearing that in mind, is the Minister in favour of mutualisation, bringing in water charges or some other hybrid model? Frankly, the situation is unsustainable. Northern Ireland Water will not be able to continue as it is.

Ms Mallon: My position, which is shared by the Executive, is that Northern Ireland Water should be publicly owned. Therefore, I continue to make the case that we need to ensure that it has sufficient public funds to fulfil that position and the desire of the Executive for it to be publicly owned. I will continue to make the case for funding at the Executive table.

I want to be absolutely clear: as Minister for Infrastructure, I do not support the introduction of water charges.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Minister mentioned the Living with Water programme a few times and acknowledged that it is, largely, a programme for greater Belfast. What is her Department doing to ensure that there is regional balance, particularly for areas that need water and waste water infrastructure upgrades?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for her question. As well as the Living with Water work in Belfast, we are engaging in a study in Derry. My officials are finalising the considerations of that report. Then, I will use that to identify the

next steps forward. The reality is that, because we have had historical underinvestment in our water and waste water infrastructure, we now have over 100 locations that are either at or beyond developmental capacity. The issue does not just affect Belfast: I would argue that it affects nearly every one of the constituencies represented by Members across the House.

Mrs D Kelly: Further to the Minister's last response about the impact across the North, I know that, in my constituency, planning applications have been refused or put on hold because of the lack of capacity, particularly for sewage. I know that, time and time again, the Minister has called for greater investment by the Executive in water and sewerage infrastructure. Can she outline the impact that that lack of investment is having across the North?

Ms Mallon: As the Member rightly highlights, the historical underfunding of Northern Ireland Water is now manifesting itself in a growing number of areas where there are development constraints. As I said, there are over 100 such areas with a further 37 under stress. It is the responsibility of the Executive to address that constrained funding for public services. We have to be absolutely honest and real: if we do not address the water and waste water infrastructure difficulties, we will not be able to build the many new homes that are needed. We will not be able to have the economic growth that our citizens deserve. It is absolutely fundamental that, if we, as an Executive, are to deliver on our Programme for Government, we realise the investment that is required in water and waste water infrastructure across the North.

Active Travel Resource Budget 2021-22

4. **Ms Armstrong** asked the Minister for Infrastructure what action she is taking to rebalance her resource budget towards active travel in 2021-22. (AQO 2079/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I would hope that all Members are well aware that my Department's resource budget presents an ongoing challenge for the delivery of its statutory duties. This financial year continues to be very challenging. When inflationary pay and price pressures are taken into account, there is, effectively, a real-terms cut. Members may also be aware that the increase of only 3% on the 2020-21 opening position has been attributed specifically to Northern Ireland Water. That means that there is little to no flexibility in my resource funding to

rebalance towards anything other than to focus on delivering statutory and other essential duties. However, I am committed to investing in active travel, as we have to address the issues of how we travel if we are to deal with the challenges that we face in respect of health and well-being in the climate emergency. Last year, I announced a £20 million capital blue-green infrastructure fund, and I am committed to delivering a similar level of capital funding this year. In addition to that, I am looking at opportunities, within the constraints with which I am operating, to fund activities from the resource budget.

Ms Armstrong: Minister, I agree that it is part of your essential duties to consider climate change, and one of the ways that we can do that is through active travel. You mentioned the £20 million capital, but that is significantly less than 5% of your capital budget. How can we hope to move forward a blue-green change to the way that we travel if it is not funded appropriately? Can you increase the funding available for the blue-green fund through other capital options?

Ms Mallon: There is a responsibility on all of us, as Ministers and as citizens in our society, to play our part in climate action. I would like to do so much more, but I have to operate within the funding envelope that I have been given. I remain committed to doing what I can within those financial constraints when it comes to climate action. That is why my intention is to roll on the £20 million blue-green fund. As I said, I am working through difficult scenarios on the resource side with my officials to see what we may be able to do there.

The reality is that, every time I go to do something more or new, I have to look at stopping something that the Department is already carrying out. As Members will know, the role of my Department is so operational and impacts on everybody's life that that throws up very difficult scenarios. It is a difficult balancing act, but I am committed to doing what I can. That has been demonstrated in the blue-green fund, and I hope that councils have continued to develop their proposals so that I will be in a position to financially support many more projects in this financial year.

Mr McGuigan: I acknowledge the ambition that the Minister has shown. She will be aware that her Department has recently taken some criticism about slow progress on active travel measures, particularly when it comes to progressing cycling-only infrastructure. The Minister outlined the economic, environmental

and health benefits of active travel. Is she considering introducing an active travel Bill, which would help put active travel on a statutory footing?

Ms Mallon: That is something that I was keen to do, and, when I took up post, I asked officials to look into it. The reality now is that, given the impact that the pandemic has had on the work of the Department, combined with the limited time left in this mandate, it will not be possible to pass primary legislation. I have asked officials to look at changing the culture in my Department. It is also about changing the policy focus and changing the areas that we invest in. We are trying to do that work and advance all that change where we can, but I hope that my successor, whoever that will be, will continue in that vein and will give positive consideration to an active travel Bill, because it would be hugely beneficial.

Mr McNulty: It is one thing getting your picture taken pointing at potholes; it is another matter altogether to get the Sinn Féin Finance Minister to pony up to pay for their repair. Everyone knows that the Sinn Féin Minister holds the purse strings. With your resource budget effectively being a real-terms cut to the infrastructure budget, you have a difficult job balancing competing priorities. Have you asked the Sinn Féin Finance Minister for more money for those priorities and for the repair of potholes?

Ms Mallon: As I outlined in a previous response, the Department's resource outcome is disappointing. That is there for all to see. The Budget outcome is such that not all of even our most high priority or inescapable pressures have been met by a significant margin, and, following successive reducing budgets, the Department has emphasised the extent to which further budget reductions cannot be found without having an impact on public services, including public transport and road maintenance.

I have made the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues aware of the pressures. While I bid for additional money on the Department's £62 million of COVID pressures, I received an allocation of £20 million. Should the remaining pressures not be met in-year, that is likely to impact on the essential services that the Department delivers. However, I will continue to stress the real pressures for our key services and will bid in-year, as I did last year, to improve our services for citizens.

North-west Transport Hub: Phase 3

5. **Ms Mullan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the feasibility study on phase 3 work to the railway line from the north-west transport hub to Coleraine. (AQO 2080/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I am ambitious for our rail network and am keen to do all that I can to explore how we progress rail improvements within the limited budgetary envelope that has been made available to us. I also want to ensure that any proposals for changes to the rail network include operational and financial viability and have a clear focus on the part that rail can play in growing the all-island economy, improving the ability of people to connect with and access opportunities and addressing regional imbalance. Rail has huge untapped potential to deliver multiple benefits across our island. I am committed to addressing regional imbalance by improving connectivity to the north-west area. In line with that, I have commissioned a feasibility study to get phase 3 of the Coleraine to Derry project back on track. I have also commissioned additional studies to explore the possibility of a half-hourly service from Derry to Belfast as well as providing additional halts at Ballykelly, Strathfoyle and City of Derry Airport. Work on the phase 3 feasibility study is ongoing, with a number of topographical and pilot studies under way. I continue to work with the campaign group Into the West as we advance that work and keep it moving forward. Rail is key to the future of travel on our island. I will continue to do all that I can to enhance opportunities, particularly for communities that have been left behind for too long.

Ms Mullan: Thank you, Minister, for that update. Clearly, investment is needed in the Derry to Coleraine railway line. Will the Minister give me an update on the active travel centre that is meant to be part of the north-west transport hub? I understand that your Department has made an application to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for funding.

Ms Mallon: Thank you. I am keen to increase the proportion of everyday journeys made by walking, cycling and public transport across the North. Enhanced passenger facilities opened in November last year in the north-west transport hub with the completion of the main station work along with a new 100-space park-and-ride facility. My Department, as you said, has submitted an application for funding for the active and sustainable travel centre from the INTERREG programme to the SEUPB, which has advised that that request for funding is still under consideration. My officials continue to

make contact in the hope that we can get the matter positively resolved.

Mr Middleton: The Minister will be aware that it is important that we improve rail connectivity to the north-west. The council recently approved a motion to seek your backing, Minister, for a feasibility study into restoring the Londonderry to Portadown rail line. Will you actively support that?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. I have announced a number of feasibility studies on improving connectivity to the north-west. I have also agreed to part fund a feasibility study on the railway line from Portadown to Armagh.

The difficulty is that I have received multiple requests for individual feasibility studies. The Member will know that I am working on a regional strategic transport plan. It is important that we take a strategic approach. That plan will go out for consultation later this year. I encourage Members in the north-west to make representations about rail lines and what they would like to see in the plan. The Member will also know that we have launched the all-island strategic rail review, which will look at rail connectivity across the island and will be data-led. There is a lot of opportunity for people to feed into, shape and dramatically improve our rail infrastructure.

Mr McCrossan: Minister, I know that you will agree that our late colleague John Dallat would be proud of the huge amount of work that you have done, the focus and attention that you have put on investing in rail and the reviews that you have established. He was a champion for that for all his life, particularly his public life. You mentioned the review: what will the benefits of that strategic rail review be for the north-west?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. Last month, I was delighted to announce along with Minister Ryan the launch of the strategic all-island rail review. It will explore the opportunities to better connect communities not just in the north-west but much further afield and will open up opportunities for our island economy.

Since coming into office, I have been clear that it is my priority to address regional imbalance, tackle the climate crisis and better connect communities across Ireland.

This review will allow us to consider the rail network across this island and how we can

improve it. I look forward to working with colleagues, North and South, as we maximise the opportunities, from rail in particular, to transform travel and opportunities for our citizens who share this island. As I said, the purpose of the review will be to allow data to drive how we improve and expand our rail connections. The process is at an early stage, with a procurement exercise being undertaken to appoint a service provider to deliver the review.

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

2.30 pm

Roads: Poor State of Repair

T1. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether she plans to bid for additional money to bring our roads up to a better standard, given that one of the things that people see when they are driving is the state of the roads, albeit we are coming out of the pandemic, with the potholes and roads that need to be repaired seemingly becoming much worse. (AQT 1331/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. We are seeing years of underinvestment manifested in our road network. The independent Barton report identified an investment requirement of £143 million per annum just to maintain the structural integrity of our roads. The fact that we are not investing that amount is manifest in the form of potholes and a deterioration in the road network. As part of the Budget process, I put in a bid of £120 million for structural maintenance. I recognise that this is a difficulty and a cause of huge frustration to people across Northern Ireland. I will continue to do what I can within the financial constraints to ensure that we are trying to fix our road network. As I have said before in the House, if we do not do the basics right, people find it very difficult to have confidence in us as an Executive. I remain committed to doing what I can. However, I have to be honest about the financial difficulties that my Department is experiencing, given the level of investment that is required in the road network.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for that answer. I accept that there has always been a concern about underinvestment in roads. Now, however, repairers seem to be repairing potholes that were repaired previously. There are safety concerns. There are arbitrary figures for the depth of potholes. On main roads, we now

witness people swerving to try to avoid potholes because the roads are in such a bad state. The danger that comes with drivers having to do that feeds into road safety.

Of course, people can put in claims to DFI Roads. In particular areas of our constituencies, we see multiple cases of damage to vehicles, the cost of which, in essence, will be passed on to your Department. Until additional investment is found, what work can you do in the short term to find out where the biggest problem areas are and address those?

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for his question. To ensure a consistent approach across Northern Ireland, the Department operates within a matrix and a framework. That is priority-led, so the worst defects get the quickest attention. However, this comes back to the fundamental problem of insufficient funding. As I said, the Barton report identified a requirement of £143 million per annum just to maintain the structural integrity. There has not been that level of finding for many years, so the difficulty that my Department finds itself in is trying to carry out the work that we know is required without having the funds to be able to do it. I will continue to make the case around the Executive table to ensure that we get the funding required so that we can find a way to deal with this. I recognise that patching may work in the first instance but is not the most cost-effective approach in the longer term.

HGV Restrictions in Clady

T4. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to state what happens next, in light of her announcement today of a public consultation on heavy goods vehicles travelling through Clady village in the heart of his constituency, an issue on which his constituents recently met with her to express their huge concern and, to her credit, she has responded to their calls for help. (AQT 1334/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I know that the Member and his colleague Councillor Edwards have been campaigning strongly on this issue. I thank them for giving me the opportunity to meet residents directly to hear their concerns and how this issue is impacting on them.

As the Member will know, the public consultation in 2019 attracted a number of objections from local businesses that would be adversely affected by the weight restriction. This exemption is intended to reduce that impact. The legislation would prohibit vehicles that exceed 7.5 tons from using the B85 road in

Clady from its junction with the Bells Park Road to its junction with the Urney Road. Under the current proposal, there will be exceptions for vehicles that are over the weight restriction that operate within the immediate rural catchment or are delivering to or collecting from properties. The scheme could be introduced later this year, depending on the outcome of the consultation. I encourage everyone locally to share their views in that very short consultation.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for that answer and for her firm commitment to the people of Clady that she is dedicated to resolving the issue. As she is aware, Clady is a very small rural village. It has a narrow street with cars parked outside people's homes, and, when heavy goods lorries come through it to access Donegal, they block the village, which causes considerable issues. Will the Minister reaffirm her support for resolving the issue and give a commitment to the House and the people of Clady that she will do everything within her grasp to see it resolved as swiftly as possible?

Ms Mallon: I recognise the importance of the issue. I listened to residents whose homes have been damaged because of the huge vehicles that pass by their homes. We had to consult on the issue. The consultation period is short: it opens on 26 May and closes on 18 June. I encourage the Member and his constituents to respond positively to the consultation. I reiterate the commitment that I gave to the residents when I met them: we will do what we can to move this forward as quickly as possible because the issue has been around for quite some time.

Roads Recovery Fund: Update

T5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the roads recovery fund, given that she will know that, for anyone representing a rural constituency, potholes are one of the biggest issues that are raised by drivers who are concerned about the condition of rural roads. (AQT 1335/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I recognise — I think that we all do — that there has been historical underinvestment in our road network for a significant number of years and that many rural roads are in need of repair. The Member will know that, in response to that, I allocated £12 million of my 2020-21 capital budget to a roads recovery fund. Of that, £10 million was specifically directed towards rural roads. That funding allowed the targeting of many short stretches of roads that were in particularly poor condition, and it is estimated that over 750

locations on the rural road network will have benefited from it. I am finalising my budget for 2021-22. However, I assure the Member that I remain committed to setting up a further roads recovery fund from the available 2021-22 budget to continue delivering that important work to improve connectivity and help rural communities.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for her comments and welcome them. She will be aware that the 2019 Audit Office's report indicated that fair coverage should be provided for the rural road network from the structural maintenance budget. I raise that with the Minister and ask her to reaffirm her commitment to addressing the issues of potholes and the maintenance of rural roads, which have caused so much havoc for motorists and are serious issues, particularly for those who represent rural areas.

Ms Mallon: The Member has made multiple representations about that issue on behalf of his constituents. I am aware of the Northern Ireland Audit Office's report and its recommendations. My officials have undertaken work to implement those recommendations. I am happy to provide a written update to the Member on the specific recommendation that he highlighted.

Unwanted and Obstructive Parking

T6. **Ms Ní Chuilín** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on what her Department is doing to deal with unwanted and obstructive parking in residential areas. (AQT 1336/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for her question. It is really important that we ensure that our roads and streets are made safe for local communities and are accessible for residents. My Department was involved in a residents' parking scheme in the Rugby Road area. A review of that scheme has been undertaken, and I am discussing the findings with officials. There is much value in residents' parking schemes. At times, it is quite difficult to get agreement on them, but there are certainly benefits to be derived from them, and I would like many more to be rolled out across the North.

There is also the issue of enforcement for obstructive parking. Traffic attendants are in place to ensure that, where there is obstructive parking, fines are issued accordingly. We also do a lot of work on the painting of road signs, so we try to come at the issue from a number of perspectives, including from an educational

one. We advise people that they need to park responsibly and safely.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for the update. She will be aware that people have been using the Lancaster Street area in our constituency as an unwanted car park. The residents have had their driveways blocked. Indeed, the emergency services have made complaints about not being able to get access for their vehicles and having to go on foot. I know the Minister's position on the matter, but, given that the area is right beside the York Street interchange, will she take this opportunity to assure people who live there and in Henry Street that, before any work on the interchange takes place, she will look at mitigations and environmental protections, including pest control, parking and all the other issues that residents need to see addressed? Their quality of life has been severely disrupted by the Ulster University development. Construction workers have used the area very carelessly for parking, and some of the traffic wardens are not acquainted with the law.

Ms Mallon: I am very much aware of that issue and have asked my officials to arrange for the current road markings in Lancaster Street and Thomas Street to be refreshed and to drop a proposal for I-bar road markings at entrances at McGurks Way, Lancaster Street and Thomas Street in advance of an informal consultation on the matter. The Member has written to me about it, and I have passed on her concerns to Ulster University, because of the issues with construction workers and the parking difficulties presenting as a result.

I also want to reassure her about the York Street interchange. I accepted all the recommendations in full, one of which was on proper consultation and engagement with stakeholders. I am very clear that one of the key stakeholders in the scheme is the local community. I therefore want to make sure that the York Street interchange works for those who will use the road but also for those who live around it. They will be kept up to date, and, of course, I will keep the Member updated as well.

Mr Speaker: The next Member is not in his place. I call Paul Frew.

Housing Development: NI Water Issues

T8. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on progress to resolve problems with NI Water, given the severe blockage to development in the North

Antrim constituency and across the Province.
(AQT 1338/17-22)

Ms Mallon: I tend to sound like a broken record, but the Member will know and it is a fact that there has been historical underinvestment in our water and waste water infrastructure. That is manifesting itself in the fact that there are over 100 locations that are now at or beyond developmental capacity. It is therefore a huge difficulty. The Utility Regulator has recently ruled on the funding that is required for the next price control period, which is £2 billion of capital investment.

Of course, the difficulty here is that we are still operating from single-year Budgets, which is a big challenge in itself. I will continue to work with my Executive colleagues to ensure that we get the funding that is required in order to deliver on our water and waste water infrastructure so that we can see the economic growth that that will deliver. It will also enable us to build many new homes, because we are badly in need of those as well.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is there a strategic pathway out of this as to which of the 100 locations that she mentioned should get development funding first? Does she agree that funding in itself will not cure the issue and that we may have to take another look at how NI Water functions and how it is governed?

Ms Mallon: The Member asked about prioritisation. There is quite a robust prioritisation process already in place. Northern Ireland Water works with the Utility Regulator and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, and there is an assessment done of developmental constraints, environmental concerns and water quality. All of that work feeds into the prioritised list of investment that comes forward in the price control period. I assure the Member that a robust process is in place.

Going forward, the fundamental issue is whether one believes that people should be charged for water.

The position of the SDLP and me, as Minister, which is shared by Executive colleagues, is that people should not pay for their water over and beyond what they pay in their rates. If that is our agreed position, we need to ensure that we give the appropriate public funding to enable us to address the historic underinvestment and upgrade the water and waste water infrastructure. We should not always look just at hard engineering solutions, which is why the

Living with Water programme in Belfast is really important too.

2.45 pm

Mr Speaker: Time is up. Members, please take your ease for a moment or two.

Justice

Speed Indicator Devices

1. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Justice whether she will consider directing further resources to policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) to enable the roll-out of more speed indicator devices (SIDs). (AQO 2090/17-22)

Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice): My Department, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Policing Board, provides annual funding of approximately £4.5 million to the 11 policing and community safety partnerships across Northern Ireland. Following engagement and consultation, PCSPs identify and prioritise local community safety issues to improve community safety, tackle antisocial behaviour and increase confidence in policing. Each PCSP, which is made up of elected, independent and statutory members, then agrees on the appropriate allocation of funding towards programmes that help to address local community safety issues, including road safety.

Over recent years, a number of PCSPs have responded to road safety concerns and provided funding for the purchase and deployment of speed indicator devices to help address those concerns. Given the ongoing priorities in my Department and the constraints on budgets and recognising that road safety sits under the broad policy responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure, the Department of Justice is not in a position to provide additional funding to PCSPs for the express purpose of enabling them to fund more speed indicator devices. However, I am content that, should community demand for local SIDs increase, PCSPs have sufficient flexibility in their action plans and existing budgets to work with PSNI and DFI colleagues to support a further roll-out.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her response. Given the importance of road safety, does the Minister agree that speed indicator devices are an effective way to highlight speed awareness?

Mrs Long: A joint committee, comprising representatives from my Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, oversees the work of PCSPs. All PCSPs provide the joint committee with quarterly PCSP action plan delivery progress reports and are required to use an outcome-based accountability model to measure the effectiveness of the services and interventions that they support. To give a recent example, reports from the Newry, Mourne and Down PSCP for the final quarter of 2020-21 showed that, on average, 10% of motorists reduced their speed due to the presence of the seven speed indicator device signs that were installed across the district at that time. They are, therefore, a useful tool but only as part of the broader panoply of measures to improve road safety outcomes. The data captured by the devices is governed and shared locally with the PCSP, the PSNI, DFI and relevant community organisations. Following analysis, that data is used by the PSNI to identify traffic patterns and informs the deployment of enforcement teams. It can also be beneficial to DFI when it is considering where to place new traffic-calming measures.

Mr Boylan: There are complaints about traffic-calming ramps in particular, and speed indicator devices are an alternative measure. Will the Minister undertake to have a conversation with the Infrastructure Minister to ensure that speed indicator devices are rolled out where necessary and appropriate?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. My understanding is that SIDs are not an alternative to traffic-calming measures but can be used by the Department for Infrastructure to identify where traffic-calming measures may be appropriate. However, on the basis that the issue has been raised by members of PCSPs and, indeed, by Members of the Assembly, I have recently written to the Department for Infrastructure and to the Minister, Nichola Mallon, to assess the role that her Department might play in assisting or guiding the appropriate roll-out of SIDs.

Mr Allister: Speaking of indicator devices, does the Minister think that she might need a truth indicator device when it comes to the report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), given that a key premise of that report, namely that there was an events company with which the PSNI cooperated, not least on road safety, now turns out to be false? There was no such company, so how can the Minister sustain the position that she welcomes what she called "a comprehensive report"?

Mrs Long: To be clear, I need no such device in terms of honesty, integrity or truth. It is fairly clear that the Member in question does not need a shoehorn either, given that he managed to turn that into a question that had nothing to do with the substantive issue.

Non-fatal Strangulation Offences

2. **Ms Ennis** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review of the law on non-fatal strangulation offences. (AQO 2091/17-22)

Mrs Long: Following the 2019 recommendation from Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland that the Department consider how to address potential inadequacies in the law around strangulation, in summer 2020, I commissioned a review of non-fatal strangulation offences. The review aims to identify and address any inadequacies in the current policy and legislation on non-fatal strangulation. The scope of the review was later extended to include consideration of the so-called rough sex defence, reflecting the similar legislative consideration given to that issue during the passage of the Westminster Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

My officials have conducted research and taken account of relevant legislative and judicial developments in other jurisdictions locally and internationally. An expert stakeholder reference group was also established to assist with that work. I am pleased to report that the work is at an advanced stage. The review team is now finalising a report for public consultation on non-fatal strangulation offences. The consultation will set out relevant background information and research and seek public and relevant stakeholders' views on the most appropriate way forward for the criminal justice system to respond to cases of non-fatal strangulation. The consultation will be launched in the coming weeks.

Ms Ennis: I welcome the Minister's clarification. Obviously, the review of non-fatal strangulation offences is crucial work, and I welcome the work that has been done. Can the Minister confirm whether she anticipates the outcome of the review of non-fatal strangulation offences being reflected in changes to her justice Bill?

Mrs Long: The issue of non-fatal strangulation may yet make it into the justice Bill, but, if it does so, it will be as an amendment. There is some discussion of whether that is the most appropriate mechanism. Certainly, the rough sex defence will be dealt with in the justice Bill, at least as a first pass. There are issues, as the

Member will be aware, that come into play in non-fatal strangulation and, indeed, in the consent to cause harm. As she will be aware, we want to finish the consultation process before reaching a final conclusion on that.

One of the issues is that, where it is tried as an indictable-only offence, the maximum sentence is a discretionary life sentence. However, in some cases, it is dealt with in the Magistrates' Court, where the maximum sentence for a small number of indictable offences that can be tried summarily in the Magistrates' Court is six to 12 months. I know that at least one member of the judiciary, District Judge McElholm, has raised concerns about the issue of judicial training and the level of the offence and penalty for non-fatal strangulation, all of which we want to consider as part of the review.

Courthouses: Facility Upgrades

3. Miss McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to outline what plans she has to upgrade facilities in courthouses in Newtownards and other towns. (AQO 2092/17-22)

Mrs Long: My officials in the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) recently published their modernisation vision statement, which set out ambitious plans to deliver independent, fair and effective modern courts and tribunals to serve the people of Northern Ireland. The document acknowledges that the current estate lacks the flexibility and technological capacity required of a modern justice system and outlines how a more consistent standard of accommodation will be delivered through evidence-based asset management and investment.

In spite of the obvious delays in construction that have been caused by the pandemic, my officials in the Courts and Tribunals Service have continued to manage improvements in buildings right across Northern Ireland, with investments, both strategic and tactical, comprising smaller-scale maintenance works and larger capital projects. This year, our energy efficiency upgrade will continue with projects on site at Downpatrick, Ballymena, Coleraine and Armagh and others progressing through the design and procurement stages. More than 40 courtrooms across the NICTS estate have been upgraded to install modern audio and videoconferencing technology that allows remote and hybrid hearings and facilitates the digital display of evidence. The courtroom technology programme was essential in allowing courts to continue throughout the pandemic and will continue in

the coming months, further increasing access to justice and boosting digital capability.

In relation to Newtownards, plans are well advanced to upgrade and replace all windows at the building. That project will address long-standing maintenance issues and improve energy efficiency. It is anticipated that works will commence over the summer months. The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service will continue to take forward a range of improvement works to ensure that courts and tribunal buildings are fit for purpose and can support the delivery of physical, virtual and hybrid services.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I welcome the improvement works that she has announced, in particular those for Newtownards courthouse. Can I seek an assurance from the Minister that it is not her intention to rationalise the estate any further, particularly Newtownards courthouse, as her party colleague who previously held the portfolio had suggested, given the need for services such as these in our smaller towns?

Mrs Long: It is widely recognised that many of the buildings in the court estate are not fit for purpose, with most old, a number listed and some, even with investment, not able to meet the standards that people have the right to expect. That does not mean that there are existing plans to close any buildings at this stage. There is no court closure list. Instead, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service has completed a comprehensive technical survey of the entire estate that will provide the data necessary to make informed investment decisions over the next five to 10 years. An estate strategy and strategic asset management plan are under development. Those documents will set out how the physical estate will support the full range of NICTS business and the investment that will be required. That strategy will be subject to engagement with all stakeholders, including elected representatives.

Mr Chambers: Following the welcome refurbishments of numerous courts around Northern Ireland, can the Minister confirm how many cases in the backlog caused by COVID that investment has helped to clear?

Mrs Long: It would not be possible to link particular cases and numbers with the work that we have done. However, if we look at what we have been able to do, I can perhaps outline the work that has been done and then a bit about progress on recovery.

Forty-four courtrooms have been upgraded to date, and over £1 million has been spent on courtroom technology. We have also included remote working facilities maximised, where 300 laptops and Wi-Fi-enabled PCs have been provided to staff not only to allow them to work in places in the courthouse where they do not have network points but to facilitate working from home. We have also included the Nightingale accommodation in the International Convention Centre to allow Coroners' Court hearings, tribunal business and welfare appeals, small claims courts, pre-hearing consultation space and jury assembly to free up some of the room that we have in Laganside Court. There are also now 66 Sightlink licences and 17 Webex licences in operation across the court facility to allow us to have both hybrid and virtual hearings. We have also installed 27 additional videoconferencing units in courtrooms.

3.00 pm

Prior to the COVID lockdown, there were around 8,100 criminal cases in the court system. With the closure of courts over the first lockdown, that number rose to approximately 12,800 cases by early September last year. With the reopening of most courts since August 2020, more Magistrates' Court cases have been disposed of by the courts than received, so the real-time management information suggests that we now have a caseload of around 10,500. Children Order cases are being dealt with at a rate that exceeds pre-lockdown levels by around 20%. However, as Members are aware, I have made a bid for court recovery as part of the budget plans, and I am hopeful that that will be received positively by the Department of Finance.

Mr Blair: My question has just been asked, but I will keep trying.

Ms Brogan: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. For how long does she anticipate the Nightingale courts will continue to be used?

Mrs Long: We have a contract that takes us up to the end of June. However, we continue to be in discussions with the management of the centre about potentially carrying on with our use of the building through the summer. Much will depend on the relaxations and whether conferencing business will be able to restart. However, given the strictures around travel regulations, international conferencing in particular may still be in quite a depleted state, come that point, so the management may

welcome a tenant that stays through the summer. Obviously, we will keep Members informed of changes.

Mr McCrossan: Thank you, Minister, for the answers to your questions so far. Pre-COVID, the courts estate was used for appeals for people going through the benefits process. Does the Minister believe that that is an appropriate use of the estate, and does she consider that it is up to date enough to ensure disability access given that there are heavy doors, no real automatic door opening and difficulty parking?

Mrs Long: The Member set out clearly what I referenced in my answer to Miss McIlveen, which was that the courts estate often falls short of the high standards we wish to have because they are old, historic buildings. Very often, they are listed; therefore, we cannot make changes.

It is, of course, appropriate that the tribunal cases should be heard within the Courts and Tribunals Service because that is not just a courts service but includes tribunals. It is important that that happens. We have extensive plans for modernisation, and one of the first, big pieces that we are looking at will be to provide a modern facility in the north-west so that we can match the kind of facilities that we have been able to provide in the greater Belfast area.

Victims' Payment Scheme: British Government Funding

4. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any engagements she has had with the Northern Ireland Office, or other representatives of the British Government, regarding their contribution to funding for the victims' payment scheme. (AQO 2093/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Minister of Finance is leading on engagement with the UK Government on behalf of the Executive on funding for the Troubles permanent disablement payment scheme. However, in addition to participating in meetings involving the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister, I have raised the issue separately with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on a number of occasions at meetings and in correspondence.

The most recent meeting with the Secretary of State relating to the scheme was held on 7 April 2021. I attended that meeting with the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister. The meeting was arranged following an offer made by the Secretary of State to

provide access to £100 million of New Decade, New Approach funding for the financial years 2022-23 to 2025-26, which is when the financial pressures of the scheme on the Executive are expected to be greatest. The Secretary of State indicated that no further funding would be made available for the scheme. However, he agreed to a further meeting later this year when more detailed information would be available on the profile of applications to the scheme, which would inform more accurate estimates of cost.

On the basis of the estimated costs of the scheme, we expressed strongly to the Secretary of State our collective position that the offer of financial support falls considerably short of what was expected and that the UK Government would need to provide additional funding in order to avoid such a financial strain on the Northern Ireland block grant. I also raised concerns about the impact on funding for proposed legacy arrangements if the funding was being diverted from that set aside for the arrangements envisaged in New Decade, New Approach.

Discussions with the Secretary of State and the UK Government will continue. In the meantime, an undertaking has been provided to the courts that payments will be made to successful applicants under the scheme. That is important reassurance to victims that payments will be made when they fall due under the terms of the scheme, regardless of where the funding comes from.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Minister for her answer. It is important that victims know that, regardless of what discussions are ongoing or what arguments there are with the British Government over who should pay, they will receive their money.

Minister, will you outline whether you have had any discussions with or approaches from the Secretary of State or the British Government about their proposed legacy Bill, as outlined in the Queen's Speech, given that, effectively, it gives an amnesty to British state forces and rules out the possibility of any type of article 2-compliant investigations?

Mrs Long: I think that the Secretary of State has contacted the leaders of all the Executive parties to discuss the proposals that he intends to bring forward. As a party, the Alliance Party met the Secretary of State on two occasions, and I anticipate a further meeting in the days ahead. As Justice Minister, I have met the Secretary of State on one occasion specifically to discuss the impact on the justice system. I have also told my officials that they are free to

continue to engage with his officials on the workability of any proposals that he may bring forward. However, I make it clear that I do not intend, as the leader of the Alliance Party or as the Justice Minister, to be involved in the co-design of any scheme that will lead to a full amnesty or disrupt the outworking of the justice system as anticipated under article 2.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Minister for the work that her Department has done on the permanent disablement payment scheme. It is really appreciated. Does the Minister believe that payments will start to be made in this financial year?

Mrs Long: It is a very positive development that the president of the board has indicated his intention that the scheme will open from 30 June. It is a complex scheme, and a number of operational issues, including the design of the medical assessment service by Capita, are being progressed in advance of its opening for applications.

It will be for the Victims' Payments Board to confirm when payments may be made from the scheme, but that will depend on the number of applications, their complexity and so on. However, I am aware that the president and members of the Victims' Payments Board are committed to ensuring that applications are processed as expeditiously as possible under the regulations. I expect that more complete applications, which require less assessment, may well come to fruition in the current financial year.

Mr McGrath: Does the Minister agree that it would make sense for our Executive Office and Ministers to have an agreed position on trying to work with the British Government to get funds? As I understand it, they have not had any joint engagement with the British Government about the funding of the programme.

Mrs Long: As I stated in earlier answers, the First Minister and deputy First Minister, along with the Finance Minister and me, have, in fact, met the UK Government to discuss those issues. As an Executive, we have a collective position that the UK Government need to continue to make more significant contributions.

Mr McGrath: That is not what I asked.

Mrs Long: You said that they had had no engagement; they did.

Mr McGrath: *[Inaudible]* British Government.

Mr Blair: I thank the Minister for the detail that she has given thus far about the victims' payment scheme. Some victims will have died before being able to make an application to the scheme. Sadly, others will pass away before it becomes operational. What provision is in place to deal with those victims?

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. First, I will return to the previous question, because the Member seems to be dissatisfied with my response. The UK Government are represented in the negotiations by the Northern Ireland Office, which is part of the UK Cabinet. Therefore, when the First Minister and deputy First Minister engage with the Northern Ireland Office, they are engaging with the UK Government. That is the answer to the question that was asked. Furthermore, the Finance Minister is engaging with Treasury on the matter. Therefore, it is being addressed at all appropriate levels of the UK Government.

There is provision in the board's regulations for victims who passed away in the interim and were unable to benefit from claims. First, applicants can nominate a beneficiary to receive a payment should they die after submitting an application. Also, the board can decide whether someone may apply to receive such a payment in the event that no one has been nominated. Further, the regulations allow for posthumous applications. As such, they will ensure that, in cases in which an individual who was entitled to a victims' payment but passed away before being able to make an application, that application may be made by a person whom the deceased could have nominated under the regulations.

Mr Speaker: The next two Members are not in their place.

DOJ Budget: Underspend

7. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Justice why her Department has had an underspend on its budget for the last three financial years. (AQO 2096/17-22)

Mrs Long: The Department of Justice manages the third-largest non-ring-fenced resource DEL budget across the Northern Ireland Departments, behind Health and Education, and has an annual budget of approximately £1.1 billion. In the Department, there are three core directorates, five executive agencies and eight executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), including the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Department manages a range of volatile and demand-led services, such

as the payment of legal aid costs, and criminal damage and criminal injuries compensation payments.

Relative to the size and nature of the budget, the Department has successfully managed to minimise underspends in each of the last three years to around 1% of the total final in-year non-ring-fenced resource DEL budget and to around 3% to 4% of the capital DEL budget. The underspends, based on the final out-turn from the three financial years 2017-18 to 2019-2020, were non-ring-fenced resource DEL of £4.3 million, £5.8 million and £8.9 million, which equates to 0.4%, 0.6% and 0.8% of the final budget. Capital DEL underspends for the same years were £1.6 million, £3.2 million and £2.9 million, which equates to 2.8%, 3.5% and 3.7% of the final budget. Final out-turn figures for 2020-21 will be available later this year.

A significant area of underspend in non-ring-fenced resource DEL each year relates to compensation services and the settlement of claims for criminal damage and personal injury payments. Those payments are particularly difficult to manage due to the uncertainty about timing and value. The underspends in this area have been £2.2 million, £3 million and £5.6 million respectively. Capital DEL underspends are mostly attributable to delays in projects across the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and policing.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for her answer. What processes are in place to ensure that your Department spends its budget to the best of its ability and offers the best value?

Mrs Long: The Department always seeks to minimise underspends, and it works very closely with the Department of Finance during monitoring rounds and the year-end process. The Department has successfully delivered underspends for non-ring-fenced resource DEL and capital DEL to within acceptable levels for the past three years due to effective budget management. Underspends have largely been achieved by a continual process of keeping budgets under review and by taking part in the in-year monitoring process run by the Department of Finance. That is the opportunity to address formally pressures in-year and declare reduced requirements at each stage of the process.

Mr Speaker: The next three Members are not in their places. I call Maurice Bradley.

HMP Magilligan: Redevelopment

11. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice whether the outline business case (OBC) for the redevelopment of HMP Magilligan has been submitted. (AQO 2100/17-22)

Mrs Long: The OBC 1 for the redevelopment of the Magilligan site will be submitted to the financial services division within the next two months.

Mr M Bradley: I thank the Minister for that very short but definite answer. It is good news.

Mr Speaker: More good news: short answers to short questions. I call Gary Middleton. Gary Middleton is not in his place. Mark Durkan is not in his place. Daniel McCrossan is in his place; you get a bonus.

Serious Sexual Offence Cases

14. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on her plans to enhance the existing protocol to expedite serious sexual offence cases involving children under 13 years. (AQO 2103/17-22)

Mr McCrossan: Mr Speaker, since the Assembly returned, all 14 questions have never been asked. Well done, Minister.

Mrs Long: I am committed to implementing the full programme of reforms under the Gillen review into law and procedures in serious sexual offences in Northern Ireland and to improve the experience of victims of these horrendous offences. I particularly recognise the vulnerability of victims who are children. Therefore, my officials are establishing a cross-departmental steering group to provide strategic direction and oversee the coordinated implementation of the Gillen review recommendations specific to providing support to child victims of serious sexual offences.

One priority for the group in 2021-22 is to oversee the development of a permanent protocol to extend and build on the judge-led voluntary protocol to expedite serious sexual offence cases involving children aged under 13 years, which began in Belfast in September 2019. A dedicated working group is also being established to make arrangements for the incremental roll-out of the protocol to one additional Crown Court within this financial year and across all other Crown Court areas in Northern Ireland thereafter. The judge-led protocol will continue to operate in tandem while that work is ongoing.

3.15 pm

Work to extend the protocol is just one element of the programme of work that the steering group will oversee. We anticipate that a number of other work streams will be established to take forward the implementation of other recommendations under the Gillen review, including the development of a pilot scheme to provide publicly funded, independent legal advice specifically for children, mirroring the sexual offences legal advice pilot that my Department launched last month for adult victims; work to pilot and test arrangements for pre-recorded cross-examination and re-examination in serious sexual offence cases involving child victims; and, finally, the consideration of a Barnahus-type model for Northern Ireland, which would bring all justice and therapeutic child services under a single roof. Those additional work streams will complement work that is already under way on, for example, delivering improvements on achieving best evidence and providing remote evidence centres, where children can provide evidence away from the court building.

Mr McCrossan: The Minister gave a very detailed answer and answered my supplementary question in the body of that answer. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. Before we move on to topical questions, I make the point that I will be writing to all Members who were not in their place today. That includes a number of Members who were supposed to be attending remotely. Departments and Ministers put a lot of work into responding to questions that are asked. There has been a recurring theme of Members not being present in the Chamber to ask their question, and there has recently been an increase in that happening. I will be writing to all those Members to make sure that they are in their place in future.

We now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Hospital and Emergency Service Staff: Safety at Work

T1. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice whether she is minded to review the sentencing guidelines for incidents that involve attacks on staff in our hospitals and on those emergency service staff who have been called to the aid of the general public, given that, over the past few months, there have been many reports of attacks on our emergency service staff, even

though they have gone above and beyond the call of duty during the pandemic and deserve to feel safe in their place of work. (AQT 1341/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for his question. It is an issue that the First Minister has raised with me. She had asked that we look at the issue of first responders and others who may come into contact with the public and be attacked in their line of work. Under the sentencing review that was undertaken, we gave consideration to the issue, and we are minded to look specifically at that area. As I have indicated previously, my intention is to bring forward a comprehensive sentencing Bill in the next mandate. Preparation on that will commence in the autumn, and it will be for whoever is Justice Minister from next May to consider whether it is also a priority for them.

Mr M Bradley: I thank the Minister for her detailed answer. It was a wee bit longer than the last one. All that remains for me to say is that I look forward to the review coming back. Stiffer sentences are the way in which to encourage support. It will be a big bonus for the people who work in the emergency services to know that, if they are attacked, the offender will get a just sentence.

Mrs Long: Sentencing remains a matter for the judiciary. It has largely been our approach in the Department to look towards setting the maximum limit at the right level so that, as judges have unfettered discretion, they are nevertheless aware of the seriousness of the offence that they are taking forward. In this case, our intention is to look at those people who, in the line of their work, may be attacked in that way as an aggravator for any sentencing so that it would be seen as an aggravated offence if the person were a first responder.

Police Officers: NDNA Commitment

T2. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Justice what progress is being made on the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) commitment of 7,500 new police officers. (AQT 1342/17-22)

Mrs Long: As the Member will be aware, there were lengthy discussions on that issue as the Budget was being set for next year. At one stage, there was concern that, owing to the removal of Brexit funding from Westminster, and a number of other issues, including the flat-cash budget that the Department got, we would end up in a situation in which we had a reduction in police numbers. That would have been very unhelpful. Thanks, however, to some

hard work done by the Department of Justice and other Executive colleagues who took a particular interest in the matter, including the Member's former party leader, we have been able to secure additional resource: first, to secure at 7,000 officers the complement of the PSNI at the moment and, secondly, to allow the PSNI to start to recruit an additional 100 officers this year. It will be a matter for future Budgets to ensure that that is baselined and built upon. We have made some progress. It is not as much as any of us would have liked, but, given the current financial situation, it is commendable that we are at least able to start moving in the right direction as opposed to regressing, which may have been the case previously.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for that answer. The Storey funeral and the events surrounding it have clearly caused reputational damage to the PSNI. The barrister-led inquiry at City Hall and the report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) have not provided the clarity and certainty that the general public require. Does the Minister believe that a judge-led independent inquiry would be helpful and provide the clarification and certainty that the public need and give them confidence in the PSNI again?

Mrs Long: It is a big step to suggest that there is not general confidence in the PSNI. From dealing with the public and talking to the people who I engage with at constituency level and as a Minister, that is not my experience. Increasing confidence in the PSNI is all of our responsibility as elected representatives. Where there are issues, we ought to engage constructively with the PSNI and with communities to build confidence. I am yet to see a substantive reason for any kind of judge-led inquiry. I am clear that I will not cross the boundary of trying to usurp the role of the Policing Board, which has the authority and responsibility for scrutiny of the PSNI. Many of the issues that have been raised about gaps in the HMIC, and in particular its report, do not pertain to HMIC and were never part of its remit. However, if the Policing Board and its members have questions about those matters, they are free to raise those with the Chief Constable and seek a response. Indeed, they could go down the route of commissioning their own inquiry into those matters. That would allow them to get to the detail that they need about the policing operation.

With respect to the report from Belfast City Council, it is well outside my jurisdiction, these days, to comment on Belfast City Council, much as Members and, indeed, the Speaker may have done in the past.

Bobby Storey Funeral: Security and Stewarding

T3. **Mr Harvey** asked the Minister of Justice, if Island Events did not provide security and stewarding services at the Bobby Storey funeral, to state who did, given that she will be well aware of the continued public outcry in relation to the funeral fiasco. (AQT 1343/17-22)

Mrs Long: I will say first that I understand the real hurt and frustration that many people still feel about the events surrounding that funeral. I am especially mindful of those who lost loved ones during the pandemic and that many of them were hurt by the fact that, whilst they stuck to the rules, others did not. I am very conscious that Mr Storey, too, has a grieving family and that, every time that this is raised, that has an impact on them. We need to proceed sensitively when we deal with these issues.

Questions about who provided the security and stewarding for the funeral are simply not a matter for me, as Justice Minister. I have no locus in matters that are the operational responsibility of the Chief Constable, and I must respect his operational independence. The Northern Ireland Policing Board, as the PSNI's accountability body, will receive a written response from the Chief Constable on the findings of the inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The Board can ask further questions if areas of uncertainty remain. The Chief Constable has already indicated that he is happy to address any questions that the board wishes to put to him.

Mr Harvey: The entire justice system has suffered serious reputational damage from its handling of all this. What further investigation will you, as Justice Minister, direct to answer this particular question?

Mrs Long: There is no doubt that the decisions of both the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) around that event were the subject of intense public interest. The mechanisms that govern the operation of the justice system are designed to ensure that operational decisions are kept free of political interference, including interference by the Justice Minister. Under the tripartite accountability arrangements, the Policing Board is the key accountability mechanism for the PSNI; it is not the Justice Minister and it is not, with due respect to the House, the Assembly. The board comprises a balance of political representatives and independent members who

are collectively tasked with ensuring an effective, efficient, impartial, representative and accountable Police Service that will secure the confidence of the whole community.

The Public Prosecution Service is also reviewing its decision. Given that the PPS is operationally independent of me, as Justice Minister, I will, quite rightly, play no role whatsoever in that process. Until such times as those processes are fully worked through and exhausted, it would be premature to consider whether there are sufficient substantive issues as to require any further action on my part.

Loyalist Communities Council: Threat of Violence

T4. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Justice, after acknowledging her acknowledgement of the grief experienced by Bobby Storey's family each time that the subject of his funeral is raised, albeit it is clear that those who raise the subject do not care about Bobby's family and are using the grief of others, who were hurt by the events around the funeral, as a political football and should be ashamed of themselves, whether she will join him in condemning the comments made by representatives of the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC) at Westminster last week, when they, once again, threatened the use of violence. (AQT 1344/17-22)

Mrs Long: I have no hesitation in condemning any group or organisation that suggests that violence is still a way to further its political objectives. Violence should never be on the table, it should never have been on the table and it should be firmly off the table today. People who make those comments do so recklessly and without thought to the people affected. Today, we have talked about victims, about legacy and about the hurt of grieving families, and every time that people threaten violence, it is those people and people like them who will be affected in the future if that comes to pass. I ask people — seriously — to de-escalate some of the language that they use around these issues. It is neither helpful to their cause nor appropriate in what is meant to be a lawful society.

Mr O'Dowd: Minister, is it not the case that those political parties that meet the LCC give that group a status that it does not deserve? While I wholly recognise that everyone should make efforts to encourage groups to disarm and disband, meeting these groups in common cause for political objective is the wrong way forward, and the only item on the agenda — not

the first item and not the last item — for these meetings should be this: when are you disbanding?

Mrs Long: I am on record previously saying that it is the only question on which I would be willing to engage with the LCC, because until loyalist paramilitarism has ended and until those organisations that are involved with it and any other paramilitary organisation have gone away, we will not have a normal society. It is completely unacceptable for the coercive control structures of any illegal organisation to still operate in our society, and it is incumbent on unionist politicians, nationalist politicians and all of us to make clear statements in that regard and to follow it through with our actions. I have no difficulty whatsoever in engaging with the loyalist community, but I refuse — I refuse — to equate the loyalist community with loyalist terrorists.

Justice Bill: Executive Delay

T5. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Justice, in the light of the fact that the Justice Committee is waiting to receive a Bill from the Department of Justice, which should have come from the Executive a number of weeks ago, to outline whether a specific party in the Executive is causing the delay, given that all the parties represented on the Committee have stated that they want the Bill to proceed. (AQT 1345/17-22)

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for her question. Drafting of the justice Bill is complete, and the Bill contains important provisions that will protect people from serious sexual offences and sexual exploitation. On 27 April, I circulated a paper to Executive colleagues for approval of the introduction of the Bill. Despite, as the Member said, the content of the Bill being widely supported, I was unsuccessful in my attempts to get approval of the Bill onto the agenda for Executive meetings on 6 May, 13 May and 20 May, when it was tabled but for discussion only. I have written, without success, to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on three separate occasions in an effort to progress introduction of the Bill. As yet, I have not been able to determine any substantive reason why that is the case.

The content of the Bill, as it is now drafted, was approved by the Executive on 19 November 2020, and no new content has been added in the interim. I am growing increasingly concerned that any further delay will see the Bill fail to progress in this mandate and that, as a result, there will be a gap in the public

protection arrangements for the most vulnerable in our society.

That is especially true, because I will not then be able to progress planned amendments to, for example, abolish the rough-sex defence, which I was questioned about today, extend the existing revenge porn provisions to include a threat of publication or widen the scope of and strengthen the current law on the abuse of trust. Those are public protection issues. They should not be controversial. I have spoken briefly, in the Executive, to the new leader of the DUP, in the hope that we will be able to meet before this Thursday's Executive meeting to seek clarity on the issues about which the concerns lie and to get the Bill cleared so that we can move forward.

3.30 pm

Mr Speaker: We have time for only a very brief supplementary question. Please be as brief as possible.

Ms Dillon: Thank you, Minister. As you said, there are a number of issues in the justice Bill that we want to see come forward, in particular about the protection of victims of sexual and domestic violence. We need to see that happen. If a party is blocking that in the Executive, we need to know, because that is not being articulated in the Committee. We need a response in order to move the matter forward.

Mrs Long: I accept the urgency of the issue. I have been as blunt about it as the Member knows that I am capable of being. I am clear that those who are holding the Bill up do not object to the Bill's content, as drafted. Their concerns are about potential amendments that may be tabled once the Bill comes to the Committee or is in front of the House. I raised the issue a number of times in the Executive when it came to other Bills. I was told firmly, by the same individuals, that it was not the business of the Executive to try to constrain what might be moved on the Floor of the House. Therefore, it would be quite a change of direction if they were to try to do so.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. Members may take their ease before the next item of business.

Mr Carroll: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was not in my place for Question Time. Business moved far more quickly than I anticipated. I place on record my apologies to you and to the House that I was not in my place.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Mr Carroll.

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

Private Members' Business

Green New Deal

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly recognises that recovery from the pandemic and tackling the climate crisis go hand in hand, requiring an investment-led, green recovery that delivers on social and economic justice and rapidly decarbonises our economy; and calls on the Executive to deliver a green new deal that will create an equitable, sustainable economy filled with well-paid, secure, low-carbon jobs in care, education and health as well as in industry and infrastructure, and to ensure well-being and inclusion are at the centre of government decision-making.

Mr Durkan: I apologise to the House for missing my question to the Justice Minister during Question Time.

We can all agree that the past year, while being a terrible time, has been a wake-up call for us all. In being forced to do things differently, we learned that we must do things differently. The pandemic has upended society, but it has also allowed people to re-evaluate how they live and work, take stock of the natural environment and consider their consumption habits, and it has served to expedite the public desire for green recovery. That is where our focus needs to be.

Rebuilding in the wake of COVID-19 demands that we build back better, with green, sustainable principles at the heart of the decision-making process. The pandemic has instigated a gear shift in global consumption habits: people are shopping more mindfully and eco-consciously, and demand for local and sustainable products is on the rise. Attitudes have changed, and those changes are here to stay. We must respond and ensure that a green recovery not only shapes policy but defines our towns and cities for decades to come.

As I outlined during the recent debate on the Climate Change Bill, environmental challenges present economic opportunity; the two are not mutually exclusive. Research has shown that the cost savings of decarbonisation will bear fruit by 2050. As such, going green makes positive economic sense. While the green

revolution is regarded with apprehension by some, it is undoubtedly a vehicle for prosperity.

Achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2050 demands action at all levels, but, perhaps most crucially, we need to see change in our industrial processes and in our energy sector. The energy sector must set its sights on a long-term collaborative plan. The North has exceeded renewable energy targets thus far, with almost half of our electricity being generated from renewable sources. However, we cannot fall into a trap of complacency. We must build on our relative success and look towards a viable long-term renewable energy plan that provides security of supply, ensures affordable renewable energy for all consumers and looks towards decarbonisation. The rapidly growing renewable sector has the potential to create thousands of jobs here, guaranteeing the improved health of our economy and environment.

The financial and practical benefits of a shift towards clean energies are clear. That is why governments everywhere are investing in renewable industries. There is no greater investment than the protection of our environment. We must act now to implement initiatives and energy strategies that guarantee that. We need a new vision if we hope to achieve climate action targets.

A collaborative cross-border approach is vital, as is a wider joined-up effort with Europe. It is important to remember that having a carbon-free energy sector will not happen overnight. It is a process that requires commitment and a change in attitude from our politicians, energy suppliers and businesses. While I welcome the Department for the Economy's ongoing work to develop an energy strategy for Northern Ireland, it is regrettable that Minister Dodds has failed to ride the wave of change, proposing just £20 million to stimulate green recovery in her economic recovery plan. In the wider scheme of things, particularly when we consider that Scotland has invested almost 10 times that amount, that is a drop in the ocean.

While Minister Dodds has reasserted her Department's commitment to achieve net zero emissions from energy by 2050, I am seriously concerned about whether the steps or time frames suggested are adequate to achieve that. A lot has been assumed about the role of hydrogen and biofuels in providing a revolution in energy systems, but, in our view, there is too little focus on energy sources such as geothermal, which is widely used elsewhere.

All Departments have a role. One key area is retrofitting homes in the social and private housing sectors. Experts have lauded the creation of energy-efficient homes as a necessity in tackling the climate emergency. Considering that 27% of emissions are from domestic sources, investment in that area cannot be an option; rather, it is a necessity. By retrofitting, not only will we make our homes more energy-efficient and cost-effective but we will create crucial well-paid, skilled jobs and tackle fuel poverty.

The transport sector, which has significant carbon emissions, has grasped that opportunity and has committed to transitioning to an entirely renewable energy fleet by 2050. The Infrastructure Minister, Nichola Mallon, has —.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his comments to a conclusion

Mr Durkan: Every facet of society must do things differently. Supported by the right strategy, we can deliver change in a manner that will not just help address the environmental challenges but bring about significant economic and societal benefit for all. We support the motion.

Dr Aiken: The Ulster Unionist Party supports the motion. How could anybody in the Assembly not support the motion and its sentiments? Plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery, and I am glad to see so many of the Ulster Unionist Party's policies being brought into it.

There are some significant issues that we need to address, particularly in Northern Ireland. There are some decisions that we have to make, and those decisions have to be made now. In particular, when we move towards an all-electric economy, we need to sort out issues in our grid system and our electricity supply system. Over time, other Members have addressed this issue several times. My party has real concerns about the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) and Northern Ireland Electricity Energy (NIE Energy), or should I say Eirgrid and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), and their approach to supporting infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Indeed, there is also concern about whether the Department for the Economy is up for the task of transforming our electrical grid system and the market to allow us get to net zero carbon by 2050.

As we move towards the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), Northern

Ireland needs to address some significant issues. We are pleased to see the issues around just transition. It is clear that our agribusiness, particularly agriculture and farmers, will need support as they move towards net zero carbon by 2050. Indeed, as pointed out by the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), many other areas of our economy, including small and medium enterprises, will need support to do that.

As other contributors said, this also represents a significant opportunity. In particular, we have the ability to transform our housing stock so that it not only gets closer to Passivhaus level but becomes self-generating to as large a degree as possible. We have seen what has happened across the rest of Europe, particularly the Netherlands and Denmark, which are models of what Northern Ireland should be looking to achieve. However, that requires significant changes to our planning processes. We have to ensure that we incentivise making housing much more efficient so that we make it easy to get to that point. We also need to be able to set incentives for Northern Ireland businesses, particularly those in the construction sector, to get involved in the major housing projects that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will, I hope, be working on. Those projects will help us move towards net zero carbon.

We heard today from the Infrastructure Minister, and significant areas of infrastructure will need to be updated to secure net zero. We heard about transport, but one of the things about being on an island is that we also need to consider how we can incentivise offshore energy and offshore wind farms that meet the requirement in Northern Ireland. It is regrettable that, in the past, significant opportunities for offshore wind farms were not taken. If you look across the Irish Sea, you will see that everywhere in English, Welsh and Scottish waters seems to be festooned by offshore wind farms. In the waters off Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland, there are very few. At the moment, it is beginning to look like we are being left behind. We must make sure that Northern Ireland is part of the all-islands renewable energy market, and that will have to involve a significant use of offshore wind.

We have talked a lot about the hydrogen economy and how it links in. However, to make it work, we have to incentivise it. One of the problems in Northern Ireland is the complete lack of joined-up government. We should be asking ourselves this question: are the Department for the Economy, the Department for Infrastructure and the Executive Office up to the challenges to make sure that we move

towards a green recovery and net zero carbon by 2050?

Finally, as I draw my remarks to an end, this is also about how we get out of COVID-19. At this stage, we should all pay our greatest respects to the health workers of Northern Ireland, who have done such a fantastic job to get us to the point at which we now look positively to the future.

The message with which I want to end my remarks is that, if we are to achieve this, we must have a fully joined-up approach across the Government. It is down to all parties, and we must ask ourselves this fundamental question: are the Department for the Economy, the Department for Infrastructure and the Executive Office currently up to the task? We need to make sure that they are, and, as an Assembly, we need to hold them to account.

Mr Irwin: The opening part of the motion states:

"recovery from the pandemic and tackling the climate crisis go hand in hand".

I caution that, in the immediate term, for most people in the Province, given the massive pressures of the past year, the tragic deaths from COVID and the many hospitalisations, recovery from the pandemic is very much the most pressing and main priority at this time, and it should be the main priority for the House.

That said, Northern Ireland must do its fair share in response to climate change.

As I have said in the House previously, actions should be reflective of and, ultimately, proportionate to our 0.04% overall contribution to global emissions.

3.45 pm

Plunging the people of Northern Ireland into further financial strain and upheaval with bad legislation on climate change will not make for any meaningful improvement. I refer, of course, to the private Member's Bill on climate change, and I use this further opportunity to urge Members instead to put their weight behind Minister Poots's departmental Bill.

Aspects of a green recovery that make common sense should, of course, be rapidly enacted. I see, for example, much room for improvement to the existing social housing stock and the need for those homes to receive much-needed energy-efficient upgrades. That should have an

immediate cost-saving benefit to tenants and also benefit the climate. I have lost count of the calls that I have received from Housing Executive tenants who feel that their homes are not efficient, which has had a real and concerning impact on their finances. The House has a responsibility to deal with that issue in a meaningful way. It could be dealt with using the right intervention.

We can read the headlines on future energy sources and moves away from gas boilers, but we cannot ignore the reality of what that means for thousands of homeowners in Northern Ireland. Putting in new technology will be a massive expense for homeowners. To achieve that will require a clear and sensible pathway and will need a significant level of financial support for homeowners.

New forms of heating technology are expensive, and to install them requires a significant outlay. Take the RHI scheme, for example. Some participants spent many thousands of pounds on the installation costs of the new technology. Of course, currently, wood pellets remain an expensive source of heat. We have a situation now in which the tariff is nowhere near enough to subsidise either the massive outlay in installation costs or the cost of the fuel compared with fossil fuel alternatives. We need to get that issue right. Bad policy decisions will see millions of pounds returned to the Treasury that would otherwise be used to subsidise sources of green energy. It will not help our overall emissions-lowering agenda either. Businesses having to revert to using fossil fuels is not a good outcome for climate improvement.

The electric vehicle market requires much work. One only has to watch the television to see that many car manufacturers are vying for a slice of that market. There is no doubt, of course, that we are set to increase our use of electric vehicles over those that run on petrol or diesel. However, the charging network for electric vehicles remains abysmal in Northern Ireland. Despite many approaches to the Infrastructure Minister on that topic and, indeed, to many others in the House, there fails to be a clear, concise and meaningful strategy for creating and increasing the roll-out of such infrastructure. Indeed, it was disheartening when a constituent contacted me earlier in the year to say that 50% of the electric vehicle charging network in Newry was faulty. The effect of that was that the driver was nervous about using the electric vehicle for fear of being out of range of a working charging point.

Those are the physical aspects of the green recovery that need to be sorted out. We need to get them right, right now, if we are to make meaningful progress. For the vast majority of consumers out there, one of the most easily recognisable products of green energy is the electric car, yet, here in Northern Ireland, the network cannot possibly respond to the market. It is nowhere near where it needs to be. That must change immediately.

The green recovery must involve actions that are sound investments of public money and policy decisions that balance the need for a climate response but, crucially, do not throw our economic future over a cliff edge.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a conclusion.

Mr Irwin: In Northern Ireland, we are uniquely placed to make an important contribution to the green economy and, especially, the green recovery, given that most electricity consumption here was derived from renewables in 2020, and that was an improvement on the previous year.

Mr McGuigan: Like everyone, I welcome the motion and will vote in favour of it.

Indeed, as Dr Aiken said, who could argue against it? As we move out of the global pandemic, and as COVID, over time, hopefully plays a diminishing part in our daily lives, conversely, the climate emergency and dealing with it will play an ever-increasing part.

We have had enough debates in the Chamber over the past year to know that we all agree with the world's science community when it says that, as a global community, we have just over a decade to get carbon emissions under control before catastrophic climate change impacts become unavoidable. Again, through the various debates in the past year, it is clear that it is the settled will of the Assembly and of society as a whole for the North to play its part in the climate fightback through legislation, and to do so by setting ambitious net zero targets.

Speaking earlier today in the Chamber to another motion on the Climate Change Bill, on behalf of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, I stated that we recognise the profound impact that climate change has on our environment but also understand that the Climate Change Bill will have implications for many sectors of our economy, including farming, agri-food, energy production, infrastructure and transport.

Given that, I welcome the fact that the AERA Committee on which I sit has launched its call for evidence on the Climate Change Bill. Over the coming months, the Committee will explore all the evidence and science from interested stakeholders and members of the public, and I appeal here today for everyone to use that opportunity to have their say on the Climate Change Bill.

If net zero targets are the destination, the green new deal must be seen as the transport network used to get there. Indeed, the ambition contained in any green new deal will determine how quickly we arrive at our destination. We need a green new deal that recognises that economic, social and climate justice are intertwined, and, as other Members have said, we need joined-up government, as it will affect all sections and all Departments.

I take the opportunity to welcome last week's Department for Infrastructure announcement of an e-transport scheme on Rathlin Island in my constituency and commend that island community on its ambition to become carbon-neutral.

As is the case for all MLAs' constituents, my constituents in North Antrim want to see action on climate change as part of the Executive's future economic policies. As an MLA representing my constituents, I want to ensure that, as my colleague Dr Archibald said earlier, those future policies and our recovery from COVID must be based on principles that support workers, families and young people and that support businesses to create, maintain and grow jobs. Those policies must be delivered through a fair and just transition and a sustainable economy.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. I am listening to claims about climate justice, whatever that is, and I have to say that justice seems to creep into every discussion. What justice is there for the farming community in North Antrim, which makes an invaluable contribution to the husbandry of our constituency and whose lives and livelihoods are now being put in jeopardy? In fact, as has been the case with some previous attempts, they are being blamed for the problem. For those families and for the future of their young people, can the Member therefore explain to me how he will support farming in our constituency of North Antrim and achieve his goal of saving the world?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr McGuigan: Thank you, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. As I have said on many occasions, and as I was saying in my speech, I represent a rural constituency that is heavily dependent on agriculture, the agri-food sector and tourism, and I do not think that any of what we are talking about today, or previously when we talked about the Climate Change Bill, will jeopardise that. I have said that the call for evidence has been opened. I encourage representatives from the agriculture and agri-food sectors in North Antrim and right across the North to have their voices heard. We will listen to them, just as we will listen to the science as we move forward. As I had stated before the Member interrupted me, key to that will be a just transition.

The Member may well be moving on to higher fields in the Executive and may well be able to play a key part in ensuring delivery, not just for his and my constituents in North Antrim but for constituents right across this island, on some of the important issues that we are talking about.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Let us remember that the House said that RHI was a bad thing, was too costly, was a scandal, and was an awful thing that should not have happened. How will we pay for making that transition? Will we be put in the same position of having a scheme that is not fit for purpose and ends up with everybody crying foul and our having another disaster on our hands? How will we square that circle?

Mr McGuigan: I heard the Member praise the Tory Government earlier. It is clear from the past year that even the Tory Government, which inflicted austerity on the people of the North for 10 years, can find the money when a crisis such as COVID comes along. I think that, if we are talking about providing a future for our citizens, businesses and young people, we will find the money.

People talk about climate and green recovery as if it is always a negative. This is a positive.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a conclusion?

Mr McGuigan: The things that we are talking about will boost our economy and provide jobs for his and my constituents in North Antrim.

Mr Harvey: I will briefly add my support to a number of comments that have been made by party colleagues and some other Members across the Chamber during the debate. As a member of the AERA Committee, I know about

some of what is already being achieved by the Department to drive growth within a green and sustainable framework. The launch of DAERA's green growth recovery road map from COVID-19 focuses heavily on ambitious change in every sector. The allocations of £23 million of assistance to local government aimed at further improvements to recycling services and £7.5 million to the farm business improvement scheme are two practical examples of green growth policies in action.

I have raised a note of caution previously in the House in relation to the setting of unachievable, or even damaging, targets for our businesses as we work to tackle climate change in particular. We cannot burden industry with unworkable quotas and then wonder why there is no economic growth. It is incumbent on us, as legislators, to work with our business communities to provide the tools and support needed to assist them to develop green and sustainable practices for the future. There is a need to take on board independent expert advice, including the clear findings of the Climate Change Committee in relation to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and the impact on the agri-food sector in Northern Ireland in particular.

I fully support the need to ensure that the economic recovery is underpinned by initiatives that are sustainable and environmentally responsible and support decarbonisation. It will also be important to ensure that investment is inclusive of, and fair towards, all communities, households and industries. I agree that sustainable solutions can bring benefits to the standards of living that are enjoyed by people in Northern Ireland and help to tackle deprivation and isolation.

The Economy Minister has previously outlined her vision in relation to the development of Northern Ireland as a global leader in a future hydrogen economy. I welcome her commitments in relation to the hydrogen hub project thus far. It was encouraging to hear of the establishment this month of the Hydrogen NI group, which brings together key energy providers and business stakeholders to see that vision becoming a reality. It is evident that that initiative is already informing our economic drivers, and I look forward to seeing how it develops. Northern Ireland is, of course, well placed to use renewable electricity and produce green hydrogen. That would make use of the wind that is available when the demand for electricity is lower. Onshore wind currently provides more than 80% of Northern Ireland's renewables capacity. We need to exploit that.

Another key element of our recovery beyond COVID-19 is our tourism industry and our potential to attract foreign visitors. It is important that we ensure that the Executive give the travel industry clarity on the way ahead and that, when changes are made to the green list for travel, those are communicated clearly to the public and travel companies.

The task ahead is great, but, as we emerge from COVID-19, we are presented with a unique opportunity to effect change for the better in terms of how we live, work and do business. As our country embarks on its next century, I have every faith that we will do so and that the very best days are still to come.

4.00 pm

Mr O'Dowd: In general, Members agree that action needs to be taken. There may be differences of opinion on what action has to be taken, the speed of that action, who pays for it and all those things. However, the one thing that, I think, we all agree on is this: climate action has to be taken. Therefore, we need a green new deal. I think that, among the public, there is huge support for or acknowledgement of the fact that climate action has to be taken. I suspect that the same debate is taking place: what action do we need to take, and who pays for it?

The action that we need to take will probably be the biggest change in production since the Industrial Revolution. That is the scale of the change that we need across the globe to change the damage that has already been done to the climate and to ensure that there is not further damage. Let us learn from the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution brought great things to many people across the globe; it also brought the damage to the environment that we live with now. It damaged, in many ways, not only the environment; workers paid a heavy price in the early and mid stages of the Industrial Revolution. Let us ensure, through the green new deal, that workers are not the ones who pay the price of the green new deal and that the tax burden is not placed on workers and families as we move to bring in the green new deal. When I talk about the tax burden, I am talking about direct taxation or indirect taxation. There is no point in giving the wealthy more tax breaks to buy greener houses, greener bigger cars and greener holidays. That is a waste of an opportunity. What we need is a fair and equitable transition to a just, new society. That has to include all of our society.

Many have rightly talked about the farming and rural community, where there are concerns about the debate and the discussion on climate change. There are concerns about the targets that have been set. People ask, "Well, how is it just for the farming community?". Significant parts of my constituency are rural and have a farming community, and I engage with them as much as anyone else. It is clear to me that, if you want to look at a sector that is familiar with transition, change and accepting that it has to adapt to the circumstances in front of it, it is the farming community. They have had to do it down through the years to survive. There is an acknowledgement as well that, if we do not tackle climate change and the adverse weather conditions that face us, the earlier introduction of the seasons, the loss of pollinating insects and all those other things that are happening now to the farming community, farming does not have a great future. Farmers want to see change. Rightly, however, they ask questions.

The consultation that the AERA Committee has launched gives all sections of society a huge opportunity to come forward and have their voices heard to help to shape the Climate Change Bill to ensure that it delivers climate action, delivers an opportunity for a green new deal and delivers for our economy, which, as I said, will be a new economy.

How do we ensure that workers do not pay the price for it? We create well-paid, meaningful jobs that are fit for the 21st century in the circumstances of a green new deal. We retrofit our homes. We build homes that use less energy, use no energy whatever in some circumstances or certainly use renewable energy. We ensure that the innovation that exists in our society is exploited to the maximum. There are many examples from around the world of where countries and societies have started to move to renewable energy, different forms of energy, different ways of production and different ways of doing a lot of things. We can copy those, but we can also, as we have shown time and time again, innovate and lead the world.

I will end on this point: saying to rural communities, "You will have to do without your car", is not a way forward. Rural communities do not have transport options. Are there different ways to support rural communities? Of course there are. I support the green new deal. There is a debate on how we move forward, but we have to move forward.

Mr McGlone: I thank the proposer of the motion and his colleagues for bringing it to the Assembly.

The COVID pandemic has resulted in an economic shutdown that has lasted longer than any of us would have wished, and with it has come human loss in many homes. It occurred at a time when the Assembly and its Executive, along with Governments across the world, should have been focusing their attention on the demands of tackling the climate crisis. As we seek to recover from that shutdown, we have an opportunity to re-evaluate our approach, to reset the economy and to build a future society that delivers on social and economic justice and decarbonises our economy to meet a net zero target for greenhouse gas emissions.

As well as recovery from the pandemic and the threats from the climate crisis, we face the additional problem of the impact of Brexit on our economy. As the DUP has realised, the free trade agreements that their former friends in the Tory Government are pursuing post Brexit will damage the Northern Ireland economy. Mr Irwin referred to his colleague's climate Bill, but we have yet to see the details of it in order to determine whether we can support it. I welcome that discourse happening and the Bill coming through the Committee.

Those who oppose the Ireland/Northern Ireland protocol should realise that, in the free trade area that is being introduced by the Tories in a race to the bottom, it is protecting the Northern Ireland market from food products imported from countries with less responsible environmental and food safety standards. It is the 50% of our agri-food that we export to Britain that will face competition from the exports of those countries as a result of the Tory Government's free trade deal approach. Each one of those deals brings with it a risk of compounding the damage done to our economy and to the climate as a consequence. We should use tariffs proactively, like the EU does, to prevent companies exploiting lower environmental standards, such as, for example, deforestation, and low labour costs — the way that they treat their labour forces — to produce cheaper foods. As well as that, there is the damage to the environment from the methods of transporting those goods long distances to GB or Northern Ireland. That undercuts the more responsible states that have more responsible approaches to the climate crisis. In effect, it is, in many ways, as I said, a race to the bottom.

The SDLP believes that there is support for an economic recovery plan that aligns with wider social, environmental and climate goals. The Executive parties have already committed to

such a plan. It is in the 'New Decade, New Approach' commitment that:

"The Economic Strategy will support clean and inclusive growth and create jobs as part of a Green New Deal."

However, when the Economy Minister announced her economic vision for a decade of innovation on 11 May in a press release — not in the Assembly — that commitment had been watered down to "supporting a greener economy".

It is often the case with headline-grabbing lines that the further detail of supposedly green policies are worth paying attention to. Mr Irwin correctly referred to the infrastructure that is required for new electric vehicles as we strive to meet the priorities and commitments that we have made to end the use of diesel and petrol vehicles by, I think, 2035. However, further aspects of that have to be dealt with. I should add that Mr Irwin's party colleague at DAERA has been in dialogue with my party colleague at the Department for Infrastructure to work on that. We also need to involve his party colleague from the Department for the Economy.

Not everyone can afford a vehicle at £30,000, £40,000 or £50,000 straight off. There are further issues of poverty and accessibility in our rural areas, where people will simply not be able to afford those vehicles. Mobility in rural areas will be affected unless there is a policy of subsidisation that will, in some way, make those vehicles more accessible.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGlone: Yes.

Mr Storey: The difficulty I have when I come to the House is that we want to do everything. Here we go; here is another party that castigated my colleagues and the scandal of RHI, but now we are talking about another subsidy. When are we going to have an honest debate about subsidies and the amount of money that we pump across government? Yet, when it comes to reducing carbon emissions, we are closing down one of the very schemes that contributed to that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute. Before I call the Member to take his minute, I remind all others that interventions should be brief. There is an additional space on the list for a DUP Member, so if Mr Storey wants to make a speech, he is

more than welcome to do so. I do not know whether the House wills that, but he is more than welcome to. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McGlone: As ever, I welcome Mr Storey's interventions here and outside, so I thank him for that.

One could argue that, in theory, RHI was a good scheme, but its outworkings, the inability to detect where it was going wrong and the oversight of it led to the chaos that it turned out to be. Yes, we need subsidies. We cannot have people in rural areas like the ones that you and I live in not having access to transport. As the changes emerge and the introduction of electric vehicles improves the process of evolution towards reducing the emissions that affect the climate, we will need support for people. People simply cannot be put in the position where only the rich are mobile. We have had enough of that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that the Member's time is up.

Mr Dickson: We are, indeed, at what might be described as a pivot point in our history. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how our economy is not working as it should. Too many people are in insecure and poorly paid jobs, with few opportunities to retrain. The economy inequality gap is growing. The pandemic has also shown us that things can be done fundamentally differently and that many of the old orthodoxies, such as the clear failure that is austerity, can and should be cast aside.

We need to change how we live and work in order to avoid another major crisis. However, another major crisis is facing us, and that is the climate emergency. We have to transition to a zero-carbon economy not only to save our planet but to secure and improve quality of life for us and, even more importantly, future generations. My Alliance Party colleague John Blair already set out that a green new deal is essential in order to move towards a better future for everyone in a just and inclusive manner. There are some parties in the Chamber that talk the talk, but they also need to walk the walk in a coherent and united manner.

Last month, we in the Alliance Party published our green new deal document to outline how we, as a society, can do just that for our economy and our environment. Building a green economy offers Northern Ireland major opportunities to lead the world and to attract major investment and tens of thousands of sustainable jobs into Northern Ireland. We have

the resources to build that with our young, educated workforce, our abundant potential for clean energy and our strong telecommunications network. However, we need the right regulatory framework in place in order to prioritise investment in research and development and to market Northern Ireland chiefly through organisations like Invest NI. We should be striving to make Northern Ireland a green economy hub for the whole of Europe.

We need to take action to ensure that everyone benefits from the potential of the green economy and that we move away from carbon-intensive industries. It must not be like the deindustrialisation of the '70s and '80s, which crippled the community that I come from in Carrickfergus when we lost Courtaulds, immediately followed by ICI. We must break the pernicious cycle of underachievement in Northern Ireland with meaningful and comprehensive interventions in education and skills.

Lifelong learning and easy access to education must be a central plank in how we move forward. That includes tackling problems of affordability, flexible working and the lack of affordable childcare. The Alliance Party's green new deal would deliver a much-needed skills strategy to tackle the skills gap in Northern Ireland and ensure that everyone has a skill to take advantage of future opportunities. We want specific green apprenticeships. We urgently need these new skills.

4.15 pm

A major task before us is to decarbonise our entire energy landscape. Homes and buildings across Northern Ireland will need to be retrofitted with high-quality insulation and new high-efficiency heating systems that deliver affordable warmth and eliminate the social ill of fuel poverty for ever, which is a key priority in the Alliance Party's green new deal. To ensure a stable and secure energy supply, new generation and transmission capacity will need to be developed, and major technical challenges will need to be overcome.

To thrive, people need secure and fair employment. The last year has shown us how the system of employment rights is not meeting the needs of today's society. Far too many people are being left without basic income security, many of them going to work when ill because they simply cannot afford to stay at home on the unacceptably low statutory sick pay provision. Discrimination in employment also continues to be a serious issue.

Homeworking has taken off in a way that no one in January 2020 could have envisaged, yet, we see the pernicious use of fire and rehire tactics to worsen the terms and conditions and pay of employees.

I speak for all when I express my thanks to those working in the care sector for their compassion and tireless work during the pandemic. I did not stand up and clap for a 1% pay rise for our NHS workers. They deserve what they deserve. The Alliance Party's green deal will tackle these issues head-on by regulating the gig economy and instituting an employment rights framework for the 2020s, not the 1990s. This will include stronger reporting requirements for gender and ethnicity, and it will ensure that our labour market is inclusive and fair. Government must act now to invest in our people —.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a conclusion, please.

Mr Dickson: Let us work together to institute a green new deal for Northern Ireland. Let us seize the opportunity of being at the cutting edge of a green new deal.

Ms Bailey: I support the motion, obviously, and I thank the Member for tabling it. However, I do so mindful of the Green Party's track record of calling for a green new deal for over a decade. During the debate, I listened to some of the ideas about what can be done to roll it out in Northern Ireland. I point out that the green new deal is not a new concept but long-established work by the Green New Deal Group following the financial crisis of 2007. The membership of that group was drawn to reflect a wide range of expertise in economics and politics, as well as in the climate, nature and inequality crises. The views and recommendations of the group are set out in a series of reports that started as far back as 2008. Maybe it is no longer a green new deal but the only deal left in town. One of the founding members of the group, Caroline Lucas MP, is, along with Clive Lewis MP, bringing forward the Green New Deal Bill at Westminster. That will be game-changing legislation, and similar is needed in Northern Ireland.

I agree with the Green New Deal Group when it states:

"The global economy faces multiple, linked crises. It is a combination of accelerating climate breakdown driven by fossil fuel use, corrosive inequality and debt-fuelled over-

consumption by a global minority pushing us beyond planetary ecological boundaries. These overlapping factors threaten to develop into a perfect storm making social collapse highly likely. To help prevent this from happening, and to lay the foundations of the economic systems of the future, we need a Green New Deal. There is still time. Act now and a positive course of action based on the framework set out in the Green New Deal can pull the world back from economic and environmental meltdown."

The green new deal is, in the loosest terms, a massive programme of investment in new technologies, community and business. The hard work has been done. All that is really needed is the political will to implement it.

Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic has proven how far and how fast we can create change and do things differently. Nothing short of similar efforts will be required to implement a green new deal and create a society that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Re-engineering the economy will take much more than a few new policies and some slight shifts in spending priorities. The Green Party has known for a long time that we can afford the necessary action, and, more often than not, we have been derided and ridiculed for championing them. I remember that, during the 2011 Assembly election campaign, many parties supported and endorsed a green new deal, yet we have seen no implementation and no delivery from Ministers since they secured their seat.

While it is encouraging that there is consensus across the House on the motion, I want to be clear: political inaction has brought us to the brink of irreparable damage being done. Political inaction alone must take responsibility for the seismic, radical shift and the rapid changes that must now be urgently rolled out if our children are to survive and thrive. A green new deal is the only plausible way forward. It will take much more than words and consensus; it will take action and implementation. The Green Party will be watching how that is done and what is prioritised within it, because failure is no longer an option.

Mr Carroll: I support the call today for a green new deal and for economic and social justice as we rapidly decarbonise our economy. I thank the Members who tabled the motion.

I believe that, to achieve a sustainable and eco-friendly society, we need a just transition away

from the causes of the climate crisis, and that must extend far beyond our borders. Those in countries that are at the greatest risk from the climate crisis are also at the greatest risk of being left behind. The COVID pandemic is a perfect example of how the capitalist system blocks those at the bottom of society from accessing the support necessary to survive and live. That is as true of vaccine patents and the profit-driven production of medical aid as it of adapting to and mitigating the effects of the climate crisis.

The very wealthy who can afford to adapt to newer climates will do so without so much as an afterthought for those who cannot. They will continue to create profit, no matter the cost to our planet. Indeed, it is the wealthiest multinational corporations and their profit motive that are responsible for the greatest emissions and the greatest damage to our planet and the pillaging of our natural resources. The world's richest 1% have caused double the amount of CO2 emissions than the poorest 50% from 1990 until 2015. That is not according to me; it is according to Oxfam. They have not only squandered our global carbon budget and brought us to the brink of climate catastrophe but made worse the lives of working-class people and the very poor across the world. Bottom wages, poor working conditions, pollution of the air, water reserves and the earth — just to name a few — destruction of habitats and even homes — all that has been driven by the insatiable need for more profits to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

That context should underscore everything that we do when we plan for a more sustainable future. Tinkering around the edges of the system will not work. Taking half measures that green our appearance but do not drastically reduce our emissions will not cut it. We need to see tangible, transformative change in society that challenges the root cause of the crisis: capitalism. That means being a global leader in banning fossil fuel exploration. It means standing up to the multinationals that want access to local reserves by saying — pardon the pun — "Not on our turf". It means acknowledging that we have a problem with production and agriculture and doing what needs to be done to ensure that sustainability does not leave ordinary farmers behind but instead gives them the skills and assistance needed to produce sustainably, based on the needs of our communities rather than on the profit that it provides.

There is a disappointing reluctance from the Executive to take action in that arena and to

talk about how we can incentivise ordinary farmers and improve their lot while reducing our methane outputs. That reluctance spreads to their failure to recognise the damage done by underfunding public transport. There is also a reluctance to break with the fossil fuel industry or stand up to those who want to have their way with our local environment. There can be no place for such reluctance in the fight for climate justice, and it is a fight for justice.

I will speak briefly about workers' rights. Any move to a so-called green economy must be accompanied by the implementation of a proper living wage, the recognition of trade unions across new sectors, and the banning of precarious working conditions and zero-hours contracts. Quickly, I want to pay tribute to the Hovis food production workers, who have fought an incredible fight and had an improved pay offer from management today. I also want to mention the workers in the meat production plants, who have had to face unsafe working conditions and exposure to COVID-19 clusters. Those are the same workers who are underpaid and underappreciated, and the issues are not unconnected.

We have an opportunity here not just to green our economy a bit but to make a monumental shift that would better in one fell swoop the lives of so many workers and those who are most vulnerable to the climate crisis. That will require a challenge to the normal order here and globally. I do not know whether Mr Muir and the other Members who tabled the motion would go as far as to agree with what I am suggesting here, but things such as workers' control, proper democracy in planning and production, and a break with the status quo are what is required.

I urge those in the Chamber and those watching to check out articles and publications by eco-socialists, whose ideas could rescue our future and the future of generations to come. If that is not important to some people in the House, look at the young demonstrators on our streets and recognise why it is important for them and many, many others.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Andrew Muir to wind on the debate on the motion.

Mr Muir: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Can I clarify how long I have?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: You have 10 minutes.

Mr Muir: Thank you very much. In winding on the debate, I will make a few remarks and then summarise some of the contributions that were made. From the Alliance Party's perspective and from my perspective, emerging from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to tackle the climate emergency whilst also creating new jobs and building a just and inclusive society. In summing up some of the contributions that have been made today, I will later touch on the need for a just transition, a matter that a number of Members raised.

As many Members said, the situation demands a bold vision and strong leadership. The Alliance Party feels that we need to grasp that chance for change and look at the examples throughout history of societies emerging from times of crisis with bold initiatives to tackle the major issues of the day, such as the original New Deal after the Great Depression or the establishment of the NHS after World War II. This time last year, none of us had fully grasped the enormity of the change that would arise as a result of COVID-19. Coming out of it now, hopefully, we will be able to turn our back on the pandemic eventually. It is about understanding the nature of the change and the impact that it has had on society, and there is a need for the response from government to be bold and show great leadership.

The Executive cannot tackle the climate emergency alone, but they have it within their power to make a start in the right direction here in Northern Ireland. My portfolio is infrastructure, and we need to supercharge the electric vehicle charging market, as was touched on today during Question Time. We need to rebalance our priorities towards active travel and support our public transport network in adapting and thriving in a post-pandemic environment.

As I have been on the record as saying today and previously, the electric vehicle charging network that we have at the moment is a shambles. We need one Minister to drive forward and champion change. It is a perfect example of silo departmental working and the buck being passed from one Department to another. Someone needs to grasp the issue and drive it forward. One of the issues is that the current network of chargers is falling apart. Fixing that would be welcomed, but, essentially, that is bringing us back to the future. We need to take on board the feedback that has been given from the Electric Vehicle Association Northern Ireland, the electric vehicles owners' group, which has a six-point plan for tackling the matter. There are clear issues on which the group has outlined the problems but also the

solutions. If there is anything that this place needs to do in the last year of its existence in this current mandate, it is to tackle the electric vehicle charging network.

Beyond that, I welcome the Minister's passion for and commitment to active travel, but that needs to be matched with funding. The commitment to and the leadership shown on electric vehicles, active travel and the use of public transport is welcome, but we need to put our money where our mouth is, and we need to support them.

The current investment in active travel is woeful.

4.30 pm

Mr Carroll: I thank the Member for giving way. Is he also concerned about the discrepancy in the likes of cycling infrastructure? Places in my West Belfast constituency and North Belfast have much less cycling infrastructure than, say, South or East Belfast. We need to do a lot more to put in infrastructure in those areas.

Mr Muir: I entirely agree with Mr Carroll. I got injured from running about three months ago so I have not been out doing much running. I have been using the bicycle much more often. The cycling network is diabolical. It is scary for people to go out unless it is on a cycle path — a properly segregated cycle path, not a shared footway. Road surfaces are not maintained correctly, and only in certain parts of Northern Ireland are we lucky enough to have a greenway network. If we are to encourage more people to take up active travel, we must put in place safe routes. So many parts of Northern Ireland, particularly rural areas, are just forgotten about in that respect. It is not good enough to say, "It is for councils to bring forward initiatives, and we will consider funding them". Councils are not given any funding or resource to run feasibility studies and take this forward. That is a key issue.

As we come out of COVID-19, we need to have good service options in public transport. There is no point in encouraging people to use public transport when the level of bus and rail services could eventually be cut if we do not sustain funding for them. We must also encourage young people to use public transport by extending concessionary fares to the age of 22. People with entitlement to half fare currently have to pay half the adult single fare: that is not fair or right. Free fares should be extended to people with disability. We have all talked about Glider phase 2 and the need to deliver on that. I

agree with that, but the approval process for bus lanes is far too cumbersome and long-winded. We need to find ways to streamline that process and to realise the commitments that have been made to high-speed rail.

Before another Member intervenes, this key question has to be faced: how do we fund this? We can bring motions to the Chamber and call for initiatives, but we need to find ways to fund those. We need to face up to the cost of division in Northern Ireland. The figures have been cited year after year, but we are not prepared to take the difficult decisions. We need to be able to utilise our borrowing powers to a greater extent and reform our public services. COVID-19 has shown us how we can change things. We need to continue in that vein with respect to our public services. We also need multi-year budgets — we will talk about that in tomorrow's Budget debate — to allow for long-term planning. The fiscal council will play a key role in the scrutiny of our finances.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He talks about reform of public services. I first came to the House in 2003, and we have always talked about the 60:40 split and how we should turn that around. Does the Member accept that, if we do that, people will lose their jobs? The voluntary exit scheme cost us millions and we have not changed the 60:40 split, so it really was not a success.

Mr Muir: If we are to reform, we need to bring people with us. We need to look at innovative ways to deliver services, such as online. In the past year, an awful lot of services that, we were told, could never be delivered online have been. We need to continue in that vein.

We also need to take into account the level of stimulus that has been given by the UK Government. Whilst that is welcome, compared with the stimuli that have been given in other parts of the world, particularly the United States of America, our level of stimulus does not cut the mustard. We need to invest in a green new deal, particularly in relation to infrastructure. The Chancellor's announcement earlier this year was disappointing in respect of the lack of investment in infrastructure.

As I said in my opening remarks, a number of the comments during the debate were about the need for a just transition. Tackling climate change and the climate emergency that we declared at the beginning of last year has to be done with people. We have to do it together and bring people with us in partnership. It cannot be done to people and communities. It has to be a just transition that is about creating new jobs

and supporting communities and the livelihoods that they need to sustain them.

In opening the debate, John Blair rightly touched on the threats of climate change. Gary Middleton talked about the need for a just transition and about hydrogen. It is one of the fuels of the future, and we need to adapt to that. The sources from which to obtain hydrogen, particularly green hydrogen, are limited. We need to invest in that in Northern Ireland and be ahead of the game.

Mark Durkan joined us on the screens virtually from Derry/Londonderry and talked about how going green would mean economic success. The economics and finances of a green new deal make sense. We need to make that clear.

Philip McGuigan talked about the need for joined-up government. We have a Programme for Government, whether in draft or final form, but it needs to be much better in tackling siloed departmental working, such as with the e-car network.

John O'Dowd spoke about the need for change and new jobs. Change is difficult, but we should not run away from it. It brings opportunities as well as challenges.

Patsy McGlone talked about the impact that Brexit is having on our ability to tackle the issues. He rightly spoke on those matters.

Towards the end of the debate, Clare Bailey talked about the need for a green new deal and said that it had been long awaited: I agree. We need to invest in our future.

Gerry Carroll talked about the need for radical action. He also said that workers' rights needed to be protected and enhanced. That point has been acutely transparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we need to be conscious of it.

The Climate Change Bill that was brought forward as a multi-party Bill was debated in the Chamber a few weeks ago. If we back the motion, it is important that we also back the Climate Change Bill. I urge all Members to back the Bill, including all Members from every party that says that it supports it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that recovery from the pandemic and tackling the climate crisis go hand in hand, requiring an investment-

led, green recovery that delivers on social and economic justice and rapidly decarbonises our economy; and calls on the Executive to deliver a green new deal that will create an equitable, sustainable economy filled with well-paid, secure, low-carbon jobs in care, education and health as well as in industry and infrastructure, and to ensure well-being and inclusion are at the centre of government decision-making.

Adjourned at 4.36 pm.

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