

Official Report (Hansard)

Tuesday 30 September 2014
Volume 97, No 8

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 30 September 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There are two amendments, which will be debated in a single group. The amendments set out to require specific selection arrangements for the person who is to be designated director of legal aid casework and to provide that the director must comply with directions from the Department about the carrying out of the director's functions, which have a specific basis in statute.

I remind Members intending to speak that, during the debate, they should address both amendments. Once the debate is completed, the second amendment will be moved formally, and the Question will be put without any further debate. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

We now come to the amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment No 2. I call Mr Tom Elliott to move amendment No 1 and to address the other amendment in the group.

Clause 2 (Designation of Director of Legal Aid Casework)

Mr Elliott: I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 2, line 18, at end insert

"(2) The selection of the person to be so designated must be on the basis of merit through fair and open public competition."

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 3, page 2, line 27, after "directions" insert

", issued under this section or under any other statutory provision,".— [Mr Elliott.]

Mr Elliott: I will speak on amendment Nos 1 and 2. Obviously, we are back here just two weeks after the last debate. I think that the Minister was quite pleased that I provided a little more debate and discussion around the legislation. He did not ask me to bring these amendments forward again, but I think that he is quite sympathetic to them — at least I hope that he is.

It was quite interesting the last day that Mr Allister described the amendments that I brought forward as modest. Most parties, with the exception of Alliance, appeared to support the principle behind them but did not appear to have the will, the courage or whatever to vote for them.

What were modest amendments the last day are even more modest today. Therefore, I hope that Members will see fit to support them. They are pretty simple. I have simplified them as much as possible.

The first amendment obviously deals with the appointment of the director. I did attempt to amend it so that the matter of being a civil servant would be taken out of it. That has now remained in. I accept that situation. However, what I am doing at this stage is proposing an amendment that will result in an open, transparent competition for the appointment of the director. I do not see how anybody can actually object to that. I thought that most parties and Members of this House supported

open competition for senior positions. I hope that Members will see that.

I know that the last day, the Minister indicated to us, as the officials did when they were at Committee, that there are a number of options for how the director may be appointed, but there is no guarantee that it will be by open public competition. That is the difficulty. Indeed, at the Committee, the senior official indicated that there were three methods that could be used. Only one of them was open competition. If we are genuine about moving the appointment process in the Senior Civil Service towards more open competition, why is this not a good place to start? The last day, there was an acceptance in the House and in the Committee that, indeed, some senior positions in the Civil Service are filled by open competition. Why are we not saying that this should be? That is all that I ask: that it gives people in the wider public the opportunity to get into a position that may be suited to them. I think that it would be hugely helpful to the Civil Service in general. It would be hugely helpful to this new position if there were open competition. That does not preclude or exclude a senior civil servant from applying. It does not exclude a senior civil servant from getting the position, but it leaves the option for the wider public to apply — maybe someone who is well suited to it.

The last day, the Minister said about my amendments:

"I fear that they would create a degree of uncertainty and confusion that would have to be addressed elsewhere and which would run contrary to the normal procedures for appointing civil servants." — [Official Report, Vol 97, No 4, p16, col 1].

I do not think that my amendment this time either adds any confusion or, indeed, runs contrary to the appointment of civil servants because we have already been told that this open process is being used for the appointment of other senior civil servants, including the recent appointment of a permanent secretary. That is what we are told. That is not coming from me; it is coming from the Minister and the Department. That is my first amendment on the appointment process.

My second amendment is on the directions that can be given by the Minister or the Department to the director. Again, it was described the last day by some Members as a "power grab" that allowed the Minister to actually direct the director to comply with his directions. All that I am indicating in the amendment is actually what

the senior officials have told us at Committee, which is that any directions that are given to the director must be issued under statutory provision — in other words, within legislation. They have already indicated in Committee that that will be what they have to do. Therefore, why not include it in the legislation?

In the last debate at Consideration Stage, I noted that the Minister gave an example of when that power of direction might be used. However, the example that he gave was either about individual cases, in which he cannot give direction anyway, or about a class of case, which was raised in that debate by Mr Maginness and Mr Allister and was not included in my last amendments or in this one. I do not believe that the Minister has addressed the issue of when he can use that direction to the director. If we heard some good examples of when he could use that direction, maybe it would satisfy me and other Members. However, at this stage, we have not. That is why I am keen to bring this amendment forward: to limit the times when the Minister and the Department can give direction to the director. That is all that I am asking: that there is not a power grab by the Department or the Minister, as was indicated in a recent debate.

I hope that Members will see fit to accept both amendments. The first amendment would make the competition for the director open to the public; I do not see what anybody has to fear from open competition for the director's position. The second amendment would limit when direction can be given to the director by the Minister or the Department.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): As I outlined during Consideration Stage, the Committee considered in some detail the requirement in the Bill for the Department of Justice to designate a civil servant in the Department as the director of legal aid casework and how, in practical terms, the recruitment and appointment of the director would take place. The Committee explored the issues raised in relation to the matter in the written and oral evidence with Department of Justice officials when they appeared before the Committee. At Committee Stage, the Department did make it clear that, as the Bill was drafted, the post of director could be filled in a number of ways, such as direct recruitment, competition among the existing grades of staff across the Senior Civil Service in all Departments, or the more managed move of a particular person in the Department or, more generally, across the Senior Civil Service. They also indicated that the Department had no plans to hold an

external competition and stated that consideration needed to be given to the current chief executive of the Legal Services Commission and the potential for retaining the expertise over a transition period, then considering how to fill the post in future. When considering clause 2, some Committee members were of the view that it could be better worded to ensure that there is not a perception that a person in the Department must be appointed to the post of director of legal aid casework. Other members, however, noted that it did not preclude the recruitment of someone from outside, who would then become a civil servant.

Mr Elliott, when addressing his amendments at Consideration Stage, said that he was seeking assurance that there would be an open competition for the director's post and that the Bill needed to be future-proofed to ensure that such appointments are not made on the basis of moving senior civil servants around, either in a Department or between Departments. In response, the Minister explained that the recruitment process at senior grades in the Civil Service is already widening, generally by generic competitions rather than the expense of running individual competitions. He stated that, each time the post falls vacant, consideration will be given to the best way to fill it. He clarified that there can be an open recruitment competition, which would be open to people internally as well as externally under the provisions in the Bill.

Amendment No1, which we are debating today, aims to ensure that the director is appointed by open public competition. The Minister expressed concerns regarding Mr Elliott's previous amendments, indicating that, if accepted, they had the potential to cause some confusion and uncertainty regarding the appointment process. I wait with interest to hear the Minister's further comments on this particular amendment.

Before moving on to amendment No 2, I will speak in my capacity as a Member. Obviously we are keen to hear what the Minister has to say. We remain to be convinced that we need to explicitly put in legislation the need for such a competition. However, I want to hear from the Minister an assurance that he would consider a public competition before we take what I regard as an unusual step to explicitly put such an appointment in legislation. We remain to be convinced otherwise.

I turn now to amendment No 2, which deals with directions given by the Department and the need to protect and ensure the independence

of decisions by the director of legal aid casework on individual cases and the granting of civil legal aid.

The safeguards in the Bill include a requirement that the Department cannot give direction or guidance in relation to an individual case; that directions and guidance must be published; the establishment of an independent appeals process; and imposing a duty on the Department to ensure that the director acts independently of it when applying any guidance or direction to an individual case.

10.45 am

During Committee Stage, the Department indicated that any direction or guidance could not override the provisions of the relevant primary or secondary legislation and may be challenged in the courts, as can any funding decision by the director of legal aid casework by way of an application for judicial review. It also emphasised that, under the proposed new arrangements, the independence of the director's decision-making in any individual case would be no less than the independence of the Legal Services Commission's decision-making under the current arrangements.

When considering clause 3, some Committee members noted that the requirement to follow directions and guidance issued by the Minister already exists and were satisfied that any direction could not override the provisions of the relevant primary or secondary legislation. Individual decisions by the director will be made on the basis of the statutory tests. Other members expressed reservations about the proposed framework to ensure the independence of the director in relation to decisions in individual cases and whether adequate safeguards were in place.

During the Consideration Stage debate, the Minister reiterated the primacy of relevant primary or secondary legislation over any directions issued by him or his Department and, by way of assurance, highlighted the fact that regulations to amend schedule 2 of the 2003 Order to add new services or omit or vary any services that the director of legal aid casework may not fund as civil legal services are subject to the draft affirmative procedure in the Assembly.

As I indicated, the Justice Committee is clear that the independence of individual decisions on the grant of civil legal aid by the director must be protected. I listened to Mr Elliott's rationale for the amendment, and I look forward to clarification from the Minister on its likely

effect and whether it will strengthen the safeguards already in the Bill.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I will take the amendments as they are listed. We are sympathetic to the intent of the amendments, and, throughout Committee Stage, the issue of how the process would go forward and how the person would be selected was raised. At Consideration Stage, Tom Elliott outlined that, and when the Minister responded, we were satisfied that the competition would be based on merit and be open and fair. The appointment process as laid out covers that, but, as outlined by the Chair, we are interested to hear what the Minister says about Tom Elliott's points this morning. We are satisfied with the explanation given at Consideration Stage, but we are open to Tom Elliott's points this morning.

Similarly, with amendment No 2, at Consideration Stage, Alban Maginness raised a number of concerns about the power of direction and the Minister's ability to provide direction — Tom Elliott described it this morning as a power grab — which will go across a category of cases that we feel should be protected and not be in the gift of the Minister to change. The statutory provision in the legislation is clear that the Minister cannot change the categories, so unless we hear a different explanation this morning, we are wholly satisfied.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am grateful to the Member for giving way. The term "power grab" has been used and will doubtless hit the headlines tomorrow. Does the Member agree, given what he has just said, that this is the reverse of a power grab? This gives away power that the Minister currently has.

Mr McCartney: I hope that I will not add to the headline of saying that it is a power grab. The issue was raised at Committee Stage, and Tom Elliott and Alban Maginness made the point at Consideration Stage, and there is a concern. I am sure, however, that the Minister will want to be protected from the suggestion that perhaps a Minister could interfere to deny a particular category.

Alban Maginness referred to inquests, whereby a Minister could say that there will be no legal aid for all inquests. We feel that that would be inappropriate but that the statutory provision laid out in the legislation would protect us from that situation and prevent any future Minister

from allowing that situation to occur. We await the Minister's contribution.

Mr A Maginness: I, too, am very sympathetic to amendment No 1, which Mr Elliott has brought to the Floor of the Assembly.

It highlights the collective wish of the Justice Committee and many Members to see open competition for the ultimate appointment of the director of legal aid casework. That is a reasonable objective and I support it, as does my party. The question is this: how do we achieve it? Of course, the two previous contributors, leaving aside Mr Elliott, have indicated that they await the Minister's comments on the matter.

If I were to anticipate what the Minister is going to say — I do not know what he is going to say — and if he said that he was in favour of open competition but could not guarantee it in the circumstances of the situation, then I am not certain that that would fully satisfy my party, which wants to see wider open competition for senior positions in the Civil Service, not just for this position but for permanent secretaries, their deputies and so forth. That is a proper aim on our part as a political party, and other Members would agree with that. I cannot see inside the Minister's mind — he will reveal that in due course — but if he says he is sympathetic but cannot guarantee this, that falls short of what the House, my party and the Justice Committee wants. In those circumstances, I would be thrown back to the position where I would give sympathy and support to Mr Elliott's amendment. So, a lot hangs on what the Minister will say on this matter.

Amendment No 2 has been brought forward by Mr Elliott with very good intentions, and, again, I am sympathetic to it. It is a belt and braces exercise, which is worthy of support. It merits support because the issue raised last time by me and other colleagues was about trying to limit the power of the Department to interfere with the grant of legal aid for certain categories of cases. We are very concerned about that, and if this helps to achieve the objective of limiting the Department's power to do that — the Minister has indicated that the Department could not do it — I still think that as this is intended to reinforce that point of view it is not only a well-intentioned amendment but an effective one, as well as being a belt and braces amendment. It is worthy of our support, but, again, I wait to see what the Minister is going to say about that.

I would not even dare to anticipate what the Minister is going to say on this point, but, in any

event, the House is very concerned about the matter. The example I gave last time was in relation to judicial reviews. If, for example, the Department was of the view that we should limit legal aid and not permit it to support judicial reviews, that would have a profoundly negative effect. It is something that we should be wary and protective of and should try to prevent it happening. If amendment No 2 helps to do that, and reinforces the point, I think that we should support it.

Mr Ford: Mr Elliott said that, at Consideration Stage, everyone but the Alliance Party — I think that that was his precise quote — appeared to be sympathetic to the principle of opening up the Civil Service. Let me be absolutely clear: I expressed my commitment, and I believe that Stewart Dickson made a similar commitment, to the general aims in the amendments that Mr Elliott had at Consideration Stage. The difficulty that we had was with whether the amendments, as proposed then, and, indeed, as proposed today, would succeed in achieving the aim that he set out. It seems to me that the amendment that talks about putting in place an open competition after a civil servant has been designated as director does not make sense. There are real problems in putting that level of explicit provision in a Bill as an appropriate way of delivering on the objective of opening up the Senior Civil Service to wider competition.

I made it clear at Consideration Stage a fortnight ago that the Bill as drafted allows for that open competition if that is the best way in which to fill the post of director at any time. If it is the right approach, it can happen. In fact, I made the case that that is what happened when the chief executive of the Youth Justice Agency was appointed. There was a specific open competition for that post. I assure Members that if that is the case, that will apply again. In fact, the most recent competition, which produced the current list of those eligible for appointment at grade 5 in the Senior Civil Service — the grading that the post of director has — has produced a list of those suitable for appointment from internal and external candidates. So, there is clearly already an open list of those who have proved their merit, and that includes people from outside the Civil Service. That is the reality, and that process is ongoing. Recently, we heard about it in the context of a permanent secretary position and other senior posts. The Civil Service is being opened up. I do not think that we need to fix that open competition in the Bill for one particular post, when that is the principle of what is already happening. The real danger of putting it in the Bill is that it would remove any

options that might be appropriate in other circumstances. One key example —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister not agree that, by failing to put it in the Bill, he is relying on a non-statutory exhortation towards openness, which, he says, is generally spreading throughout the Civil Service, but that there is no statutory basis for the imposition of openness in competition throughout the Civil Service? It may be a policy direction, but amendment No 1 would give it a statutory focus for this specific post, which is the only post that we are talking about in the Bill. So, what is he scared of?

Mr Ford: As I was saying, the key point is that there would be a complete lack of flexibility in any circumstances. Suppose that we had a number of changes of director over a short time, for whatever reason. We would potentially have to run a costly and, worse, time-consuming open competition. We would hope that that would not be the case, but you cannot be sure that health issues, job opportunities or changes in personal circumstances would not lead to that happening. Given the difficulties that we have had in managing legal aid, the last thing that we would need is a lengthy series of vacancies for the post of director.

The danger is that the approach that is put forward in the amendment would remove any flexibility. We could tie it down if we passed this amendment, but doing so would potentially rob us of the benefits of having continuity at this particularly difficult time of transition, because my understanding is that it would remove the ability to nominate the current chief executive of the Legal Services Commission (LSC) as the director of legal aid casework. That is a point that was raised by a number of Members at Consideration Stage. Mr Givan referred to it today, and, I think, Mr Maginness referred to it last time.

11.00 am

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for giving way. On that point, taking the present incumbent and moving them over on a temporary basis would not be prohibited by this amendment because, by its very nature, it would be a temporary appointment, which is in keeping with what everybody seems to want in relation to this position. Surely, a temporary

appointment could not be prohibited by this particular amendment.

Mr Ford: It is certainly my understanding that a temporary appointment, given the specific powers vested in the director of legal aid casework, would fall under the provisions of this amendment. This is not somebody temporarily acting up from one post to another; there are very specific legal duties, including, as we will be talking about later, the duty of individual decision-making, that are attached to this post. I find it difficult to see that even a temporary appointment would not fall foul, because it would be the formal designation of a post holder who would have to carry out those duties.

We are not talking about a simple acting-up mechanism for people operating within a mainstream policy area. That is another point where we would have difficulty if we were to fix open competition into the Bill. It is unnecessary because we have the openness already coming through. It would create difficulties if we had particular needs to make appointments speedily, and it would have particular difficulties on the transition. If it is made even internally, the reality is that, the way things are changing, there would almost certainly be somebody bringing experience from outside the Civil Service as they fill the post.

So, I do believe that there are significant problems with the wording of the amendment. Whilst I think that I have outlined, a fortnight ago and today, my willingness to look at the opening up of competition for posts in the Senior Civil Service, there are difficulties in specifying in a Bill that, right from the introduction of the post, it would have to be somebody external and that an internal candidate could not apply whatever the circumstances. I hope that, on the basis of what Members said when we discussed it at Consideration Stage and what has been said today, Mr Elliott will think of those points and accept that there is a broad understanding around the Chamber of his intent and a willingness to work on that but will not move the amendment, because I believe that it is unhelpful. If he does move it, I ask the House to reject it.

On amendment No 2 —

Mr McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: Yes.

Mr McCartney: On the issue of flexibility, would a reserve list not satisfy the need for a smooth transition if someone were to leave for health or career reasons?

Mr Ford: As I understand the principles of reserve lists, they would only apply for up to a year. So, if the post were to fall vacant at 53 weeks, you would potentially be going through a very long process to make an open appointment with a complete gap at that stage. I am not sure that we would be able to maintain a reserve list for any longer than the one year. Indeed, in those circumstances, if there were effectively a list of those who were already on the grade 5 approved list, that would be the appropriate point to go to, not to go to public competition to get a speedy filling of the vacancy.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: Again?

Mr Allister: Yes. Surely, it is not unfamiliar in public appointments to have a situation where there is an acting up for a period while a post is filled. In recent years, we have seen the post of chief executive of the Housing Executive filled a number of times, and he or she, of course, is the accounting officer of the Housing Executive with specific functions under the Act that only they can operate. In each of those circumstances, there has been an acting up while the process has run its course. So, where is the difficulty in having that same principle apply here? As for the suggestion that someone in-house could not be appointed, of course they could be appointed if they applied in the open competition. There would be no barrier to them applying in an open competition, would there?

Mr Ford: I think that Mr Allister has just made the point that I was making. We have a list at the moment of those eligible for grade 5 appointments, some of whom are internal and some of whom are external. That is where the openness has come through. So, he makes the point that I was making about the existence of that list.

I will turn to amendment No 2. I am simply not sure whether it achieves any effect. It merely restates the requirement to comply with directions that appear elsewhere in legislation. It is not clear to me why only the power of direction in clause 3(1)(a) is singled out and not the other references to directions. I am not sure whether, in that way, it makes sense as drafted.

If the amendment does have any effect, it is to interfere with the set of safeguards on the power of giving directions, which are designed to work together to provide the appropriate level of assurance that the House has been seeking. Those safeguards have been extensively aired by the Committee, as the Chair said, and during Consideration Stage, and, frankly, I do not think I need to repeat them all today. We have a carefully constructed set of arrangements, and amendments could potentially result in meddling and lead to unintended consequences.

The key point is that, under the Bill as it was originally drafted and as it proceeded through Committee Stage, all applications for civil legal services will be dealt with individually. The decisions will be taken by the director on the merits of the case and not influenced by political considerations. As well as being published, any direction or guidance issued by me or my Department cannot override the provisions of the relevant legislation, whether primary or secondary.

There may have been some confusion over the reference to the Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 during Consideration Stage. That refers to the power of Ministers to direct. The 1999 Order states that all functions of a Department shall be exercised subject to the direction and control of the Minister, but it does not mean that I or any other Minister can use the 1999 Order to give directions to the director on individual cases. Article 4(6) of that Order prevents that by making it clear that:

"Nothing in this Order affects the operation of any statutory provision or rule of law which authorises or requires any functions of a department to be exercised in a particular manner or by particular persons."

That means that the assurances in clause 3(2)(a) of the Bill that the Department must not give direction or guidance about an individual are simply not affected by the 1999 Order.

There may also be confusion about whether anything in the Bill, the 1999 Order or other statute allows me or the Department to give directions in relation to classes of cases, as has just been highlighted by Mr Maginness on the issue of judicial review. I must say that, from discussions that have happened around the Executive table, I think that I am probably more favourable to judicial reviews being allowed than a number of other Ministers are. Article 12(5) of the 2003 Order prescribes, in schedule 2, the services that the director of legal aid

casework may not fund as civil legal services. Article 12(6) provides:

"Regulations may amend Schedule 2 by adding new services or omitting or varying any services".

That may be the point of concern, but article 46(5) of the Order, as I highlighted previously, provides that any regulations made under article 12(6) are subject to Assembly control by draft affirmative procedure. Mr Givan made that point today. So, it would simply not be possible for the Department to give the kind of direction or guidance reflecting the scope of cases, never mind the individual cases, that may be funded without the approval of the Assembly. I trust that that reassures Members who have expressed concern about that.

The term "power grab", as I highlighted to Mr McCartney, who is about to intervene again —

Mr McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way.

Mr McCartney: It is in terms of clarity. Tom Elliott's amendment only makes it clear that there is statutory provision that prohibits a Minister from interfering in the classification of cases. It only makes it clear.

Mr Ford: I do not accept that it makes it clearer, because it only applies in one small part. It is only inserted into one subsection of one clause where there are references to directions. The point is that the overarching issues that appear in the 2003 Order and the references to the schedule 2 powers are clearly covered quite explicitly there. There is no need to tinker around the edges and make a reference to one piece of legislation only. It is not assisting with or adding anything, and the powers and the limitations of powers on the Minister are absolutely explicit elsewhere in statute in a much more coherent and joined-up way than appears by tinkering with just one subsection of one clause of this Bill.

There was a reference to a power grab, but the reality is that, as I highlighted a fortnight ago, I have already given away, as a matter of administrative practice, any power that I had to determine continuing funding in inquest cases. Representation for next of kin in inquest cases currently has to be approved by the Minister, but I have given away the responsibility for continuing assessments of further applications to the chief executive of the LSC because I do not believe that it is appropriate for the Minister

to carry out those functions. We will move this forward in a way that ensures that those powers formally pass in statute.

The suggestion that I am engaged in a power grab is an utter nonsense, when the reality is that the power is being taken as far away as possible from political influence and being given as much as possible to the director of legal aid casework. That is being done under the guidance and duties that exist to ensure that only the Assembly can change classes of case and only the individual director can decide individual cases.

On that basis, I do not believe that the amendment contributes anything. It merely clouds the issue by referring to one or two points. If that amendment is moved, I trust that the House will reject it also.

Mr Elliott: I welcome and thank all those who participated in the debate to make it a little more exciting than it could have been. I am a wee bit surprised that the Minister has been so difficult about the issue of a power grab. I only referred to a comment made during the debate at Consideration Stage, but it seems to have gathered some legs, with Mr McCartney referring to it and the Minister taking up the issue. Mr Maginness referred to limiting the power of the Department, which is maybe a little softer. I am quite happy to use whatever term people are comfortable with.

I welcome the Chairman of the Committee's overview of the situation, particularly on amendment No 1. He said that there is no guarantee of an open public competition for the position, and that was referred to on several occasions during the debate. It has been accepted by the Department and the Minister that there is no guarantee of an open public competition. I totally accept that it is one of the options, but there is no guarantee, and even the Minister has accepted that position.

Mr McCartney and Mr Maginness said that they were sympathetic to my amendments. My late father used to say, "My pockets are full of sympathy, but it does not do a great lot for me." *[Laughter.]* I am looking for much more than sympathy; I am looking for a clear line on where Members and their parties are on this.

Mr McCartney also referred to the power of direction and the power grab. I probably want to remove that term. I do not think that it is reasonable, and I was referring to something said during the debate at Consideration Stage.

Mr Maginness said that his party wants a wider competition for senior civil servants' positions, so he also accepts my premise and position on that. He went on to say that he wants to hear more from the Minister than that he is sympathetic to open competition; he wants him to guarantee it. Mr Maginness, if you heard that today, I would like to know where, because it was not from the Minister, and there is no guarantee of an open public competition. I assume that you will, therefore, support my amendment.

I am pleased that the Minister has not indicated that my two amendments cannot be accepted and would not fit into the Bill. I did not hear the Minister —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I will in a moment. I did not hear the Minister say that they would be detrimental to the Bill, and he did not give any examples of where either would diminish it. In fact, I think that the opposite was indicated. I give way to the Minister.

Mr Ford: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, but, if he did not hear what I said, I am really concerned. I made a very specific point that his amendment would prevent the current chief executive of the LSC becoming the director of legal aid casework as we seek to make these changes. If that is not a pretty fundamental objection to his first amendment, I am not sure what it is.

I also made a point about the confusion around his second amendment. I said that it applied only to one subsection of one clause in a way that did nothing to deal with the concerns about the powers of direction, which are well covered by the limitations on any individual case and the limitations that I highlighted with the Assembly's role via affirmative resolution on classes of case. So, if Mr Elliott did not hear me objecting to both his amendments, I fear that he was not listening terribly well to what I said.

11.15 am

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that clarification. While I do not know who the current director or chief executive of the Legal Services Commission is, if opposing my amendment is about the protection of the position of one individual, I have to say that it is a very weak case for objecting. I do not think that legislation should be refined to address any one individual; it should be much broader than

that. I do not see that as a reasonable or valid objection to that amendment.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am happy to give way.

Mr McCartney: In relation to amendment No 2 and the points that the Minister made, during the previous stage, we were satisfied that there was a statutory provision that would prevent interference in the classification of cases. Your amendment does not add to that. I think that Alban Maginness referred to this as a belt and braces exercise, so, in some sense, it is not necessary. Do you agree with that, given what we have heard again this morning?

Mr Elliott: I will come to that in a wee moment, if that is OK, Mr McCartney.

I will finish my point about the side move of the chief executive of the Legal Services Commission. I understand why the Minister and Department would want to do it because it brings some consistency, and I accept that; however, I do not think that the legislation can be bound by just that one issue. I think that would be totally unfair to the wider public. It would be unfair to people who may have the expertise to go into that position and, therefore, I think that is a very weak reason for the Minister to want to stop it.

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: OK, I will give way on that point.

Mr Ford: I am not sure whether Mr Elliott wants me to repeat my entire speech. I merely gave one specific example, but I made a number of references as to why the dangers of confining the appointment of the director of the legal aid casework in the way he has suggested could create difficulties in short-term changes as well as in transformation. As a member of the Committee, he is surely well aware of the problems that we have in managing legal aid at the moment and the vital need to get a handle on that.

I also gave significant examples of the current open practice that exists across the Senior Civil Service and, indeed, the open list, which includes both internal and external applicants who would be available, for example, if we were seeking to draw from it at the present time. Let us not have him highlight one particular point I made as if I am seeking to protect an individual rather than trying to ensure that, in the difficult financial circumstances that we are in at

present, we get a handle on the cost of legal aid.

Mr Elliott: I certainly hope that the Minister is not trying to defend his position by saying that the process that we are currently using to administer legal aid has been a huge success and that we want to continue with it, because I do not think that many in the community would accept that. I notice that Mr Wells, the new Health Minister, is not in his place, but he was very critical of that matter in Committee. I hope that the Minister is not trying to use that issue as a defence, because I think that he is on the wrong tack there.

In relation to Mr McCartney's point on amendment No 2, I accept his position that it does not do anything around that class of case. I am trying to reiterate the position that any directions given must be part of legislation, therefore, it is, to some extent, repeating legislation. However, the point is that, once it gives direction in the Bill at all, that is repeating legislation, because we heard during Consideration Stage that the Minister and the Department already have powers to direct their civil servants. That is a repeat of the legislation. All that I am trying to do is refine it and curtail the powers that the Minister and Department have to the legislative base. I hope that you accept that, Mr McCartney. I accept that particular point.

The Minister indicated that amendment No 2 may have unintended consequences. However, he did not give us an example of what those unintended consequences may be. We have not heard any good reason as to why either amendment cannot be accepted.

Therefore, I am happy to move forward with the two amendments and, hopefully, I will get more support than sympathy from Members.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M

McGuinness, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve
McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr
Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr
Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs Overend, Mr P
Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan,
Ms Sugden, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt

NOES

Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Mrs Cameron, Mr
Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr
Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr
Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr
Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr
Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr
McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCreá, Mr D
McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord
Morrow, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Mr Spratt,
Mr Weir.

*Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Cochrane and Mr
McCarthy*

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 3 (Exercise of functions by Director)

*Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 2, line 27,
after "directions" insert*

*", issued under this section or under any other
statutory provision,".— [Mr Elliott.]*

Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I have been
advised by the Whips that in accordance with
Standing Order 27(1A)(b) there is agreement
that we can dispense with the three minutes
and move straight to a Division.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 21; Noes 61.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs,
Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr
Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mrs D Kelly, Mr
McCallister, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs
McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs
Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms
Sugden, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P
Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cameron, Mr Campbell,
Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr
Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms
Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr
Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr
Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr
Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr
Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms
J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr
McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCreá, Mr
McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr
D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Ms Maeve
McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr
Maskey, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton,
Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs
O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane,
Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir.

*Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Cochrane and Mr
McCarthy*

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes
Further Consideration Stage of the Legal Aid
and Coroners' Courts Bill. The Bill stands
referred to the Speaker.

Private Members' Business

Kincora Boys' Home: Investigation of Allegations of Abuse

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

Mrs Cochrane: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations of sexual abuse that took place in Kincora Boys' Home during the 1970s and 1980s; further notes allegations that senior politicians, military personnel, paramilitary figures and businessmen from Northern Ireland and Great Britain were involved in the commissioning and subsequent cover-up of the abuse, as well as allegations that members of the intelligence service were complicit in a cover-up of this scandal; believes that the nature and seriousness of the allegations, especially that MI5 was involved in a cover-up, means that this cannot be adequately considered in any way other than a Westminster Government-led inquiry; and urges the Home Secretary to include Kincora Boys' Home in the inquiry by Fiona Woolf as the most appropriate means of achieving truth and justice.

Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to raise this important issue today. Child abuse is a devastating crime that traumatises people at an early age, and the consequences stay with them for the rest of their life. Perpetrators need to be stopped and brought to justice, yet, so often, our systems have failed young victims by not hearing or believing them when they cried out for help or by failing to protect them from those who sought to harm them.

Recently, we have been made aware of particularly troubling cases of abuse involving powerful people and celebrities and a growing belief that some of those people did not act alone but were part of a network of abusers who were too well connected to be touched. It is partly the fact that some of the rumours have turned out to be true that has reignited interest in Kincora in east Belfast, as well as the fact that Kincora is one of a number of children's homes currently subject to investigation by the historical institutional abuse inquiry.

We know that three senior care staff from Kincora were jailed in 1981 on 23 counts of abusing 11 boys. However, there are concerns that there were more victims and more abusers during the period between 1960 and when the home was closed in 1980. There have been allegations that senior politicians, military personnel, paramilitary figures and businessmen from Northern Ireland and Great Britain were involved in both the commissioning of abuse and the subsequent cover-up. Perhaps even more disturbing are the allegations that members of the intelligence services were also complicit in covering up the scandal. Indeed, there are specific allegations that the secret services, over an extended number of years, used their knowledge about a paedophile ring at the boys' home for the purposes of intelligence gathering while actively blocking police investigations that could have ended the abuse.

The motion is designed to shine a light on the magnitude of the allegations concerning Kincora.

It also echoes the repeated calls of my colleague Naomi Long MP to the Home Office to ensure that present investigations comprehensively assess what took place at Kincora, as it is clear that none of the previous probes had the power that they needed.

I said that the Kincora Boys' Home is one of a number of children's homes subject to investigation by the historical institutional abuse (HIA) inquiry, which was established by the Assembly and began public hearings in January. Whilst I appreciate that investigating abuse should, in normal circumstances, be the responsibility of the devolved Administrations, we do not believe that that alone is appropriate in this case. What differentiates Kincora from other cases are the allegations that persist that the Government and their agencies, such as MI5, had full knowledge of the allegations at the time and acted to prevent appropriate investigation taking place. There is further suspicion that MI5 and the security agencies were complicit in the abuse in order to collect information that could be used to blackmail those in positions of power. It is also thought that the abuse that took place in Northern Ireland did not only involve victims and perpetrators from Northern Ireland, and there have been suggestions that children were moved between different locations where abuse took place. Indeed, a former army captain said that he was aware of boys being brought from different children's homes to be abused in Kincora.

The current Northern Ireland inquiry, as it stands, is limited in its terms of reference and its statutory powers to summon witnesses. The head of the inquiry, Sir Anthony Hart, recently spoke out to confirm that he does not have the power to compel MI5 and military intelligence witnesses to give evidence or Whitehall Departments to release files. That fact was also highlighted by Amnesty International and my colleague Naomi Long when they called for Kincora to be included in the overarching UK inquiry. That view has been echoed not only by other politicians from various parties but by former army captain Colin Wallace, who was discredited and jailed for his efforts to expose the abuse back in the 1970s and then finally cleared.

Whilst we do not want to hinder progress for those victims who have seen the HIA process as a step forward, given the allegations of the senior level of visitors to Kincora, we believe that the Home Office's inquiry would be a better vehicle by which truth could be established and where a more thorough and substantive investigation of allegations can take place. I understand that the Woolf inquiry will look into how child abuse allegations against senior public figures were handled by the Government, and I believe that there are parallels with, and a potential connection to, the circumstances surrounding Kincora. These are extremely serious allegations and need urgent attention. Only the inquiry that is about to take place at Westminster would have the powers to examine the necessary material and to call the witnesses required to uncover the truth about the abuse and any subsequent cover-up at the home.

A number of former military intelligence officers have recently come forward to indicate publicly that they possess information that would be of interest to an inquiry with regard to Kincora and also their willingness to give evidence, including on the alleged blocking of police and army investigations by secret services. At least one of them has also indicated that he was unable to disclose some information to an earlier inquiry because it would have been deemed a breach of his obligations under the Official Secrets Act. It is therefore imperative that the UK Government authorise disclosure of all relevant information held in order to examine and fully address the persistent allegations surrounding Kincora and other such homes. It would be extremely concerning if any limitations, including the use of the Official Secrets Act, were allowed to restrict the effectiveness or undermine the credibility of this inquiry.

The victims and survivors of Kincora deserve justice but, to date, they have been left as outsiders. If the correct powers are granted to it by the Home Office regarding witnesses testifying who are subject to the Official Secrets Act, the Woolf inquiry is the way to properly consider the allegations and help the victims put their nightmares to rest. I believe that today we can send a strong message to the UK Government to encourage them to take the correct decisions, with regard to the inclusion of Kincora in the Woolf inquiry and ensuring that the inquiry is empowered to access all files and witnesses required to uncover the truth, which many feel has been hidden for so long.

I hope that there will be full support for this motion.

Mr Douglas: I support the motion, and I thank the Member for bringing this important debate to the Chamber. I hope that, after today, this will not just be about raising the issues, many of which have been raised before, but about action, and that, at long last, we will get to the heart of this scandal, which has shamed Northern Ireland, given the extent of the abuse that went on and the fact that it affected so many innocent young people.

I live one and a half miles from the former Kincora Boys' Home in east Belfast. Every time that I pass that area, it is like a trigger, in that I am reminded of the rumours, the allegations, the discussions with people, the real anger and the suspicions, which have persisted through the years, that child abuse at the home was indeed known by a huge range of people, including politicians, civil servants and members of the security forces and military intelligence. The most serious allegation is that investigations were blocked by the authorities.

I read an old copy of the 'Belfast Telegraph' last night in which our First Minister said:

"In some cases it goes beyond rumours. Again, you get down to what might be regarded as circumstantial evidence, but people did take their lives after being questioned by police on these issues."

He also said:

"at the bottom of all this ... we're talking about young boys who were put into the care of the state and we are now being told that there were agencies of the state who were aware of it and did nothing. That is the most serious allegation that can be made,

particularly when you see just how much it has ruined the lives of so many people."

I have met some of the individuals concerned. Last year, a man who was at the home came to see me. He told me of his own nightmare and his experiences while he was at the home, but also when he was taken from the home. He was taken to big fancy houses where he was abused by, as he said, the top echelons of our society. He was a man in his sixties. He went to the police and informed them of his allegations, but he was frustrated after all these years. The man was traumatised in his own being, and, unfortunately, he died within the last year. He had a record of his allegations of the abuse that he experienced during those years, which he handed to the police.

There are specific allegations that the secret services, over an extended number of years, used their knowledge about a paedophile ring at the boys' home for the purposes of intelligence-gathering while actively blocking police investigations that could have ended the abuse. Shocking. Those allegations, with some substantiating evidence, have been documented in a series of media investigations and books published from 1990 onwards.

Kincora Boys' Home is one of a number of children's homes subject to investigation by the historical institutional abuse inquiry established by the Assembly, which began public hearings in January. While we welcome the Northern Ireland inquiry, let us be honest: it has only limited powers and is unable to compel the release of files from either Whitehall Departments or the intelligence agencies.

On 1 August this year, our First Minister, Peter Robinson, said that child sex abuse at Kincora Boys' Home is a "national scandal" that needs to be fully investigated. The First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister to urge that the east Belfast home be included in the ongoing Westminster child sex abuse inquiry. I agree with the First Minister: we should seek nothing less than a full investigation of Kincora. We must be able to have access to all the relevant files and witnesses required to uncover the truth about abuse and any subsequent cover-up at the home. That should include the UK Government granting requests for the authorised disclosure of relevant information by current or former state employees with relevant knowledge of the alleged child abuse and its alleged cover-up, as permitted under the Official Secrets Act 1989.

As Mr Robinson said, any investigation would require full access to information from

intelligence agencies. I think that there has to be complete freedom on the part of those who want to give evidence to be able to do so. I do not think that anybody is asking them to divulge national secrets, but this is a national scandal that needs to be dealt with, and I trust that whatever steps are taken will ensure that the truth will eventually come out.

12.00 noon

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Alliance as an rún seo. Tá an díospóireacht seo an-tábhachtach ar fad, agus tá mé sásta go bhfuil gach páirtí ag tabhairt tacaíochta don rún. I would like to thank the Alliance Party for bringing forward this very important motion. It is good to see that, so far, there is all-party support for it. I absolutely agree with both of the Members who spoke previously that a thorough investigation is required into the allegations about what happened in Kincora Boys' Home in east Belfast.

The issue is different from abuse that occurred in other institutions in one important area, which is that of the role of the British security services, who are accused of actively colluding in the ongoing abuse of young children for decades. We know that senior staff at Kincora were jailed for abusing boys in the home, but, as Judith Cochrane said, that is only the tip of the iceberg. There are concerns that there are potentially more victims from a later period who have not come forward yet. Continuing allegations have been made on the specific role of the British security services, senior politicians and civil servants. It is alleged that, due to the high-level nature of those involved, investigations were blocked and thwarted by the authorities. That is absolutely shameful and scandalous.

We know that, when the Westminster inquiry was announced, a number of former members of the British security services came forward to reveal that they had information that would relate to the inquiry and specifically to Kincora. The historical institutional abuse inquiry, which began its public hearings in January, will examine the allegations of abuse at Kincora. However, Judge Hart has made it clear that the scope and terms of reference of his inquiry are inadequate to deal with the shocking nature of the allegations in that instance. He is unable to force the release of files that are in the possession of the British Government or the secret services; he cannot compel the British security services to give evidence to his inquiry; nor does his remit stretch to allegations or links

to Westminster politicians and British establishment figures.

There are proposals for a further inquiry at Westminster into some of those issues. My party has great concerns about the British political establishment investigating itself. We feel that there needs to be an independent investigation that has the powers and remit to access the files and information that is held at the highest level. I know that my colleague junior Minister Jennifer McCann has met some of the victim-survivors of the abuse at Kincora Boys' Home. They feel abandoned by the state. They are worried that, due to the scale of who was involved in their abuse and suffering, it will be swept under the carpet. Those survivors need our help.

What we need to see today is a united voice from the Assembly calling for a strong independent investigation into what happened at Kincora, particularly the role of the British security services and establishment. We also need to send a clear message that, in the past, those survivors may have been failed, but we will leave no stone unturned to ensure that they get justice even at this stage in their lives. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Attwood: I, too, welcome the tabling of the motion by Mrs Cochrane and her colleagues as well as their work, with that of many other politicians, to raise this issue in all appropriate places. In doing so, I also want to acknowledge, first and foremost, the victims and survivors, individually and through organisations like Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA), Amnesty International and others, which continue to campaign for truth, accountability and acknowledgement because, in this phase of our history, the measure of our democracy and the standard of our Government should be the primacy of the needs of victims and survivors of institutional abuse, abuse outside institutions or the history of this part of the world.

In opening my remarks, I want to make three comments. It is remiss of us, in a debate like this, not to name the other issues that need to be addressed by our Government. Those issues are: compensation for victims and survivors where there continues to be uncertainty; how there shall be an inquiry into victims of clerical abuse outside institutions and whether that does or does not fall within the Hart inquiry; and the other victims in our society who were abused by organisations not of the state but of the paramilitaries and who must be acknowledged and have their needs addressed.

The SDLP endorses the proposal in the motion, which is that, given the limitations that Judge Hart has named in relation to his inquiry, the appropriate vehicle for inquiry into what happened in Kincora should be the Home Secretary's inquiry in London. We endorse the need for full accountability and disclosure with all appropriate powers to compel witnesses and documents in respect of the inquiry. While I note and welcome what the Home Secretary said about the Woolf inquiry — that there would be access to all government papers and that the inquiry could become a full public inquiry in the fullness of time if necessary — I put down a word of caution due to what we know from this jurisdiction. Only last week, a case in the High Court confirmed that important papers that were meant to be released to an ongoing inquest were destroyed. Here we have an example where a court in this part of these islands was to have access to important state documents, yet those state documents were destroyed in advance of them being released to the inquest. So, when it comes to the inquiry in London, whilst we welcome the words of the Home Secretary in respect of what might or might not be made available to it, we put down a word of caution, because we have had our own bitter experience in the last number of days, never mind over a long number of years, of the state, when it comes to issues of national security, denying people access to all information on all the individuals in a way that standards of due process require. However, subject to that caveat, we in the SDLP believe, as it appears all other Members do, that the right place for the Kincora issues to be interrogated in all their scale is through the inquiry being convened by Justice Woolf in London. In that regard, we welcome the motion.

Mr Nesbitt: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, if you and I were to take a lunchtime stroll down the Upper Newtownards Road, we would soon pass Kincora. We would find a large, double-fronted building. It is the sort of large, double-fronted building that you see on arterial routes in east Belfast, north Belfast, south Belfast and west Belfast; nothing intimidating or threatening about it. As a young man, I walked and cycled past Kincora daily; as an older man, I drive past it daily. Only in recent years has it come to light that it was a double-fronted building living a double life.

I feel this personally because there but for the grace of God go any of us in the Chamber. I feel it politically because it is to do with how we have treated the most vulnerable in our society. Once again, victims have been doubly abused. First, there was the physical and mental abuse, and that is proven: three people who worked in

that care home were convicted on 23 counts. Secondly, there was the failure to rally round and do what was right when the abuse was discovered. That did not happen. Worse than that, there was, allegedly, a cover-up. Worse even than that, allegedly, it was not just a cover-up but the children were exploited. The children who we already knew had been mentally and physically abused were then used as fodder and bait to entrap people. They were used to help the authorities to engage in some form of blackmail.

So, there remain key questions, despite all the inquiries to date. When did the abuse begin? Who was responsible for it? Who knew about it? When did they know about it? Why was it not discovered sooner? Was there a cover-up? If there was, in whose interests did it suit people to cover up what was happening? What was the nature and extent of any involvement or knowledge of unionists, the Orange Order, the business community, military people and senior civil servants, including the secret services?

For decades now, there has been speculation that senior politicians were involved, including members of the Ulster Unionist Party. If the Ulster Unionist Party is implicated through individuals or corporately, I stand here to say that I will accept that guilt. The time has come to find out what really happened.

In a previous life, I worked with journalists, including Chris Moore, who has dedicated himself to exposing the abuse at Kincora as well as the Father Brendan Smyth case. I have been very critical of the Catholic Church and the way that it covered up members who abused children. I have been critical of political parties in the House whose senior members and family members were involved in abuse, and they did not do the right thing. So, if it is our turn as the Ulster Unionist Party, so be it. If any of our members were guilty, let us expose that, and I will acknowledge our guilt. There should be no hiding place because, if this is true, it is a national scandal. If it had happened in Birmingham, Swansea or Glasgow, it would be a national scandal. If it happened here in Belfast, it is a national scandal. Therefore, it needs a national investigation.

I understand that the historical institutional abuse inquiry will look at certain aspects of what happened at Kincora, but even the chairman has made it known publicly that he does not have the power to compel Whitehall Departments or the security services, so something else is needed. That is why we support the motion calling on the investigation to be passed over to Fiona Woolf's UK-wide

inquiry, but it is critical that she is given the powers to look into the darkest corners of government in London. Otherwise, she will fail, as many other inquiries have failed to date. The most recent was undertaken in 1984 by Judge Hughes. I understand that Chris Moore and the BBC 'Spotlight' team are about to challenge some of the recommendations and conclusions of that report. I wish him well in that, and I wish Fiona Woolf well in her investigations.

It may be historical abuse, but those boys are now men. They are still hurting, and we owe them a debt. Perhaps supporting the motion is a small down payment.

Mr McCausland: The abuse that took place at Kincora and at a number of other homes in the Province is, I believe, a stain and shame on our society. Yesterday, the news focused on what happened at Rubane House, the De La Salle boys' home in Kircubbin. Today, in the Chamber, the focus is on Kincora.

All those examples of abuse are equally vile, but the story of Kincora is somewhat different, in that there are more dimensions and layers to it. That was very clear even back in 1980 when the story was first exposed in the 'Irish Independent'.

12.15 pm

Three homosexual predators were appointed to one home; that is the starting point of it. The first of them arrived in 1958, the second in 1964 and the third in 1971. Many people have asked how it was that the staff — I suppose the entire staff at one point — of that home were appointed to that home and all of them were homosexual predators. The Belfast welfare authority, which made those appointments over that period, was part of the old Belfast Corporation. Clearly, the chief welfare officer of the Belfast welfare committee had a role in making those appointments. Many people asked themselves how it was possible for this particular and unique situation to arise. The Hughes report of 1985 looked at recruitment processes, but it is interesting to pick out as one example the fact that one staff member gave a reference for a friend to enable him to be appointed. There are big questions about recruitment that need to be looked into in more detail.

Then, of course, in 1973, the Belfast welfare authority gave way to the health boards. The question arises as to how it was that over time, under the old corporation welfare authority and

then under the boards, none of these things were uncovered. Previous investigations were partial and limited in their remit and their powers. Therefore, the fullest and strongest possible inquiry with adequate powers in relation to this matter is what is required. As has been pointed out, it is something that nearly all the political parties in the Chamber have called for. We need the fullest and strongest inquiry possible.

The focus has also been on the fact that there were suggestions, allegations and now clear first-hand testimony of the awareness in the British security services and military intelligence of what was happening in Kincora. Questions were raised all those years ago about the fact that the third person to be appointed to Kincora was appointed in August 1971 at the very point when internment was introduced in Northern Ireland and when, in many ways, Northern Ireland exploded. It had started in August 1969, but the introduction of internment in August 1971 changed the scene here politically, and that was the point when the third member of staff was appointed.

Soon after the initial article in the 'Irish Independent' in January 1980, stories began to emerge in newspapers and journals about other allegations of involvements, many of which were traced back to Colin Wallace and the book written about him by Paul Foot. Many people would have raised questions about the credibility of some of it because they would have seen Paul Foot as coming with a particular agenda because of his background. However, we now have very different and very compelling evidence that is solid and substantial.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: The Member referred to Paul Foot's book 'Who Framed Colin Wallace?'. If one now reflects on that book, one realises that what Mr Foot was in fact revealing was the depth of the intelligence service's involvement in trying to suppress the truth that Colin Wallace had tried to reveal.

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

Mr McCausland: The point I was making — I do not have time to go into it in full detail — was particularly around the fact that there were other aspects of Wallace's narrative that people may wonder about. As regards the core story,

which was the issue around Kincora, there is not a question nor a doubt that it was correct. Chris Moore's book about Kincora, which has also been mentioned, was much more focused on Kincora and is a much superior piece of work because he had access to a lot more information and sources when he put that book together. It is an excellent book that highlights the issues. Clearly, because of all this, we now need something that is very different from what is on offer. We need the most extensive, thorough and empowered research and inquiry into this.

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

Mr McCausland: I trust that, as a result of today's discussion and all of the other pressures that are being exerted and the demands that are being made, that will be forthcoming.

Ms J McCann: I thank the proposer of the motion and hope that today's debate will shine a light on a very grave injustice that saw young children left to the mercy of a paedophile network. That was all in spite of it being known and, indeed, covered up by the British security services. At the outset, I express my admiration for the victims and survivors of Kincora and, indeed, any victims and survivors of this type of abuse. The way in which they have come forward to try to highlight their case is admirable. I also pay particular tribute to the proposer's colleague Naomi Long MP, who has raised this issue on several occasions.

I too voice my support for the motion for Kincora to be included in the Westminster inquiry, but I also want to express some concerns that have already been expressed about the state investigating itself. I feel that an independent investigation would be better, but, that said, I support the motion.

As Members have said, we hear on a daily basis from the historical institutional abuse inquiry in Banbridge details of horrendous and horrific abuse and sexual exploitation of children. The testimony that is being given by witnesses is clearly saying that those children, who were in the care of the state, had no one to turn to. Even when they tried to speak out about the abuse, they were often not believed and were sent away. In the case of Kincora, there have been persistent claims of a cover-up of what happened and claim after claim that members of the British security services, high-profile politicians and civil servants, among others, were involved in the abuse and sexual

exploitation of young boys who were in the home. Indeed, some individuals have gone even further and gone on public record claiming that they reported the abuse while it was happening but investigations by the authorities at the time were deliberately blocked. That has to be a concern for us all. To date, only three members of staff at Kincora have been charged and sentenced, and at least one of them is alleged to have been an agent for British intelligence.

I reiterate: all forms of abuse against children are wrong and should be condemned, no matter who was responsible or where the abuse took place. The abuse of children in care is an attack on our most vulnerable children, as they have no one to protect them or to speak out on their behalf. Even more startling in respect of Kincora are the reports that the intelligence services not only knew it was going on at the time but chose to allow it to happen and to deliberately block any investigation, as they were using the knowledge of a paedophile network operating there as a means of gathering intelligence and protecting informers. It is difficult to imagine anything worse than a paedophile network knowing that it could get away with whatever it wanted to do to abuse vulnerable young children because it was being protected by the security services at the time. That shameful practice illustrates the need for a proper independent investigation that has the powers and the remit to access the files and information held by the British security services that allowed the abuse to happen. We cannot allow the Official Secrets Act or any national interest certificates to be used to hide the truth or to prevent the disclosure of any evidence, as that will only result in another cover-up.

The victims and survivors of Kincora were let down by the state as children, and we cannot allow them to be let down now as adults. They have the right to truth; they have the right to a thorough investigation of the crimes that were perpetrated against them. I hope that all parties will stand united and be their voice today and come out to support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Newton: I rise to support the motion. Kincora is a scandal; it is a stain in east Belfast. It was a house of horrors, and every day the house sits as a permanent reminder of its very dark past. Those walking around the area today who have a connection with Kincora and are regarded as respectable people and pillars of society are a total and utter disgrace. They have a conscience seared with a hot iron for what they did to young boys in Kincora.

They are people who abused youngsters, destroyed their lives and left them with mental problems that they carried with them for all of their days. My colleague Sammy Douglas referred to the fact that he had met victims from Kincora. I have also met them and you cannot really understand what they have suffered all of their lives.

Kincora was established as a house of refuge, a safe haven and a shelter, and, for many, it turned out to be a horrifying and nightmarish place to spend their days. Vulnerable young boys were preyed upon, and, allegedly, the security forces allowed the abuse to take place. It has been referred to that purportedly prominent people frequented Kincora. Those are people who have been referred to as politicians, businessmen, military men, church men and people who held high positions. Also, there is evidence to suggest that the children were, as we would call it today, trafficked away from the home and, indeed, across the border for similar abuse in other places.

Caitríona Ruane called for a united front on this, and I agree with her on that. However, if this House is really concerned, there has to be a united front on how we tackle the child abuse that is happening today. The way that we can do that, in the memory of those who were abused in Kincora, is for all of the political parties here to sign up to the legislation that will allow the National Crime Agency to tackle this problem in Northern Ireland as it does in other parts of the UK. I am certain that those who were the victims of Kincora would plead for that to happen today.

Reference has been made to Kincora being a part of the UK-wide inquiry. The First Minister has written on that. I hope that that decision can be made by Theresa May, but what happens if she decides that it cannot be? What happens if Judge Hart is unable to investigate fully, as he said he cannot do? This House needs to ensure that Judge Hart has the remit, the resources, the finance and the expertise that will allow him to take a step forward on this issue. If we get a negative decision from Theresa May and we do not allow Judge Hart to do it, we are failing the victims of Kincora.

None of us who have had a loving, supportive family environment could understand what many of the victims of Kincora went through for years, and we will probably never know how many went through the abuse in Kincora. However, through supporting this motion and other actions in terms of the National Crime Agency and adjusting Judge Hart's remit in the case of a negative response from the Home

Secretary, we can in fact take this matter forward and continue to keep it in the headlines. We can be supportive of all of those who were abused in Kincora.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag tabhairt tacaíochta don rún seo sa Tionól inniu. I also will be speaking in support of the motion. Indeed, I welcome the motion. I think that, whatever we say or do or whatever results as this inquiry is taken forward, we should always be very mindful that at the core of this are the young people who were abused. I think that it was referred to today that the needs of the victims and survivors should be very much on our minds.

12.30 pm

There is absolutely no doubt that there is a wide acceptance that what happened in Kincora Boys' Home should be the subject of scrutiny. I do not think that anyone has anything but the belief that there was a cover-up on a massive scale, and that is one of the reasons why I have some concern around how this will unfold. I do not think that anyone can doubt the integrity of or the need for the inquiry that has been laid out by Fiona Woolf, but I think that the powers that she has might be limited and, in that case, we will not get to the full truth around these matters.

In my opinion, the best vehicle to carry this forward would have been an inquiry under the 1921 Act because that has the power to compel not only papers but witnesses. From reading some of the documentation around the Woolf inquiry, it seems that she will have access to papers, but there will be no power to compel witnesses. Most people know that, in this type of situation, open proceedings and cross-examination provides better details and a better insight into what has happened. I know that there is reference to the fact that it will be similar to the Hillsborough panel, which I believe carried out an excellent piece of work. It had full access to papers and resulted in bringing the next stage of justice for the Hillsborough victims —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will indeed, yes.

Mr A Maginness: There is one other technical difficulty and that is that anybody who is called to give evidence could claim that they cannot give evidence because of the Official Secrets Act. That aspect of the inquiry also needs to be

addressed, because it restricts the amount of information that a person can give.

Mr McCartney: I agree.

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

Mr McCartney: Whereas the 1921 Act is not the perfect vehicle to get round the Official Secrets Act, we saw, in some other instances, particularly the Saville inquiry, how at least some of the rush to try to prevent evidence coming forward was tackled. That is why I make the point about the Hillsborough panel. Despite the cover-up that resulted from Hillsborough, there was no role for the British secret services, which have a long history of not only not wanting to come into the public domain in these type of cases but of suppressing and destroying evidence. Alex Attwood spoke about the most recent example where evidence has been destroyed as an inquiry was just about to take place.

I also agreed with Mike Nesbitt when he spoke about what the inquiry should do. At its core, yes, it has to be about the abuse that was carried out, but there are important questions to be asked about who knew, when they knew, who should have been responsible for ensuring that it did not continue and who failed in their responsibilities at the time, because it is on public record that the RUC said that an appropriate and thorough investigation was carried out and that there were no issues apart from the fact that three people were charged. We have to try to resolve that.

In this inquiry, many allegations have been made about who was entrapped and what responsibilities they had in wider society, and there may be implications around that because there may be suggestions that other people's lives could have been disrupted. Indeed, there are other suggestions that people's lives were manipulated in a particular way, and all of that must come out as well. Being mindful that the abuse that was visited upon the people in Kincora has to be at the core of the inquiry, there are other implications that will not do a service unless they are all resolved. That is why this motion is a good one.

The truth around Kincora has to be exposed, but that truth will have many, many layers, and unless we get the proper vehicle to do it, we will be back saying that there is a need for another inquiry into Kincora Boys' Home.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.33 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we begin, I would like to welcome the new Minister to his first Question Time and wish him well. We will start with listed questions. Questions 5 and 12 have been withdrawn.

Social Housing

1. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Social Development, given that Newtownabbey Borough Council has not met the deadline to acquire the former PSNI barracks site in Glengormley, whether the Housing Executive will acquire this land for social housing as per its expression of interest. (AQO 6710/11-15)

Mr Storey (The Minister for Social Development): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your kind words. I certainly look forward to the challenge that has been presented in rising to fulfil my roles and responsibilities as Minister for Social Development.

I understand that, at a meeting yesterday, the PSNI gave the council an extension until 31 December to firm up proposals for purchasing the land. Both Newtownabbey Borough Council and the Housing Executive have expressed an interest. The Housing Executive expressed its interest on behalf of the housing associations, which would, in due course, have been responsible for buying the site and providing the housing. The Housing Executive itself would not have acquired the land.

The council's interest involves a concept plan for the wider area, including the PSNI site. The plan will focus on attracting private sector investment, including commercial, leisure and recreation activity. In that context, the Housing Executive decided to suspend its interest until the concept planning process was complete. The Housing Executive is still supportive of housing on the site and awaits the outcome of the PSNI decision-making process.

Mr McMullan: Before I ask my supplementary, I congratulate Mr Storey on his elevation. Will the Minister outline other sites in the

Glengormley area that his Department is examining to meet the need for social housing in north Belfast?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his words of congratulation. He specifically asked how many other sites there are in the area. There are a number of different projects. I do not have all the details of the individual sites, but I will write to the Member with those.

Mr McCausland: I also congratulate the Minister on his appointment. Is he aware of the significant housing need in the Glengormley area of north Belfast, especially in unionist estates such as Queens Park? Is he also aware of the failure of the Housing Executive over many years to meet that need in those communities, with no family homes built in almost 40 years? Will he undertake to engage with the Housing Executive and local representatives to see how it can provide new housing in appropriate locations for those communities?

Mr Storey: The answers to those questions are yes; and I will endeavour to do that. It is unacceptable and regrettable that no family housing has been built in that area in the last 15 years. In fact, the last social housing of any type was built in 1999 and was a supported housing scheme for clients suffering from mental illness. There is a need for us to look seriously at the issue, and I undertake to have the matter addressed.

Housing Executive Land: South Belfast

2. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the status of the land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive between Hope Street and Wellwood Street, Belfast. (AQO 6711/11-15)

Mr McGimpsey: I also congratulate Mr Storey on his promotion. I have no doubt that his elevation will come as a great relief to the Minister of Education.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his kind words. I will pass no comment in reference to what the feelings of the Education Minister have been.

The Housing Executive has advised me that final land transaction for Hope Street was completed on 12 September 2014 and confirmed that the majority of the site is now in Housing Executive ownership, with Roads

Service and the Lincoln group each retaining a small portion. The land in Housing Executive ownership is currently vacant. The Housing Executive is in the process of arranging a meeting with the Planning Service to discuss future usage of the site, both in the interim and in the longer term. It is considering progressing an outline planning application on this site.

As someone who knows the area, and for anyone who passes through it, it is clear that there is an urgency in addressing that need. I find it somewhat ironic that we are talking about Hope Street. In that location, very little hope has been given over the last number of years and I trust that we can move in a positive way for this location.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer and what I read as a call to action as far as this vacant site is concerned. He will be aware that it is not the only vacant, derelict site in the Sandy Row area. We are now getting a proliferation of applications for housing, but not social housing; it is for student accommodation. That goes very much against the grain as far as that community is concerned. I ask the Minister to meet local representatives to discuss the way forward, because he is aware that this is a well-known arterial street, close to the city centre, and is —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The question is very, very long.

Mr McGimpsey: All right, thank you Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask that the Minister meet local representatives to discuss the issues and drive forward some development that will be acceptable to the local community.

Mr Storey: There is a short answer to that: yes. However, looking at the history of this site, we should go back as far as 1998, when the Housing Executive entered into an agreement with Lord Rana's company, Lincoln Centre Belfast Limited. There were a lot of issues and there has been a lot of discussion, which ultimately led to a court case. I would be quite happy to meet local representatives of the area and discuss the issue as well as the wider issue of need in that community so that, as I said previously, we give that community hope.

Mr McKinney: On the back of what Mr McGimpsey said, this was once described as the "golden mile" of Belfast. Members will probably all recognise now that it is significantly tarnished. The Minister has reflected on the demand, but can he point to a resource that would answer that demand at some point?

Mr Storey: The Member is well aware of the current financial situation that we are in. Since I have come to the Department, it is abundantly clear that, not only are other Departments under huge financial strain, but that the Department for Social Development is under particular strain. Since being appointed Minister, I have been overwhelmed by how this Department impinges so much on all our lives on a day-to-day basis; on housing, welfare and regeneration. If we want to give a sense of hope to our communities, my Department has a huge responsibility to ensure that we give that hope and that leadership.

However, we have to face up to some realities. It is, unfortunately, against the backdrop of a very difficult financial situation, but I am looking at the budgets to see where allocations have been made in the past and where they will lead us in the future. Following my agreement to meet local representatives of the area, I believe that we can give a sense of hope to those communities, as we have done in other places, that the dereliction that currently prevails is not what they should live to expect or live amongst.

Social Housing: Demand

3. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Social Development whether demand is being met by the number of social homes being built. (AQO 6712/11-15)

Mr Storey: I think that good progress is being made. Not only are waiting list figures coming down, but the numbers of new homes being built are significantly up. For the first time in over a decade, planned output is in line with the Housing Executive's assessment of need. That need has been determined at a requirement of 2,000 homes in each of the next three years and that is what the programme proposes to do.

As far as the waiting list is concerned, we have seen a drop of over 2,000 from last year. At March 2013, there were over 41,000 applicants on the waiting list. The latest figures, at June 2014, showed just over 39,000. During the same period, the numbers in housing stress dropped by almost 1,000. At the same time, we are also building increasing numbers of new homes. The Programme for Government target is to build 8,000 new social and affordable homes by 2015. Delivery has been running substantially ahead of the target for the past three years, which has, no doubt, had a positive impact on those waiting lists. Compared to the 8,000 target, I expect the final out-turn to be around 9,500.

It is also worth noting that, in social housing, Northern Ireland is outperforming the rest of the United Kingdom. In England last year, one new social house was provided for every 60 applicants on the waiting list; in Scotland, the figure was one for every 49; in Wales, it was one for every 44; but in Northern Ireland, the figure was one for every 30. In relative terms, Northern Ireland is performing at twice the level of England.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Stewart Dickson.

Mr Nesbitt: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Apologies. I would not need to do that.

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his answer and wish him a successful tenure in his Department. He will be aware that previous net stock models indicated that 1,900 a year was the target for builds, plus 600 to make up for shortfalls. That, I see, has changed. Can the Minister tell me why it has changed, and does he accept what his predecessor always sought to deny, which is that the Programme for Government targets are not sufficient?

Mr Storey: Look at the Programme for Government targets for 2011-15: we are committed to delivering 8,000 new social and affordable home starts. This was broken down into some 6,000 new social starts and 2,000 new affordable starts. What we have done to date is progress. I will not be complacent in believing that there is no more that needs to be done than all that we have said we will do. We always have to ensure that the figures are accurate and relevant to what is being done on the ground. However, when I look at the figures for social and affordable housing — two key component parts of the delivery of our housing programme — I believe that we need to focus on what the commitment was and how we can continue to build on that commitment. That is what I am determined to do as the new Minister for Social Development.

Mr Dickson: I welcome the Minister and congratulate him on his appointment. What hope can we have that, in the delivery of new social housing programmes in Northern Ireland, you will put sharing and integration front and centre as a policy and delivery model?

Mr Storey: You always have to remember that housing is driven by demand. It is also driven by the desire of the people who want to be part of that housing provision. Housing need, as

defined in the current process, gives us a number of elements to that provision. I have already had some look at the social housing provision that we have across Northern Ireland, and I am well aware of the two projects that were transferred into the new regime — one in Londonderry and the other in Bloomfield. I have asked my officials to establish how successful they have been, what problems they have encountered and what needs to be done to change the model, if it needs changed, so that we encourage people to live in a way that reflects our society and our community and gives them, first and foremost, a good and affordable standard of housing, which I believe they all deserve.

Mr Campbell: I, of course, join in congratulating my honourable friend on his elevation. Both he and his immediate predecessor have indicated the scale of affordable and social housing that has been provided in recent years. Has he got any figures that he can supply for the immediately preceding four or five years? If not, perhaps he can write to me.

Mr Storey: I thank my colleague. From his previous ministerial roles, he knows the challenge that is before us as we take up this post.

2.15 pm

The Programme for Government commitment to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes was by 2015. In the past three years, 6,911 new social and affordable houses have already been delivered; a further 2,500 are due this year. That will give a total of over 9,400 new social and affordable homes against the original target of 8,000. In 2011-12, the target was to deliver 1,900 new homes; 1,400 social and 500 affordable. A total of 2,053 were delivered; 1,400 social and 643 affordable. In 2012-13, the target was to deliver 1,825; 1,325 social and 500 affordable. A total of 2,336 were delivered. I could on giving you all the figures in relation to 2013-14. That gives us the overall view of the progress that has been made. I am certainly happy to make all those figures available to the Member in writing.

Mr P Ramsey: Like other Members, I wish the Minister all the best for his new appointment. May he bring to it the same passion and commitment that he brought to education.

Will the Minister look urgently at the demand for bungalow accommodation in new build programmes? It is an issue that I highlighted

on the Floor to the previous Minister. Many disabled people, families and older people in our communities are being deprived of a bungalow because housing associations just will not build them for financial reasons.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his comments. I will miss the interaction in relation to education. I know that those whom we worked with in education, from comments that they have made recently, appreciate the efforts that we made. I trust that I will bring to the Department a sense of enthusiasm, as I endeavoured to do in education. Members, I come here with no elevated opinion of my ability. I come here as someone who is very proud of his working-class background. I was born, as most Members know, in the village of Armoyle. I am extremely proud of that fact. I will not forget — the grace of God will enable me not to forget — who I am. I realise the real issues that are out there for our community.

The Member made a specific reference to the provision of particular types of dwellings for people with disabilities and others. I know, as a constituency MLA, the challenge that that is. I assure the Member that that is an issue that I will look at. I am quite happy to respond to the Member when I get an update on that particular issue. He raises a very valid point in the House. It is something that I have a concern about. Indeed, I have already had discussions with some of the providers. I plan to meet those who provide social housing: the Housing Executive. There are huge issues and big challenges in relation to the Housing Executive. I will meet the chair and the chief executive tomorrow for frank and open discussions. It is my intention to very quickly get a handle on what is happening in relation to the Housing Executive and what is being delivered in social and affordable housing. I will bring the same passion and commitment to that as I trust I did to education.

Planning Powers

4. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister for Social Development what information is available for community and voluntary groups preparing for the transfer of community planning powers to local government in April 2015. (AQO 6713/11-15)

Ms Sugden: Many congratulations to the Minister in his new role. I just hope that he will be mindful of his neighbouring constituency of East Londonderry when making decisions in his new office.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her kind words. I assure her that her colleagues in that constituency remind me constantly of what is across the Bann in East Londonderry.

Whilst preparation for community planning is a matter for the Department of the Environment and councils, I confirm that my Department, in the run-up to the transfer of agreed urban, regeneration and community development powers under the reform of local government on 1 April 2015, has worked, and continues to work, closely with the organisations that it supports through, for example, neighbourhood renewal, areas at risk and the community investment fund.

That ongoing support has proved vital to managing this period of change and has ranged from advising organisations on what the transfer of powers means for them to meeting with neighbourhood partnerships and local representatives in the area.

Ms Sugden: Thank you for your response. Do you acknowledge the growing uncertainty amongst community and voluntary groups about the transfer of community planning when there are less than six months to go?

Mr Storey: Yes, I do. I assure the Member that reference has been made to that issue in other questions before the House today.

The issue around the Regeneration and Housing Bill is of grave concern. I am not misleading anyone in the House when I say that a decision will have to be made on that very soon. I have made it very clear that a decision will be made and that those who have blocked the progress of the Regeneration and Housing Bill, and the issues that are associated with it in regard to how those powers will be transferred to councils, need to give reasons for doing so.

I am very clear that I have not seen any information that is in any way substantive or gives any degree of understanding on why concerns have been raised. I have met with some of those who have raised concerns, and I raised the issue at the Executive last Thursday. I assure you that it is a matter of importance for me, because, in relation to this, my Department is contributing to the transfer of somewhere in the region of £60 million to £65 million; it has the largest proportion of the overall budget that would transfer to local councils.

I am well aware also of the concern in the new councils about the key part that that will play in how they will be able to roll out, over the lifetime

of the new councils, projects that are vital for rejuvenating and bringing new life to their areas.

Mr G Robinson: I congratulate the Minister on his elevation. I also congratulate Mr McCausland, the outgoing Minister, on a job well done. Thank you very much.

When the Minister gets an update on the Regeneration and Housing Bill, will he make sure that it comes to this House?

Mr Storey: I thank my colleague for his words and concur with what he said about my predecessor. I apologise for not doing this at the start, but I pay tribute to my predecessor, Mr Nelson McCausland, someone with whom I have worked closely down through the years, not only in this House but in other organisations. He endeavoured, when he was in the role, to ensure that the Department was focused on many of the issues that we have already discussed here this morning.

In many respects, some of the issues were addressed in my response to the previous question. When I read through the paperwork in relation to this, I saw that there had been attempts to table this legislation at the Executive on a number of occasions. We still have not had any progress on how that matter can be resolved.

However, I had a meeting with the Chair of the Social Development Committee. I plan to meet him again in relation to this issue and meet the members of the Committee, because there is a serious issue around giving confidence to the people of Northern Ireland. The confidence of the people of Northern Ireland in this institution is pretty low, and people feel that there is little need for this place to be in existence. However, let us be under no illusion: if we do not have the transfer of the powers outlined in the Regeneration and Housing Bill, local councils will also be saying that there is no need for this place to be in existence. So, it is a serious situation, and I look forward to meaningful engagement and discussions over the next few days. That is the time frame that we are dealing with in making decisions on how the issue will be progressed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's two minutes are up.

Mr Eastwood: I add my words of congratulations to the Minister. I look forward to what will, I am sure, be a fairly robust debate in the time ahead. If and when the powers are

transferred, can he guarantee that each and every area will not lose budget when it comes to community development and regeneration functions?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for his comments, and, yes, I will endeavour not to disappoint him when it comes to being robust in discussions on the issue.

The budget as it stands is always subject to what the final arrangements and agreement will be, but I have to say that I am concerned that the envelope originally envisaged — I think that the package was in the region of £90 million, and, as I said, the largest part of that was £65 million coming from the DSD budget to carry out those functions — will have to be reconsidered in the event of whatever decision is taken.

Along with my colleague Mr Wells who was also appointed a Minister, the stark reality and wake-up call has been the serious situation in which we find ourselves with the Budget. Let us not get tied up with welfare reform, which is another issue, but with the issue of the Budget and the 4% cut — or is it 6%, is it 8%, or is it, as it may be, higher than that? — to ensure that we as an Administration live within our means. It is a very serious situation, and I cannot underline enough how serious it is.

I was taken aback somewhat when I had meetings with my officials about the number of people that my Department employs. There are in the region of 7,000 people in the Department for Social Development, in over 70 locations in Northern Ireland, and 3,000 personnel in the Housing Executive.

I have a statutory responsibility to protect social security. I will give that priority —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's two minutes are up.

Mr Storey: — as is my statutory responsibility, but I assure the Member that the issue of finance is at the top of the agenda in my Department.

Housing Executive Schemes: Upper Bann

6. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the range of Housing Executive schemes, such as window replacement, kitchen upgrades and repainting, planned for Upper Bann, including the timescale for completion. (AQO 6715/11-15)

Mr Storey: The following schemes are included in the Housing Executive's planned maintenance programme for Upper Bann in 2014-15: external cyclical maintenance (ECM) for 204 dwellings; double-glazing installation for 398 dwellings; kitchen replacements for 289 dwellings; and heating installations for 341 dwellings. The projected budget spend for 2014-15 is £3.7million.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Like others, I concur with the remarks made about him and his predecessor. Is he confident that those very worthwhile schemes can be delivered on time, given the current financial circumstances?

Mr Storey: There is always a concern over how any proposal that is brought to fruition can be completed in the current financial situation. We would all do well to look at our constituency to see how those projects and programmes have been of benefit to people. Dwellings have been greatly enhanced, as has quality of life, whether as a result of external cyclical maintenance, double-glazing installation, kitchen replacements, replacement of fire doors to flats with communal access, or heating installations. In your constituency of Upper Bann in 2013-14, 464 dwellings benefited as a result of heating installations. We ought to be pleased that that has been achieved. As I said to the previous questioner, the issue of budget is at the top of the agenda for me, because I want to protect those services and deliver to the people of Northern Ireland in a meaningful way.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That ends the period for oral questions. We will now move on to topical questions. Question 9 has been withdrawn.

Housing Executive: External Maintenance, Ballyclare

1. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive external cyclical maintenance scheme in Ballyclare. (AQT 1521/11-15)

Mrs Cameron: I also join the chorus and welcome the new Minister to his very challenging role in Social Development.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her insight to how challenging this role is going to be. I can assure her that, over the last week since

being put into the position, I know how challenging that is.

The Housing Executive has advised me that the external cyclical maintenance scheme for Ballyclare has recently been commissioned and that the start date is currently 30 March 2015. There are 103 dwellings included in the scheme, which is at a briefing stage at the moment. None of the properties is on the stock transfer list.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his answer. When was the last ECM scheme carried out in Ballyclare?

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for that supplementary question. As I said in relation to Glengormley, here we have another serious issue, because the last external cyclical maintenance scheme that was carried out in Ballyclare was between 2003 and 2006. I do not believe that that is in any way acceptable in how the process is carried out. On a general note, the work content and unit costs for the ECM schemes have changed a number of times in recent years in response to rising costs and competing demand of other work streams in the investment programme. Consequently, the external cyclical maintenance programme will be revised and reviewed as part of the Housing Executive's new strategic approach. I intend to raise that issue with the Housing Executive when I meet the chair and chief executive for the first time tomorrow.

As I said to other Members earlier, a huge amount of work needs to be done between my Department and the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive does much good work. Indeed, before coming to the House today, I was in east Belfast to see how the scheme in the Diamond project is delivering, through the Housing Executive, benefit to the people who live in that area. So it can be done. However, when you look at figures showing that, for this particular scheme, the last time it was carried out was between 2003 and 2006, it raises serious questions about the way in which the scheme is operated.

Magherafelt Town Centre Master Plan

2. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Magherafelt town centre master plan. (AQT 1522/11-15)

Mr I McCrea: I, too, would like to join the chorus of Members who have welcomed the Minister to his post, and I wish him well.

Mr Storey: I think that it might be good to note in the House that I have no hand in who asks these questions. When you look at the topical questions, you might think that I was involved in some sinister plot, Mr Deputy Speaker. However, as a good Calvinist, I believe in providence, so I was delighted when I saw that the first questions were from my colleagues.

Getting back to the issue at hand: the Member has rightly asked about the Magherafelt master plan. I have to say that I have been impressed by the variety and number of master plans, and I am very keen to get up to speed with all that they intend to deliver for the communities.

The Magherafelt master plan was launched in 2011, and the document sets out a vision for the future development of the town centre. The plan sets out 32 actions, showing their priority and potential delivery, with partners for each. DSD is represented on the town centre forum, which comprises town councillors, Chamber of Commerce representatives and council officials who oversee the implementation of the actions contained in the master plan.

To date, my Department has also progressed and completed a number of other activities set out in the master plan. Under the heading of "Growing and Supporting the Retail/Commercial Sector", for example, my Department supported the branding and marketing strategy, Wi-Fi and the smartphone app. Also, under the heading of "Improving the Townscape Quality" and the shopfront improvements theme, my Department funded a revitalisation scheme for Queen Street.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for that update. What assurance can the Minister give that the Magherafelt master plan will be taken forward after the reform of local government?

Mr Storey: The Member raises what is, for me, an important issue. We have had some discussion about the transfer of powers, but I want to be absolutely sure that the objective of the master plan is carried out as originally envisaged. Obviously, we do not want to have a command and control situation, whereby Big Brother — my Department — oversees that. Under the reform of local government, the responsibility for the delivery of master plan initiatives will rest with the new Mid Ulster District Council. With councillors on the town centre forum, the council was fully involved in the preparation of the master plan and the current site. So my officials are working closely with the council to ensure that there is a smooth transfer and that the functions and all the

related activities are carried out in a way that ensures progress and continuity.

My Department has committed funding of £90,000 to progress the scheme to detailed design and readiness for construction, and that work is due to be completed in March 2015. That is with particular reference to the Magherafelt public realm scheme, which was identified as a key regeneration initiative in the master plan.

Ministerial Credibility: Social Development

3. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Social Development to commit to the House that he will get his Department to fully cooperate with the Red Sky investigation so that the public will be assured that the Department has nothing to hide, given that one of the biggest challenges for him will probably be restoring the credibility of his office after several turbulent years. (AQT 1523/11-15)

Ms Lo: Like other Members, I would like to congratulate the Minister on his new appointment and welcome him to his first Question Time.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for her question. As I said earlier, I come to the House without overly inflated views of my ability but with a determination to ensure that I carry out my responsibilities to the best of my ability. I have made that very clear to my officials and those for whom I am responsible.

The reality of being appointed to the position of a Minister in the Executive is that the buck stops here, so I have a responsibility. I will bring to the job the skills that, I trust, I endeavoured to bring to education. Others will judge whether those skills were relevant, useful or needful. However, I have to say that I am quite open to scrutiny, discussions and debate, and, when necessary, I will be quite open to criticism. As far as I am concerned, those will be my guiding principles. I do not claim infallibility, and I do not claim to be perfect. I have weaknesses like everyone else, but I can assure the Member and the House that I will do this job to the best of my ability.

Let me say this: if one thing has — maybe "impressed" is the wrong word — challenged me, it is the need in many homes in Northern Ireland. There are needs that, I believe, my Department can meet, whether it is in regard to housing, regeneration or benefits. Those things

matter to people, and we will endeavour to address them.

Ms Lo: I sincerely thank the Minister for his very comprehensive commitment to the House to do his best. Unfortunately, the credibility of the Department was damaged by more than simply the Red Sky issue. Allegations of political interference in housing allocation in north Belfast have held up much-needed housing schemes. Will you restore credibility to the Department by stepping back and taking independent advice so that the issue can be addressed transparently?

Mr Storey: I am disappointed that the Member feels it necessary to make such an allegation. The figures do not prove that that is the case. Maybe the Member sitting beside her who is giving her the information would be more prepared to ask that question, because it seems as though he has more of an interest in the issue, given his involvement in the Committee.

We had some allegations in the press just a few days ago about my Department trying to do something subversive in regard to the Ballysillan master plan. Nothing could be further from the truth. There can be no changes. For example, in regard to the issue of schools in the area, it was quite clear in the statement that was made, which included a comment from the Department of Education, that I can do nothing without a development proposal being brought to the table. There is process, and, unfortunately, process can be very slow, difficult and challenging.

I can give the Member this assurance: I will pay due regard and close diligence to process. I trust that no one in the House, from any political party, believes that, somehow, they have someone in place whom they think they can manipulate, corral and change. There is an issue of ensuring that my Department continues to deliver in a way that reflects the needs of the community that we serve: the people of Northern Ireland.

Disadvantaged Communities

4. **Mr Poots** asked the Minister for Social Development what his Department is doing to assist the many communities that need support and work in disadvantaged areas that fall outside the neighbourhood renewal zones and lots of other catch-alls, albeit that much good work is happening in those communities. (AQT 1524/11-15)

Mr Poots: Congratulations to the Minister on his appointment.

Mr Storey: The Member raises a very important issue. On a personal level, I thank him for his contribution when he was the Health Minister. I trust that I can bring the same determined focus to my Department as he did to his Department when he was the Health Minister.

The Department recognises that tackling spatial deprivation through neighbourhood renewal can leave out smaller areas, and there can be places in which there are difficulties and challenges. So, as a result, the areas-at-risk programme provides support to communities, outside the Noble 10% most disadvantaged communities, identified as being at risk of decline. The small pockets of deprivation programme was created to complement the implementation of the neighbourhood renewal strategy and to target areas with a population of under 1,000. Those area-based interventions were designed to target substantive concentrations of deprivation.

In addition, my Department provides a wide range of support to individual families, households and communities through the provision of decent and affordable housing, actions to address fuel poverty, child maintenance arrangements, comprehensive social security provisions and support for the voluntary and community sector.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that time is up; there is not time for a supplementary.

2.45 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 6, 8 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Nitrates Directive

1. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her proposals for farming practices in relation to the nitrates directive (91/676/EEC). (AQO 6725/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): An action programme to implement the EU nitrates directive across the North of Ireland was first introduced in 2007.

The nitrates action programme regulations are joint legislation between my Department and the Department of the Environment, and contain a wide range of measures. These measures are to prevent water pollution and to ensure that manures and chemical fertilisers are used efficiently.

The nitrates directive requires action programmes to be reviewed and, as necessary, revised every four years. A comprehensive review of the current action programme was completed by the Departments and scientists from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) in March of this year. Subsequently, a public consultation on the proposed action programme for the next four-year period from 2015 to 2018 has been carried out.

The Departments intend to make some revisions to the proposed measures to take into account the responses to the consultation. They are also in the process of seeking European Commission agreement for the next action programme.

The proposals for the 2015-18 action programme should not require any significant changes to current farming practices. The majority of the measures in the current action programme are being carried forward. Key measures, such as the dates of the closed period for spreading slurry, remain unchanged despite pressure from the European Commission for a longer closed period. The changes which are proposed are based on scientific evidence or technical and policy developments, or have been requested by the European Commission.

My aim is to continue to have a balanced action programme which is practical for farmers and effective for protecting water quality and meets the obligations under the nitrates directive.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. There is a further step. Is she prepared to issue clear guidelines to farmers on ways to reach the targets that are set by Europe?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, as I said, as part of the review on the action plan both my Department and the Department of the Environment worked very hard to consult the industry to ensure that it is up to speed with what we are doing. However, absolutely, if there are any requirements on the farming industry — as I said, the reality is that, by and large, there will not be very much difference to farming practice — and any changes that impact on farmers, we will, of course, issue guidance and ensure that

everybody is able to comply and is given all of the necessary information that is required.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. The Minister will be aware that we have had changeable weather in September. I am interested to learn what impact these proposed changes will have on the proposed closing date for spreading slurry. As a secondary comment, I did not really know that there was that much interest in spreading slurry in South Belfast.

Mrs O'Neill: I will not comment on the second part, but I will certainly pick up on the spreading of slurry. As I said in the original answer, by and large, farming practices will remain as they are. However, one issue that was raised was the closed period for spreading slurry. The length of that closed period has been an issue for the European Commission for quite some time, not just in this review of our action plan but in previous negotiations on the action programme. Officials have successfully negotiated on that issue that there will be no changes to the current dates. The Commission did not get its way in trying to extend that. That is a positive outcome, because I know that some farmers even find the period that we have at this moment in time to be frustrating.

Farmers will continue to demonstrate good practice when they are spreading slurry and will take great care to protect water quality. As the Member rightly said, the recent dry spell of weather means that conditions are very good for slurry spreading and will allow farmers the opportunity to maximise its fertiliser value and have slurry tanks emptied before the winter housing period.

Mr Swann: The Minister mentioned good practice. Will she also include an update on safety practice? Since the nitrates directive was introduced on 1 January 2011, we have had seven slurry-related deaths due to asphyxiation or drowning. Prior to that date, there were only two such deaths, and that was back in 2005.

Mrs O'Neill: I absolutely agree with the Member's concern about the number of deaths that we have had as a result of slurry. As he will know, the Health and Safety Executive, through the Farm Safety Partnership, has been doing excellent work to try to raise awareness and promote the Stop and Think SAFE message. It is continuing to bring forward quite a number of other areas of work, particularly with regard to farmsafenet.org. Farmers can

actually go online and go through a quick course.

We have an obligation in my Department, in DETI and in other Departments with relevant responsibilities to promote the Farm SAFE message and do all that we can. One issue around slurry that is frequently raised has to do with detectors and measuring the level of gases. The HSE is still not in a position where it is content that that is the proposed way to do it. However, all those things are being considered and taken forward as part of the action plan that the Farm Safety Partnership has clearly set out.

Mr Poots: What steps are taken to ensure that the people carrying out the inspections actually know what they are doing? I wrote to the Minister recently about a case where the gentleman had soil stored and people mistook it for chicken manure. That soil has now been used, as soil, by another Department for its facility. Can we have people who know what they are doing when they carry out inspections?

Mrs O'Neill: I would like to think that the inspectors who go out are fully qualified. I am sure that, as a former Minister, the Member will be fully aware that, when it comes to dealing with individual cases, I do not want to comment on the one case that he wrote to me about. However, I am happy to correspond with him privately. I assure him that, if there are issues with inspectors not carrying out their job properly, I am always happy to look at that.

Rural Proofing

2. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her proposals to enhance rural proofing. (AQO 6726/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the annual progress report on the rural White Paper action plan I made a commitment to explore options for strengthening rural proofing. Having considered the issue, I believe that there is more that we can do to improve the effectiveness of the rural-proofing process across government. Therefore, I propose to introduce rural proofing legislation during the lifetime of the current Assembly, subject to Executive agreement. This important Bill will provide my Department with a firm basis for promoting rural proofing across government and help to ensure that rural needs are fully considered in policymaking. Whilst all Departments have been committed to carrying out rural proofing since 2002, the new

legislation will build on the present commitment and help to improve the effectiveness of rural proofing across government. In particular, it will increase the availability and transparency of information on how rural proofing is carried out in Departments.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas don Aire go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. Will she provide an update on the rural White Paper action plan?

Mrs O'Neill: The first annual progress report on the rural White Paper action plan was published earlier this year and demonstrates that good progress was made by Departments in implementing their commitments in the action plan during its first year of operation. Further reports from Departments during this year indicate that good progress continues to be made. I hope to publish the second annual progress report later this year. I see the rural White Paper action plan as a live initiative that continues to respond to the needs of rural dwellers. I have therefore asked my Executive colleagues to identify new and challenging actions for inclusion in a refreshed rural White Paper action plan that I intend to publish in 2015.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far and her commitment to rural proofing. Will she state what concrete proposals her Department has made in the last year to embed rural proofing and what is being done across other Departments to make sure that rural proofing becomes a reality?

Mrs O'Neill: To be clear, the reason I propose to legislate is that I am not convinced. Whilst I think that, individually, Departments are doing their best on rural proofing, particularly when it comes to policy development, there is no tangible way of measuring that. There are other opportunities that we need to explore. It is all well and good having the rural White Paper action plan. However, we do not want it to become just a tick-box exercise for Departments; it very much needs to be a live document. There are opportunities for us to provide a firm basis for rural proofing and to make sure that it is consistent across Departments. One possible area we can look at is an obligation on Departments to feed into DARD on the work that they do on rural proofing to make sure that there is consistency. For me, there is a lot of benefit in bringing this forward. Quite a lot of consultation will be necessary, and that will involve talking to stakeholders about what needs they identify.

Given the Member's role on the ARD Committee, he will know that there will be a role for the Committee in scrutinising the legislation that we bring forward.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her response so far. Will she now at least give a commitment to speak to her colleague the Sinn Féin Education Minister with regard to the possibility of the Department rural proofing decisions on the future of rural schools, just as Scotland does, before he shuts any more?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I have had many conversations with the Minister of Education, and he has clearly put on record his commitment to maintaining rural schools and making sure that he provides first-class education for all children right across the board. He has also made it clear that, when it comes to the future of schools, it is not merely a numbers game; it comes down to the position of the school in the community. Six criteria are clearly set out when it comes to the future of schools, and I am assured of his commitment to maintaining the best education for all children.

Mr McCarthy: What action is the Minister taking to ensure not only rural proofing but shared future proofing for all her policies and programmes?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give the Member an assurance, particularly with regard to some of the projects that we have seen taken forward through the rural development programme. Quite a lot of work has been done, particularly in rural communities around churches working together and trying to reach out to bring people together. My commitment through what we have done on the ground is on the record. I am happy to provide a bit more detail on projects that we have taken forward that clearly demonstrate a shared future, but I can assure you that equality is at the core of everything that I do. That is key to a shared future for everybody.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has said that rural proofing is very important. She also said that she intends to legislate. Given that she has been in office for some time, can she outline what the change has been in rural proofing on her watch compared with previously?

Mrs O'Neill: Over the last two terms, before my time, when Michelle Gildernew was Minister, we made sure that rural proofing was at the core of the Department, and we have seen significant progress right across all Departments. However, as I have said, all Departments have

signed up to the rural White Paper, which is reviewed every year, but there is a lot more scope for more positive collaborative working across Departments. I think that my commitment is very evident, particularly when it comes to tackling poverty and social isolation. For all the programmes across my Department, the evidence is there to back up that I truly am a champion of rural communities.

Fishing Quota

3. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the proposals being put to Brussels for the next fishing quota agreement for 2015. (AQO 6727/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Proposals for fishing quotas are made by the European Commission and are based on scientific advice for fish stocks. At the Fisheries Council on 15 and 16 December, Ministers will discuss the Commission's proposals and reach agreement on fishing opportunities for 2015. It is expected that initial proposals will be published around the end of October or early November. As usual, my main priority will be prawn quota for area VII, which includes the Irish Sea and is the main quota fished by vessels that are based here. The prawn stock is surveyed and assessed annually, and the scientific advice on catch limits is published at the end of October. That ensures that all the latest survey information is included in the stock assessment. The Commission's proposals for prawn quotas will be based on that advice.

Another stock of importance to us is the Irish Sea herring. The latest scientific advice shows that the stock is in good condition, but a small reduction is recommended in order to remain within the maximum sustainable yield levels. It is expected that the quota will vary up and down annually around the 5,000-ton level.

The scientific advice for cod has not changed for several years and is that there should be no directed cod fishery and that by-catches are kept to a minimum. We are doing all that we can with highly selective fishing gear to keep cod by-catch below 1-5%. It is inevitable that some cod will be caught in the prawn fishery, and the quota is probably as low now as it can be to accommodate the by-catch. I will be resisting further cuts, which would be completely pointless and would do nothing for cod recovery.

Mrs McKeivitt: What prior discussions have taken place thus far with Brussels in order to

get that better fish quota deal for the people of Northern Ireland? What impact does she think that will have on our fishermen?

Mrs O'Neill: Every December, fishermen watch with interest, and we enter into a period now in which, first, the Commission publishes its advice on what it believes the quota should be. We then have to go to Europe and fight science with science. We bring our own science expertise to that discussion. I will go to Brussels with an agreed approach, which I will talk to the industry about over the next number of months. We will have a set timetable, and we will go and fight the case for quota. I do not think that the way that Europe does it is the right way to do it. I do not think that fishermen can plan for the future on the basis of a yearly quota. It needs to be set out over a number of years so that people can financially plan and take business decisions. However, that said, we are where we are, and I will go out and fight for the adequate quota and fight against cuts that, in all likelihood, we will see the Commission trying to put forward again.

Mr McCallister: The Minister will know that licences have been issued lately for the Mourne Herring Fishery.

She will also be aware that the EU embargo on Russia will dramatically affect the market for the licence holders. Has any analysis been done on providing any compensation to them? What effects might it have on other sectors of the agrifood industry?

3.00 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, the Russian import ban has an impact. We did not sell any fish to Russia last year. There will be a knock-on effect for us, particularly on price, because the European market has an abundance. That will be an issue for the fish sector to deal with, and we are actively involved in conversations about that at a European level.

I was in Brussels about three weeks ago to talk about that issue and the fact that there is an implication for the dairy sector, particularly the cheese sector. We have made it clear to the Commission that we need to see timely intervention and support coming at an appropriate time. The Member will be aware that quite often in the past the EU steps in when things are too far down the line and a lot of businesses have already been negatively impacted on. I assure the Member that the Russia issue is high on our agenda and we are looking at it.

When it comes to supporting these industries, we are looking for new markets. Whether that be for the dairy sector or the fish sector, looking for new markets at an EU and local level is key.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister provide an update on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF)?

Mrs O'Neill: The fund will remain open until the end of December 2014, and applications are still invited for projects that can complete by the end of 2015, when the programme will close. The Department and the EU made a joint funding commitment of just over £7.5 million to the fishing industry to the end of August this year. It is fair to say that spending under the EFF has been less than we wanted to see, but a number of factors contributed to that, particularly the uncertain economic climate, which has affected the industry's confidence to invest. In addition, the decommissioning scheme did not go ahead, and that also had an impact on the spend.

Looking to the future, however, we have the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to be put in place. We already have a task force in place, the aim of which is to get that spend on to the ground. We have to make sure that, as we design programmes, the fishing industry is integral to them. A lot of positive work is going on. The task force has met on a couple of occasions and will report by the end of the year.

Mr Nesbitt: I want to return to the original question about quotas and the December Fisheries Council. What can the Minister say that would give confidence to the local fishing fleet that she is ahead of the curve in preparing for that critical event?

Mrs O'Neill: The industry has been very aware of my approach to that issue over the past number of years. We have gone out and fought a hard battle with the European Commission. There is no point in going out to Europe unless you have the science to back up your argument. A number of years ago, we put forward a clear proposal on selective gear that allowed us to avoid cuts. My track record of commitment to standing up for the industry in Brussels speaks for itself, and I will do that again this year.

Conacre Land

4. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what

proportion of total agricultural land is set in conacre. (AQO 6728/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The results of the June 2013 agricultural and horticultural survey — the latest available data — showed that land let under conacre accounts for 31% of the total area of farmed land.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister. Can she tell us how many active farmers depend on the significant acreage of rented land for their farming operations?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the number of active farmers who occupy the 31% that I mentioned, but I will be happy to try to provide that to the Member. He will be aware that we will be working with a new definition of "active farmer" from next year, so those statistics might not be available. Suffice it to say that the active farmer issue is a contentious one at the moment. We need to make sure that everyone understands what defines an active farmer. We have been anxious to make sure that we make that clear for people to understand.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur. My question is exactly on that very point. What is the Department doing at the moment about the definition of "active farming" and its implications for land that is taken in conacre?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that that is an issue. The rule of thumb should be this: if you do not know whether you are an active farmer, you most likely are not. That is just a definition that I use in my head. Given the difficulties, it would be good to set out exactly what it means and what we are trying to do. The implementing Act for CAP reform contains a provision that, in 2015, entitlements to be issued under the new support regime must be allocated to the person who enjoys the decision-making power, the benefits and the financial risks in relation to the agricultural activity being carried out on the land for which an allocation is requested. My best advice to anybody who is unclear is to contact their DARD Direct office or the helpline and seek out the information.

The provision that we now have has particular relevance to us because we have the conacre system. That is obviously a long-standing system that we have. In general terms, however, it means that in 2015, when all existing single farm payment entitlements are abolished and the new entitlements are

established, the landowners who rent out land in conacre will not be able to establish entitlements on that land. We are reviewing the information that the Department holds for all farm businesses that submitted an application for single farm payment this year, and we will write to all the businesses that, we think, the review suggests are not active farmers. We are proactively targeting those people. We will encourage them not to put forward an application in 2015, if that is what we believe to be the case. I think that that will lead to some farmers wanting to query that, which is fair enough. I think that that is the right direction to go.

Next year, when people are applying for single farm payments, we will be able to run reviews and check records to see if there is evidence of agricultural activity. We will look at herd books, movement histories and all those things. There will be a number of ways in which we will be able to look at and establish whether people are active farmers. Whilst I accept that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's two minutes are up.

Mrs O'Neill: It is a time of big change, but we are doing all that we can to make sure that we get the clarity out there that is needed.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What advice do the Minister and her Department have for potato and vegetable growers who have difficulty in accessing land?

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of reports that potato and vegetable growers are having difficulty obtaining land for 2015, as landowners are, perhaps, speculating and trying to hold on to their land to see if they can maximise the value of their entitlements for 2015. Again, the Department has made available information to growers in a Q&A brief that is on the DARD website. I encourage farmers and landowners to look at that. The Q&A points out the issues relevant to whether landowners rent out their land or farm it themselves. It is probably determined by the financial benefit that there will be for them and, therefore, depends on the conacre rent that is on offer. It is important that the return received from establishing entitlements for 2015 is fully understood and compared with the alternative of forgoing conacre rent in 2015. There is a worked example of that on the Q&A, and I advise people to look at that. Potato and vegetable growers will also have the option of establishing entitlements on the rented land in 2015 and

transferring those back to the landowner, provided that the landowner is also a farmer after 2015. It should be possible for landowners and potato and vegetable growers to reach an agreement on the way forward, which would see the land being rented out for potato and vegetable production.

Mr Irwin: There is still a lot of confusion among farmers, especially young farmers, about what constitutes head of holding. Has the Department yet decided what constitutes head of holding?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that young farmers have every piece of information that I have. Our problem is that Europe has yet to define a few remaining issues, particularly around young farmers. We will have a meeting on 6 October with European Commission officials, and we are hopeful that clarity will be provided at that stage. We are asking for clarity, and I know that other member states are asking for clarity. We are hopeful that, with a bit of pressure, we will have a bit more information to provide to the young farmers after that meeting on 6 October.

AFBI Grant

5. **Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the departmental grant to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute has been cut, what steps her Department is taking to aid research aimed at maximising the contribution of agricultural and food industries to the economy. (AQO 6729/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I remain committed to supporting research and recognise that it is vital in supporting the agrifood sector plans outlined in the 'Going for Growth' report. My Department engages with stakeholders when prioritising its evidence and innovation needs, which helps to ensure that funding is correctly targeted. My Department is well advanced in preparing the DARD-directed AFBI research work programme for 2015-16. DARD funds a NI contact point based in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, the role of which is to facilitate the local agrifood industry and research community in drawing down increased EU research funding.

The Department is funding postgraduate studentships to help drive innovation in the industry and to foster future local world-class leaders in industry, research and teaching, while developing the science base here in the North.

The industry-led DARD research challenge fund encourages collaboration between rural enterprises and the research community, and five new projects have recently been commissioned. My Department is working to develop strategic alliances and collaborations with other government funders to help to coordinate research and evidence gathering for the agrifood sector. For the new rural development programme, DARD has been developing proposals for innovation partnership groups that aim to bring together farmers, advisers, businesses and researchers to advance innovation in the agricultural sector.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister said that one of the strategic aims is to draw down further funds from Europe. In light of the fact that the first tranche has been announced for science, has agriculture, through AFBI or any other institution, been successful in applying for Horizon 2020 funding and achieved a drawdown?

Mrs O'Neill: Eighteen per cent of my resource budget goes to AFBI. Other than that, we are dependent on looking outside, particularly to Europe. You will be aware that the Executive have a Horizon 2020 target of increasing the drawdown of funding by 20%. We have now appointed our person in AFBI who will target that funding. We have no confirmation of new funding, but we are working in Europe and trying to form partnerships. One of the key areas that we developed under the new rural development programme is partnership working, and that involves everybody — farmers, researchers and scientists — coming together. We believe that there will be opportunities in Horizon 2020 for us to be able to take that forward, but, as yet, we do not have confirmation of funding.

Mr Rogers: Minister, given the cuts that AFBI, like other organisations, is experiencing, what is the Department prioritising in its budget to ensure maximum delivery for the economy of Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: I assume that the Member is referring to the AFBI budget. Public expenditure is under significant pressure for a combination of reasons, and AFBI, as an arm's-length body, is no different from any other element of my Department, in that it is being prudent and looking at what potential savings it can make. As I said in my initial answer, it is not just for us to decide what areas need to be prioritised. Our clear vision for the agrifood sector is set out in Going for Growth. It sets out where we need to direct research, support,

innovation and technology transfer. For me, the way to establish our priority is in consultation with stakeholders, and that work is ongoing. We are working with AFBI and stakeholders to design next year's programme and identify what research opportunities we will explore. All sectors feel that they are worthy of research, but, with limited budgets, you have to prioritise. As I said, we are working, with AFBI officials, to develop a strategic plan for research and to identify what will be targeted over the period to 2020.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Can the Minister tell us about the postgraduate research programme?

Mrs O'Neill: The research programme is designed to ensure that we provide the best local students with the best opportunity to undertake research that is directly relevant to our agrifood industry. It has been successful in providing world-class leaders in research, teaching, industry and policy development, and it has had an impact throughout the local agrifood sector. This year, DARD increased the number of PhD studentships from eight to 12, the majority of which are undertaken in conjunction with Queen's and the University of Ulster. These take place at a university campus or at either the AFBI or CAFRE site. As part of our continuing need to provide assurance on the value and quality of the PhD studentships, the departmental scientific adviser has commissioned a review of the current arrangements. DARD is funding postgraduate studentships to help to drive innovation in the industry and to provide high-level training to help to develop the science base in the North. PhD research areas are directly related to DARD's priority in evidence and innovation needs.

CAFRE: Applications

7. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applications were received for the level II agriculture qualification at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise for the CAP young farmers' scheme and regional reserve. (AQO 6731/11-15)

12. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the young farmers' scheme. (AQO 6736/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 7 and 12 together. My Department received

3,495 applications to the level 2 agriculture qualification. The qualification is one of the eligibility criteria for the young farmers' scheme and the young farmer and new entrant categories of the regional reserve. CAFRE is providing an accredited training course for those who do not already have the required level 2 qualification. Equivalent or higher level agriculture qualifications are also acceptable, and CAFRE has compiled a list of eligible qualifications, which is available on its website.

DARD has recently written to all those who applied for the level 2 qualification in agriculture by the closing date of 29 August to provide further information on the young farmers' scheme and the regional reserve and to outline the possible types of evidence required to meet the head of holding eligibility criterion. Evidence will be required from young farmer applicants to demonstrate that they are the head of holding. If they are unable to provide it, they will be unable to participate in the scheme or benefit from associated support until they satisfy the requirements. Officials are also seeking legislative advice on whether a minimum age should be imposed for young farmers to satisfy the head of holding requirement, and a decision on that will be made in the coming weeks. Officials are also seeking clarification on the young farmer requirements, particularly in relation to the head of holding requirement. Commission officials have been invited to Belfast on 6 October, and it is hoped that further clarification will be provided during that visit.

3.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for questions for oral answer. There is no time for a supplementary. We will now move to topical questions.

Farm Safety Action Plan: Schoolchildren

1. **Ms Sugden** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she has taken to include primary schoolchildren in the farm safety action plan to instil safety awareness at a young age. (AQT 1531/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have the detail with me but, yes, that is one of the elements that was looked at. A lot of schools do that work anyway, particularly schools in rural areas. The Farm Safety Partnership looked at whether there are some elements that it could incorporate, even into the curriculum, that would help. So, yes, work around imaging and

diagrams would resonate with children. Some work has been done on that, but I am very happy to provide to the Member any other detailed information on what we have done.

Ms Sugden: Thank you for the answer. Would the Minister consider engaging with community and voluntary groups such as young farmers to engage with a younger group of people in rural areas?

Mrs O'Neill: I regularly engage with young farmers' groups and have met them over the last couple of months at different shows. They do great work in reaching out and getting that positive message across. I am very encouraged by the number of young people who have applied to be head of holding under the new CAP regime. To me, that very clearly sets out a change in the age structure in the farming industry. For all those young people who either have qualifications in agriculture or will now take part in the level 2 qualification, there will be a farm safety element to that training, and that will be key in changing mindsets and making sure that people start out in their farming business with that to the forefront of their mind.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 2 was withdrawn. Mr Chris Hazzard is not in his place.

Single Farm Payments: Targets

4. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department is still on course to achieve the 85% target for single farm payments. (AQT 1534/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, we will be announcing our targets over the next wee while. The Member will be aware that, year-on-year, we have reached increased numbers by December, and my aim this year is to do even better than last year. There is no doubt that it has been challenging year and a challenging couple of years with CAP reform, but I gave an assurance to the House last year that I will continue to make improvements year-on-year.

Mr I McCrea: It is certainly good news that that is to be the case, and we look forward to seeing the outworkings of that. Is the Department on target in respect of the inspections that need to be carried out?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. Again, in our endeavour to speed up the payments, we have switched to a

lot of remote control sensing inspections, and, this year, we were able to start those earlier again, which should obviously improve the bigger picture. I think that it is just over 1,200 remote control sensing inspections this year. So, we are certainly further on than we were at this time last year.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Trevor Clarke is not in his place. Mr Robin Newton is not in his place. I call Mr Joe Byrne, who is in his place.

EU Infraction Fines

7. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether DARD's EU infraction fine problem from Brussels has gone away. (AQT 1537/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that we are trying very hard to avoid infraction. We have been working very hard with the remapping exercise to try to avoid it, and we have had success in that, year-on-year, we have had a reduced fine. However, we want to get to the stage where we rule it out altogether or certainly try our best to rule it out altogether. We are awaiting confirmation of this year's fine, but we are pretty confident that the fine is coming down as it did last year.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she state whether there is a unit in the Department that is actively dealing with that issue to make sure that we do not incur any further fines, given the tight budgetary situation?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that it is my aim to get to a position in which we avoid fines altogether. People are working seriously hard on remapping. You will be aware that we had to remap over 750,000 fields, so it has been no mean feat. My officials who are working on the land parcel identification system project have been working hard with DFP's Land and Property Service officials to make sure that we avoid future disallowance.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr David McNarry is not in his place. Mr Edwin Poots is not in his place.

National Ploughing Championship, Laois

10. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development about her recent visit to the National Ploughing Championship in County Laois. (AQT 1540/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. The National Ploughing Championship was fantastic. I think that record numbers attended the ploughing this year. Some 1,400 businesses from across Ireland exhibited, and over 100 were from the Six Counties. That shows that people were there to do business. I took the opportunity to visit as many of the stands as I could. They were doing real business and were very enthused by what they could get out of the show.

In our DARD stand, we took the opportunity to offer the opportunity to new or smaller businesses that are trying to establish themselves but perhaps could not yet afford to take a stand at such a significant agricultural show. From talking to the people who were on our stand, I know that they could clearly see the benefits and were so grateful for the opportunity to be there and promote what they have to offer. It was a success all round.

I congratulate all our local ploughmen and, indeed, ploughwomen, who were successful in taking part in the competition itself. The show has something for everybody, and I certainly enjoyed it. It is an absolute showcase of what we have to offer in Ireland.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her response. How practical would it be for the industry in the North to make a bid to host the event at some time in the near future?

Mrs O'Neill: It would be fantastic to have the National Ploughing Championship in the North. It is always held in the midlands area, given the nature of the land. However, from having conversations at the show, I know that others would be keen for that to happen.

I intend to write to Anna May, who runs the whole show — the president of the show — and ask if that is something that she would seriously consider. We would be honoured and privileged to host such a significant agrifood and rural event. It really does attract so many people. As I said, there are record numbers year on year. Over 120,000 came to it this year, and you can imagine the knock-on impact that that would have economically for local businesses, tourism and everything that goes along with it. I would certainly be keen for that to happen, and I will ask if it could happen in the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. That concludes Question Time.

Private Members' Business

Kincora Boys' Home: Investigation of Allegations of Abuse

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations of sexual abuse that took place in Kincora Boys' Home during the 1970s and 1980s; further notes allegations that senior politicians, military personnel, paramilitary figures and businessmen from Northern Ireland and Great Britain were involved in the commissioning and subsequent cover-up of the abuse, as well as allegations that members of the intelligence service were complicit in a cover-up of this scandal; believes that the nature and seriousness of the allegations, especially that MI5 was involved in a cover-up, means that this cannot be adequately considered in any way other than a Westminster Government-led inquiry; and urges the Home Secretary to include Kincora Boys' Home in the inquiry by Fiona Woolf as the most appropriate means of achieving truth and justice. — [Mrs Cochrane.]

Mr Eastwood: I begin by echoing the words of support and, I suppose, congratulations to all the campaigners who, over the last number of years, have made an immense impact in this place and on the search for truth and justice for all those in our society who have suffered the great injustice of child abuse. Organisations like Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA) — I know that some of them are here — have done immense work to bring that issue to the fore and to ensure that the House and the Executive make good strides to try to bring about justice for all those people.

It is kind of depressing that, almost daily, we have a new revelation about the abuse of children in our society. Most recently, we have seen very prominent and powerful people across the water being facilitated by very powerful institutions to treat our children in the most despicable way. We have seen, over the last 10 or 15 years, the state and powerful elements in the Church across this island being allowed to get away with terrible injustices on our young people. Thankfully, we are now in an era where we can talk about these issues, where we can bring them to the fore and where we can attempt to hold these people and, more particularly, these institutions to account.

Even though they are nearly 30 years old, the revelations about Kincora are no less shocking

and demand nothing less from us than all our efforts in trying to bring the truth to the fore. It is astonishing that this length of time has been allowed to pass without a proper investigation into what happened there being facilitated. Whatever the allegations about security services, state involvement and everything else, the bottom line is that many young people were abused and have not seen a modicum of truth or justice in all that time.

It is incumbent on us and on Westminster to ensure that we can now get to a stage where those people can have some level of truth and justice. Very good work is being done in the Justice Hart inquiry and through the acknowledgement forum, and we have to ensure that that work continues and that we get to a point where we can look at reparation and possible expansion, whether through that inquiry or a further one, into the issues around clerical abuse. However, we understand that the issues around Kincora are outwith the abilities of the Justice Hart inquiry to get to the truth. We need to ensure that that part of the inquiry, whilst not diminishing victims' rights around the acknowledgement forum and so on, inquires properly into what the state and the security services have done. I think that, at this stage, that probably best rests with the Woolf inquiry.

As was pointed out earlier by Mr Attwood and others, we cannot take our eye off the ball. We, in this country, have had a very difficult and bad experience when it comes to what state agencies have been allowed to get away with and what they have been allowed to cover up. Victims have not been allowed to get near the truth or justice. We need to make sure that every bright light is shone into the darkest corners of the state and the security services in order to ensure that those people who are still struggling and striving for truth and justice with regard to Kincora and other issues are allowed to see those files and to act upon them.

Mr Beggs: I, too, thank the proposer of the motion for bringing it to the House and indicate my support for it.

As we have heard, the Kincora story is quite a gripping one, with all the elements of the plot of a thriller. However, it is not an imaginary tale set in a far-off location; it is a tale of real lives, a real story, that happened about a mile from this Building. We must never forget that, at the heart of this dreadful tale, is the terrible and unforgivable exploitation and abuse of young boys in care.

Then there are the claims about the involvement of the most powerful — politicians, businessmen and the intelligence services. Regardless, we must focus on two things: truth and justice. Truth means that there must be no hiding place for the perpetrators of these crimes no matter who or where they are, no matter their connections or affiliations and no matter how inconvenient it may be for the powers that be, whether in Belfast or in London.

Justice demands that the perpetrators should be exposed and held to account. These were young boys who were already disadvantaged and were to be cared for by the state but were abused. They had no one to defend them when they were alone in that house at the mercy of those beasts.

3.30 pm

The Kincora story has long been plagued with rumours that the full story never came out and that the involvement of powerful people in MI5 led to a cover-up. That is still the case, some 32 years later. There have been numerous inquiries over the period, starting with a private inquiry in 1982 set up by Secretary of State James Prior. It collapsed a month later, when three of its members resigned because they believed that the RUC had failed to carry out an effective investigation. In 1983, we saw former Sussex Chief Constable Sir George Terry look at the RUC's handling of the Kincora inquiry. He found no evidence of a homosexual ring, cover-up or paramilitary involvement. Tellingly, however, MI5 refused the RUC permission to speak to any of its officers. Then, in December 1983, James Prior appointed Judge Hughes to head up a public inquiry, with limitations, into Kincora, but still the allegations persist. All has not been uncovered.

Recent revelations about celebrities such as Jimmy Savile and former Liberal MP Cyril Smith have led to victims of abuse coming forward. In addition, there have been widespread claims of abuse involving the rich and the powerful in other parts of the UK, for example London, Jersey and north Wales. These have been uncovered, and there is emerging evidence that strengthens the argument that the Kincora story should be reinvestigated with appropriate powers.

It is worth pausing to assess the words of Tim Fortescue, Edward Heath's Chief Whip, as recorded in the 1995 BBC documentary 'Westminster's Secret Service'. Talking about the role of Chief Whip, Fortescue said:

"It might be ... a scandal involving small boys ... we would do everything we can because we would store up brownie points ... if we could get a chap out of trouble then, he will do as we ask forever more."

The question that must be asked is this: are there elements of that at Kincora?

In October 2012, the Labour MP Tom Watson claimed that there was a powerful paedophile network linked to Westminster. In late 2012, the Metropolitan Police commenced Operation Fairbank to investigate claims that the Elm Guest House in south-west London was the scene of child sexual abuse. That has been followed up by Operation Fernbridge. Clearly, there are ongoing difficulties. Further recent investigations have uncovered 13 undisclosed items, four of which have implicated Home Office officials. There are 114 missing files.

We need an open and transparent inquiry into Kincora, with all the necessary powers. Critically, this must include the ability to fully question members of the intelligence services and for them to be obliged to disclose information freely. Like others, I agree that Kincora should be included in the Westminster-based historical inquiry into child sexual exploitation, with powers to enable full disclosures to be made. The Ulster Unionist Party is determined that for Kincora and, indeed, any instance of wrongdoing there must be no hiding place.

Mr Poots: As a young man growing up, I remember hearing rumours about Kincora and about the various inquiries into Kincora. The truth is that there was a cover-up of what happened at Kincora. The truth was never properly told, and the victims of abuse in Kincora deserve the truth. It is as simple as that. I find many things disgusting, but one thing that I find particularly repellent is any individual thinking that they have the right to harm a child, to abuse a child, to interfere with a child and to destroy that child. I recently met a young man who had been a victim in Rubane, which we heard a little about yesterday in the Hart inquiry. Lives are not destroyed just at the time; they are destroyed for good in so many instances. The harm that is done to a young person or a child by the perpetrators — the evil, twisted perverts — will live with them throughout their life.

When I look at the findings of the Terry report, I think that, if they were not so terrible, they would be laughable. Sir George Terry could have come to his conclusions only as a result of cover-up, whitewash and sham. Surely the lives

that have been impacted on, harmed and damaged as a consequence of the evil, twisted practices of individuals deserve better than that. We all know that, where there is vulnerability, there will be perpetrators. There is nobody more vulnerable than young people who have lost their family and been put into homes and other services. That is why we must be so careful in protecting those young people. We must ensure that they receive the appropriate care from the appropriate people. That is work that we are always learning about. Very often, where you have vulnerable young people, you will have powerful people instigating the perpetration. I have absolutely no doubt that powerful people were involved in what was going on in Kincora. That is why we did not get the truth in the 1980s, even though every piece of evidence was pointing in a particular direction. That is why it is important that we get the truth now.

Kincora was not the only place. Abuse took place in the republican movement, and leading families, such as the Adams family, the Cahill family and the Meehan family, largely got away scot-free as well. It is not just about Kincora or Rubane and the Catholic Church; it goes much broader than that. Powerful people have used their power to abuse the vulnerable. That is something that we must always be very conscious of. In this instance, it has been alleged that people of great seniority in the security services and other places abused the trust that they had in order to victimise those young people. We owe it to those young people to do our utmost to find the truth. That is why we should ensure that the inquiry led by Fiona Woolf includes Kincora. Lord Justice Hart does not have adequate powers at this stage to dig deep enough into the issue, and that is why we would like to take it further. It is incumbent on the Home Secretary, Theresa May, to respond positively to what she hears in the House and, more importantly, to what she hears from the victims of this terrible crime.

Mr A Maginness: It is not very often that I agree with the First Minister, Peter Robinson, but he said in reference to Kincora that it was a national scandal, and I believe that it is. However, the scandal is not simply about abuse; it is about the cover-up and the use of the premises and the unfortunate boys who were residents in Kincora as a source of information and material for use by the intelligence services. That is the nub of the scandal.

The more you probe that sorry episode, the more you come to the conclusion that there has been a major cover-up. If anybody is in any

doubt about that, I advise them to read Paul Foot's book 'Who Framed Colin Wallace?'. In that book, you will see the depths to which those in the establishment have gone to impugn the integrity of Mr Wallace. They fabricated a legal case of manslaughter against him, which, incidentally, was quashed in 1996 by the Court of Appeal. It is very important to remind ourselves that there was a web of intrigue that was assisted, organised and administered by the intelligence services. It is appropriate to say that, and many Members are in agreement with that, as are Members of the Westminster Parliament.

It is also appropriate for us to note that the intelligence services were, at times, out of control. As a political party, we took an awful lot of stick because we said exactly that. I think of people like Seamus Mallon, people who probed what was going on, people who defended people like Mr Stalker, who investigated the shoot-to-kill killings in the 1980s. Therefore, it is important for us to probe the full depths of the intrigue and this web of sinister interference by the intelligence services. Those who say, "Don't worry about the intelligence services; they are under the control of Parliament", should remind themselves that in this instance they were not. Indeed, even Harold Wilson, the then Labour Prime Minister of Great Britain, confided to people that he was not sure that the security services were not conspiring against him. It is important for us to exercise or to try to exercise further democratic control over the intelligence services. As a note of caution, we should not simply allow those intelligence services to govern themselves and not be subject to democratic control. That is very important.

In relation to this inquiry, I support the view expressed by Members of the House that there should be a much wider inquiry under the chairmanship of Fiona Woolf and that Kincora should be included in that inquiry. Quite clearly, the powers that Mr Justice Hart has in the historical institutional abuse inquiry do not go far enough. Technically, how would he be able, for example, to subpoena people in the intelligence services who are resident in Great Britain? How could he do that? There are all sorts of technical reasons why Kincora should be absorbed into the Woolf inquiry.

Finally, it is important for us to remember once again those who were exploited so cruelly —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will bring his remarks to a close.

Mr A Maginness: — for the so-called needs of the state.

Mr Agnew: Many Members have spoken, and it is always difficult to speak last in a debate like this where there is unanimity. I will not try to outdo everyone else's abhorrence at the acts that are alleged to have taken place at Kincora Boys' Home and at the cover-up that appears to have been perpetrated to protect institutions and powerful people at the expense of children. It is clear from everything that has been said today — the argument has been made, and it can no doubt be won — that the only just act is for the allegations to be investigated as part of Fiona Woolf's inquiry and for proper powers to be given to uncover the truth and, where possible, to seek justice for the survivors and victims of the Kincora Boys' Home.

3.45 pm

I will depart a little from what has been said and use the lessons of this situation, because the other way that we get justice for any victim of sexual abuse is to do all that we can to ensure that it does not happen today. We are looking at a historical event, although, as many said, it is very much present for victims and survivors, but abuse is still taking place.

A much-used phrase in the Chamber and elsewhere is that those who fail to learn the lessons of the past are condemned to repeat it. The lesson that we need to learn is about the place and value that we put on children in our society. There is an old phrase, "Children should be seen and not heard." We need to put that attitude to bed. Children's concerns and experiences must be listened to. They are a vulnerable group, and we need to be ever vigilant of any abuse that they could be suffering.

In different ways, I, as a parent, and we, in the various roles that we play, have a power over children that comes with a responsibility. That applies to us as individuals and to our institutions, whether state, religious or educational — wherever adults have domain over children.

This case brings to light the importance of transparency. We talk about a position of trust, but there should never be absolute trust. That is the mistake of the past, when we had absolute trust in institutions to care for children. There must be accountability in whatever institution has dominance over our children — whether that is a school, religious institution or care home.

The Barnardo's report highlighted the vulnerability of young people in care and the level of sexual exploitation that many of them faced. It is incumbent on us that as well as this call today — I support it and welcome the motion from the Alliance Party — we must do more. We must look at how we treat children.

Discussing issues such as children's rights is the type of thing that vexes some people. We have become overly litigious as a society. Maybe we do not talk enough about responsibilities, but, when it comes to children's rights, these are the experiences and lessons that we have to learn from. The mistakes of the past are why we need a rights-based framework and the greatest possible protection for children, because they are one of the most vulnerable groups.

Whatever their socio-economic background, children are always vulnerable to the abuse of adults, and we must ensure that we —

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

Mr Agnew: — exercise the responsibility that we hold and use it to ensure that institutions are transparent, accountable and use the responsibility that they hold accordingly.

Mr Lyttle: I thank all Members for their contributions to this important debate. I acknowledge the victims and survivors of all child sexual abuse, in particular, those present in the Assembly today, and the courage that they show daily in continuing to campaign on these important issues.

The weighty responsibility that I feel in summarising the key elements of the debate is eased slightly by the united way in which the Assembly has called for the inclusion of Kincora Boys' Home in the Westminster child sex abuse inquiry.

It is indeed a scandal of national seriousness. There is clear agreement on that. It is also an indictment of the UK Government and this society that it has taken over 40 years of pain and persistence to achieve full and proper disclosure of the full extent of the abuse suffered by children in our community at that home.

My colleague Judith Cochrane MLA and I attended a school that is yards from the location of that building. We were prompted to table the motion today by the work of our Alliance Party colleague and Member of Parliament for East

Belfast, Naomi Long MP. Naomi Long has urged the Home Secretary and, indeed, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on several occasions now to include Kincora in the Westminster inquiry into child sex abuse. Many people have supported that call and many people have worked tirelessly towards achieving that outcome for victims and survivors. I think of the many journalists who have been referred to in the Assembly today, organisations such as Amnesty International and many of the victims and survivors' groups like SAVIA that have worked on those issues.

At its heart, it is about the systematic abuse of the most innocent members of our society by the people specifically charged and entrusted with their care and about adequately investigating the most serious allegations that security and intelligence services were deeply complicit in that abuse and its concealment. The gravity of the allegations means that nothing less than the fullest independent investigation and disclosure of all available evidence will satisfy the right to justice for victims and survivors and the need to address the most serious disrepute that all of those allegedly involved, including the state itself, have been brought into by that litany of abuse.

There is a clear opportunity now for the British Government, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Home Secretary to satisfy those demands by including the abuse in Kincora Boys' Home in the UK inquiry chaired by Fiona Woolf and to grant the military intelligence officers the clearance they need under the Official Secrets Act to present to the inquiry the grave allegations that they have made.

I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has suggested that it may be a matter for the devolved Administrations to address child abuse. The Executive and Assembly have certainly shown a degree of leadership and taken responsibility by enacting the historical institutional abuse judge-led public inquiry here in Northern Ireland. It has created an opportunity for victims and survivors to present allegations, including those from Kincora Boys' Home.

Again, I acknowledge the work of organisations like SAVIA, Amnesty International and, indeed, former Members of the House, including Conall McDevitt MLA, who worked tirelessly to support the progress towards achieving that inquiry. I also pay tribute to SAVIA for the dedicated and dignified manner in which it has continued to campaign for adequate victim support for participants in the inquiry. I hope that it secures

an update soon in relation to funding for a victims' support centre that it is working to put in place in relation to the inquiry. It has also sought an update on any interim report or information that can be given on the inquiry. It has requested that work be started to explore potential compensation and how non-institutional clerical child abuse may be addressed. That has been covered by a number of Members today. It is my understanding that OFMDFM is conducting scoping studies in relation to those matters. Hopefully, it will be able to provide us with an update on those important issues as well.

The chair of the historical institutional abuse inquiry has stated that he would not have the adequate powers to achieve full disclosure in relation to some of the most serious allegations of military intelligence involvement in Kincora. In addition, the contributions of Members in the House today have shown that the weight of argument and the support for inclusion of Kincora in the Westminster child sex abuse inquiry are increasingly irrefutable and that the clamour for justice is now unavoidable.

The Home Secretary must announce the inclusion of the Kincora Boys' Home in the Westminster inquiry and she must grant the exemption from the Official Secrets Act that the military intelligence officers need to provide the necessary evidence if we are to secure the level of investigation that victims and survivors deserve and, indeed, that any democratic society must demand.

In their contributions, other Members said that there were indeed many other children who were — and are — abused and terrorised in many other ways by non-state paramilitary organisations in our community, who hold themselves to far lower standards of human rights and who have provided far less disclosure of their abuse and terror. As I hear it, the Assembly calls on the Home Secretary to ensure that this democratic society holds itself to much higher standards of accountability, justice and human rights, which are the standards on which the very legitimacy of this society depends. The Assembly calls on the Home Secretary to ensure that she does not add to what has become known as a chronicle of lost opportunities in relation to the Kincora Boys' Home, and to ensure that the principles that she set out for the Westminster inquiry — full investigation, prosecution and maximum transparency — are met by the inclusion and full investigation of all available evidence relating to Kincora Boys' Home in this inquiry.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this has been a unique debate and a clear, united message comes from the Assembly calling on the Home Secretary to take urgent action in relation to this issue. I would be grateful if the Speaker's Office could ensure that a communication is sent to the Home Secretary to convey the mood of the House in relation to this serious and grave issue, and that we see the action that we have called for as soon as possible in relation to this important issue. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with deep concern the allegations of sexual abuse that took place in Kincora Boys' Home during the 1970s and 1980s; further notes allegations that senior politicians, military personnel, paramilitary figures and businessmen from Northern Ireland and Great Britain were involved in the commissioning and subsequent cover-up of the abuse, as well as allegations that members of the intelligence service were complicit in a cover-up of this scandal; believes that the nature and seriousness of the allegations, especially that MI5 was involved in a cover-up, means that this cannot be adequately considered in any way other than a Westminster Government-led inquiry; and urges the Home Secretary to include Kincora Boys' Home in the inquiry by Fiona Woolf as the most appropriate means of achieving truth and justice.

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

Commonwealth Games: Team NI

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

Mr Campbell: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the tremendous achievement of the entire Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team at the recent Glasgow games, in particular the boxing team; congratulates all those involved; and calls on the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to urgently reassess other sports that might be expected to excel in the 2018 Commonwealth Games and ensure the appropriate training,

resources and facilities are in place to maximise our medal return in 2018.

It is with considerable joy that I move the motion. This is a moment of rejoicing across Northern Ireland, and it has been so since the Commonwealth Games took place because of the success of the participants. It was a substantial improvement on previous performances, and while I will not spend undue time naming each of them, they are worth mentioning.

The gold medal winners were Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlon. The silver medal winners were: at boxing, Michaela Walsh and Joe Fitzpatrick; and in the men's triples at lawn bowls, Neil Booth, Paul Daly and Neil Mullholland. The bronze medal winners were: in boxing, Alanna Audley-Murphy, Steven Donnelly, Connor Coyle, Sean Duffy and Sean McGlinchy; Lisa Kearney in judo; and, in the women's pairs in lawn bowls, Barbara Cameron and Mandy Cunningham. They were symptomatic of the success of the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team.

However, what we are really endeavouring to do with this motion is not just to commend the team. We should do that, and it already has been done by the Department, the Minister, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It is right, proper and entirely appropriate that the entire country congratulates those who took part, particularly the medal winners.

4.00 pm

We are looking ahead because, while everyone participated well — there were personal bests even amongst those who did not win medals — we always aspire to do even better. That is in the context of improved participation in sporting activity amongst young people, but, at the same time as that improvement in sporting activity, we have what amounts to a veritable explosion in obesity rates amongst our young. So, we almost have this dichotomy between having an excellent performance at the games and increasing participation rates in sporting activity amongst young people and, at the same time, young people generally becoming more obese, with a sedentary lifestyle becoming more and more prevalent. So, we have to try not only to improve our athletes at the top but to ensure that, right across the spectrum, people become more active.

On a personal note, I enjoy walking, and I find that, when I am out walking in the summer, quite a few people are also out walking, but

between now and April, unfortunately, the numbers who engage in such physical activity will decline considerably, until the lighter evenings and the better weather return. So, we have to ensure — I hope that the Minister will respond to this — that, right across the board, we get greater participation levels across society as a whole, but particularly amongst our young people.

In addition to that — this is why, towards the end of the motion, we inserted:

"ensure the appropriate training, resources and facilities are in place to maximise"

those participating at the top end in the likes of the Commonwealth Games and even the next Olympic Games. It should not be forgotten that, prior to the Commonwealth Games, our rowing fraternity, particularly those from my constituency of East Londonderry, had fantastic success at the Olympic Games. As a result of that, we saw a significant increase in the numbers of young people taking up rowing. So, this has an effect; success breeds success. We find that people take up a sport that they perhaps thought was not the sport for them as a result of online and TV coverage during which they see someone whom they know is good at that sport.

So, we want to hear from the Minister about the Department's strategic plan to build on the success demonstrated at the Commonwealth Games this time. For example, the news about the tremendous success of our boxing team went across not just the UK and the Commonwealth but the wider world. They did — to use a pun — punch well above their weight. For a country the size of ours, the boxers were outstanding — absolutely outstanding. Yet, there are a lot of other sporting disciplines in which we can improve significantly and reach the boxing equivalent. Again, we need resources and a strategy, and we need to see the design that will put that in place over an incremental period of the next few years.

We saw the Scots athletes excel in Scotland. Of course, you would expect them to excel, given that they were on home soil. However, in addition to the athletes playing at home, the Scottish Government and Parliament deployed sufficient resources over the previous four-year period to ensure that they were better placed to succeed in Scotland in 2014. So, that is what we need to see.

We need to target obesity and diabetes amongst the young. All those issues can be

tackled with a greater, more significant participation level at primary-school level and post-primary-school level, as young people move into preparation for the sporting activities that they would like to participate in. Then, those who are regarded as excellent prospects can be nurtured, and the tremendous facility that we have at Jordanstown can be fully utilised in order to get the cream of the crop for Australia in four years' time. Hopefully, those of us or whoever is here in the next few years after the Olympic Games and, in four years' time, after the next Commonwealth Games will be able to report an even better performance than that which took place in Scotland in 2014. Hopefully, we can also report that obesity among children is on the decline as a result of a targeted strategy by the Department and the contribution that we all make towards achieving that very worthwhile objective.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé buíoch as an deis labhairt sa díospóireacht seo. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I support the motion. Tá mé i bhfách leis an rún seo inniu. Mar atá ráite sa rún, ba mhaith linn comghairdeas ó chroí a ghabháil lenár lúthchleasaithe, mná agus fir, a ghlac páirt sna Cluichí Comhlathais i nGlaschú i mbliana. As the motion states, we wish to extend sincere congratulations to the local sportsmen and sportswomen who competed in Glasgow's Commonwealth Games 2014. Their achievements were outstanding overall. I am sure that no one will mind if we make special mention of the tremendous success of local boxers. I would like to mention all the medal winners, who include Lisa Kearney, who won a medal in judo, and Neil Booth, Neil Mulholland, Paul Daly, Barbara Cameron and Mandy Cunningham who won in bowling. Agus, ar ndóigh, ár ndornálaithe iontacha, and of course, our fantastic boxers Paddy Barnes, Michael Conlon, Joe Fitzpatrick, Michaela Walsh, Steven Donnelly, Sean Duffy, Connor Coyle, Sean McGlinchey and Alanna Audley-Murphy. Despite not making it on to the medal table, other competitors also excelled in sports such as running, badminton, netball, wrestling and triathlon.

Recognition must also go to support staff, trainers, coaches, families and friends, who rightly deserve to be commended for their roles in the great achievements of our athletes. Such achievements are a source of great pride for us all, and we should continue to encourage and support those athletes in whatever way we can in their pursuit of sporting excellence. We should also, as the motion states, seek to identify other sports where possibilities might

exist to excel if given the right support and opportunities.

Sport NI is the body whose responsibility it is to promote a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport, which contributes to a healthy, fair and prosperous society. I do not think that we can overemphasise the health aspects of this, particularly given the rise in diseases like diabetes and heart disease. It is important therefore that we encourage everyone to take part in physical activity, whether in competitive sport or not.

Dúirt Antoinette McKeown, príomh-fheidhmeannach, go bhfuil eagraíocht s'aici tiomanta do rath a bhaint amach sa spórt mar an gnáthrud seachas an eisceacht. The chief executive of Sport NI, Antoinette McKeown, stated recently that her organisation is committed to the achievement of success in sport being the norm rather than the exception. She went on to say that a very detailed review of the Commonwealth Games performance would be carried out in order to set targets for future games, identify where resources can be best used and learn particular lessons from the success of boxing in Glasgow this year. This review will be very important and will include participation from the Commonwealth Games Council and the governing bodies of all the sports. As I have stated, a clear focus will be on the boxing success, which was absolutely phenomenal this year.

Mar is eol dúinn agus mar a thuigtear go maith do chách, níor tharla na torthaí seo de thaisme. As everyone involved knows and understands only too well, these results did not come about by accident. The individual boxers, of course, were pivotal to their own success, but without the support structures around them, such as good coaches, training facilities, physiologists, nutritionists, sports psychologists and vital family support, the chances are that they may well not have had such major achievements. That will therefore be hugely central to the forthcoming corporate plan for 2015-19.

The job will be to ensure that all those key support elements are in place for each of the identified sports so that they can, at the very least, be in with the best sporting chance for the 2018 games and any other major competitions in the calendar.

If our sporting network is to reach its full potential, one issue that it will be important to tackle is the under-representation of women as sporting participants, coaches and representatives on sports governing bodies. When it comes to equality, there must be a

focus on strategies to increase the involvement of women in local sport.

As the motion states, there needs to be a reassessment of other sports that might be expected to excel in 2018. We fully expect Sport NI's review to flag up the ones that will have most to gain from an injection of appropriate training, resources and facilities. If the appropriate supports are put in place, we should rightly expect that athletes will emerge who will hopefully maximise our medal return in 2018.

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

Ms McCorley: I commend the motion to the House. Molaim an rún.

Mrs McKeivitt: I support the motion, as I am a firm believer that sporting excellence and achievement should be recognised and celebrated. Each of the 117 local athletes who participated in 14 sports over 11 days of competition in Glasgow deserves recognition. All were very dedicated and trained hard to qualify for the Commonwealth Games team. All played their part and represented Northern Ireland with distinction, pride and commitment. I commend them all.

The motion singles out the boxing team, and so it should. The boxers' haul of two gold, two silver and five bronze medals — a total of nine for the 11 competitors — was phenomenal. Northern Ireland team captain, Paddy Barnes, deserves a special mention not only for winning gold but for leading and motivating the whole team through their best ever Commonwealth Games. I also give special mention to Michaela Walsh, as I believe that she has put the sport of women's boxing on a new level.

It is most appropriate that we are discussing sporting success and recognising achievement today, given the sporting weekend that we have just had. Our top golfers, Rory and Graeme, played a major role in helping Europe retain the Ryder Cup. Maybe even more important, Mr Deputy Speaker, we saw County Down win its first ever All-Ireland Intermediate Ladies' Football Championship against a very good Fermanagh team. Congratulations to them and to the Down camogs, who won the junior intermediate all-Ireland title the weekend before.

The most important part of the motion may be the call on DCAL to reassess urgently other sports and ensure that the appropriate training,

resources and facilities are in place to maximise our medal return in 2018. Yes, we did good, but, you know what, we could do better. While recognising and commending coaches, medical personnel, support staff and team management, along with the governing bodies and sponsors supporting our athletes and their families, the House and the Government have a responsibility to play their part in supporting sport. There is no doubt that we could do better. Many sports are underfunded, and facilities are dismal when compared with other Commonwealth nations. I look forward to the assessment, which will, I think, highlight opportunities for improvement, some of which may cost very little if we speed up the sharing of facilities between the likes of Jordanstown and Queen's University, which has been mentioned previously, as well as school and gym facilities and pitches.

Mr McGimpsey: I support the motion. It is a valuable one that highlights the value and importance of sport in our society among our young people and our population as a whole, the importance of strategies around fitness and the need to seriously engage in physical activity to promote good health. When I was in the Department of Health, we had a policy called Fit Futures. It was very much about encouraging our population to engage in physical activity, not least because of the challenge of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other serious conditions.

The Commonwealth Games are about more than that. They are about promoting elite sports. They are about the best and the brightest in each of the sports coming forward to represent their country. It is important that we invest in that. It is not only about public health and fitness in the general population; it is about targeting and concentrating on the individuals who can represent at that very high level. We have seen that at the Commonwealth Games, and we have seen that not least with Paddy Barnes and the boxers but with other sports as well.

4.15 pm

A key element of this is that we have sports that we show we can do well in. We can be proud of our achievements at the Commonwealth Games, but there is huge potential still waiting to be given the opportunity. For example, at the Commonwealth Games, we had the ability to put in a Northern Ireland rugby team, but that did not appear. Yet, look at the investment that the House has made in rugby in Northern Ireland in the past two or three years — around

£15 million in the Ravenhill stadium alone. Hockey is another sport in which our men and women excel and are known internationally. Of course, there has been mention of golf. The Ryder Cup is a biennial tournament and is one of the most important in the world. It was led by two of our golfers — Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy, the world number one. That demonstrates that we have huge potential. When you look at our achievements in the past and you look at people like Tony McCoy, the greatest jockey in the world, or Carl Frampton, a world champion, you see that we have a pantheon of achievement in sport.

The key thing is ensuring that barriers to access to sport are broken down, that we have fairness, equality and investment in areas and that no one feels disadvantaged. I have to remind the Minister of the situation of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club, which has been subject, over the years, to sustained sectarian and racist abuse, proven by an independent review, on a number of occasions. The point is this: where are we going from here? One of the boxers who achieved a medal in Glasgow was a Sandy Row boxer, and there are youngsters in that area and in other areas who would love the opportunity to represent their country. The fact is that that boxing club is currently not allowed to access funding because it is not affiliated with the boxing federation, which oversaw the sectarian abuse in the first place. We have a situation in which that boxing club is excluded. This is an issue of fairness. I have to say to the Minister that, if it was a boxing club in her constituency, I do not think that I would be talking about it in these terms; I think that it would be dealt with properly.

It seems to me that sport is the key area where our society can come together. It is the key area where we can see partnership, representing our community where we are all proud of the achievements of our sportsmen and women and we can all get behind them. They are such an important cohesive force in our society in bringing our communities together. Fairness is another key element in this and in ensuring that barriers to access do not exist, as far as possible. We invest, and we support. We have much to celebrate and much to be thankful for in the achievement of our sportsmen and women.

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

Mr McGimpsey: There is so much more potential there.

Ms Lo: I thank the Members who tabled the motion, which has the Alliance Party's support. First, I offer my warmest congratulations to all our athletes who competed in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow this summer. The media coverage showed the games to be a fantastic sporting occasion, and it was wonderful to see how well it captured the public's interest. The Northern Ireland team did us proud. Across all sports, there were remarkable achievements, and it is fitting for us today to pay tribute to them. Secondly, I ask the Minister if a feasibility study could be carried out to see if a future Commonwealth Games could be hosted in Belfast. We saw how wonderful and how successful the World Police and Fire Games were, and it would be brilliant to build on that.

As we know, sporting activity is not only valuable in itself but increases confidence, empathy and a sense of community. Of course, it is not just about talent; it is about discipline, training, coaching, resources and a positive mental attitude.

Perhaps one of the most endearing qualities of people in Northern Ireland is that we are self-deprecating. The problem is that when that translates to sport, we tend to see ourselves as the underdogs and, at times, assume that we will never be the best. This is a shame when we consider that there are many sports in Britain in which our athletes are some of the best in the world. A constituent, Peter Hawkins, a professional cyclist who competed for Team Northern Ireland in Glasgow, told me that this is partly down to mentality but is also due to the fact that so many other countries have better support and facilities for their athletes. This, however, comes down to money: better training facilities, good quality full-time coaches and travel to international competitions are all very expensive. In Peter's opinion, however, they make a huge difference.

The ability to make a living as a full-time athlete is rare, and most athletes would need additional financial support in order to focus on their sport. Investment in sport is hard to come by, and I am interested to know what actions the Minister has taken or will take to help our athletes to get to a position where they can concentrate on their sport without having to work part-time. Peter also believes that more should be done to allow athletes to travel to compete against international opposition as that would allow them to get used to competing on the bigger stage. It can also show them that the gap between where they are and where they need to be is often not as big as they think. In an email to me, Peter wrote:

"There are some sports in which Northern Ireland is genuinely world class, for example, golf. I'm sure a young kid taking up golf here would be thinking anything was possible ... whereas I never dreamed I'd even get to where I am now, never mind the very top of the sport. Maybe if it hadn't been made to seem so impossible, I would've progressed a lot faster. One of the things I take most pleasure in is showing how far you can go with hard work, persistence and belief."

We have the talent and the passion — there is no doubt about that. We now need to focus on how we nurture that so that athletes like Peter receive all the support they deserve.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Members who tabled the motion, and I will speak in favour of it. The names of Michael Conlan and Paddy Barnes now stand alongside those of Philip Beattie, Mike Bull, Davy Larmour, Mary Peters and Barry McGuigan in Northern Ireland's Commonwealth Games hall of fame. I congratulate all our athletes who took part in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and commend all the officials who went along to support them.

I watched the opening ceremony when at scout camp on the Isle of Man, and the reception that our team got as it went into the stadium was second only to that of Scotland, the host nation. Two weeks ago, with party colleagues from the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I met representatives of the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council to discuss a range of issues. On Thursday past, Sport NI was here to discuss the same issues. Participation in the Commonwealth Games is vital. When the representatives of the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council appeared in front of the Committee last year in the Sports Institute at Jordanstown, we were very sympathetic to what they were saying. Clearly, they wanted to do much more. I am sure that the Minister wants to do much more but has a very restricted budget. I pay tribute to the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council. The development of athletes for international competition is absolutely vital. We will maximise the potential that Members talked about only if we maximise our participation. It is great that we have the facility down at the Sports Institute, but we need people who train and work hard for four years. Sadly, however, some of them are not able to compete.

Mr McGimpsey mentioned two sports — rugby sevens and hockey — which I referred to last week in Committee. Northern Ireland is not

able to take part in those sports at the Commonwealth Games, which is a huge regret. That is politics with a small "p" interfering in sport, and that should not happen.

I, too, support Northern Ireland hosting the games, but much has to be done with our infrastructure and facilities. Ravenhill is completed; Windsor is under way; there is development to come at Casement; and we have the Aurora swimming facility in Bangor, the Dub and the Odyssey. We have many great facilities, but we still do not have a velodrome, and considerable improvements are required at the Mary Peters Track. If we are ever to do that, we will need a joined-up approach. Realistically, we need DCAL, Sport NI, local councils, universities, education and library boards and private clubs and their facilities to come together to be in a position to host the Commonwealth Games or any such major international sports event. A considerable amount of investment is required.

I appeal to the governing bodies of hockey and rugby. I am proud to be a part of the Northern Ireland green and white army and to support our wee country in international football. I am saddened when a player opts not to play for Northern Ireland, but it is his or her choice. I made this point in Committee on Thursday, and I make it again in the House today. You can swim for Ireland or GB and take part in the Commonwealth Games; and you can box for Ireland or GB and take part in the Commonwealth Games for Northern Ireland. However, you cannot play hockey for Ireland and play for Northern Ireland in the Commonwealth Games; and you can play rugby for Ireland, but you cannot take part in the rugby sevens at the Commonwealth Games. It is about time that the Irish Rugby Football Union, whether in Dublin or the Ulster branch, and the Irish Hockey Association addressed that anomaly.

Sport NI produced a document at our Committee meeting last week, and on page 67, Iain Lewers, a great hockey player from this wee part of the world, is mentioned. He now plays hockey along with Mark Gleghorne for England. He is a GB player. Two other players from Northern Ireland, Ian Sloan and David Ames, have declared for England. They will not play international hockey for three years to enable them to become eligible to play for England. We are missing out on an opportunity; and some sportspeople whom we are developing here are not participating for Northern Ireland at the Commonwealth Games. That needs to be addressed. Angela Platt, the executive manager of Ulster Hockey, was in

front of the Committee last week. Members of the Committee will know that I asked her a question.

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

Mr Humphrey: I asked her whether she missed out on the opportunity to compete in the Commonwealth Games and whether she would have wanted to. She said that she would, but, sadly, Northern Ireland does not send a team. It is time that that was addressed. I support the motion.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat. The Commonwealth Games in Glasgow have just finished, with our athletes taking home a very creditable and excellent 12 medals, and our boxers took nine of that total. For the first time at the games, female boxers also took home medals. Athletes in other sports finished well but were just outside the medals. Those sports included wrestling, netball, badminton and athletics. We are already planning for the next games in 2018 and have an expectation to do better. The motion calls on DCAL to urgently reassess other sports that might be expected to excel at the next games and to ensure that appropriate training and facilities are in place.

On 7 August 2014, Antoinette McKeown, the chief executive of Sport NI, a DCAL arm's-length body, stated that a detailed review of how each sport had performed at the games would be undertaken. That review will help to establish where resources can best be used and spent. Sport NI will sit down with the governing bodies of all the sports to understand the factors in the sports that have been successful and those that have not.

It is clear that Sport NI is serious about creating an environment in sport where success becomes routine. I am pleased to hear that targets will be set for the next games in Australia and that, unlike this year, those targets will be made public. Other sports will be encouraged to learn from the successes of our boxing squad, and the tally of two gold medals must be bettered.

4.30 pm

Why are our boxers so successful? What are they doing that is different from other sports? The boxing fraternity developed a high-performance system that the boxing family bought into completely. When you listen to any of the squad talking, you hear that they have total self-belief that they are the best, and that

belief is brought into the ring with them. That same high performance must now be installed in other sports like judo, bowls, netball etc. When you go down and see the facilities in Jordanstown, where those high-performance athletes train — the Ulster rugby team has been down there as well — you see that we have got the basis for that.

Sport NI and DCAL have put money into our sports programme, but, next time, the lottery must put funding into sport. That has not been mentioned here today. For the Olympic Games in London, over £60 million was taken from us over six years as our contribution towards the cost of £2.2 billion. If that money can be taken from us for the Olympic Games in London, surely the lottery can put some of that money back to us to build up our sports facilities like a cycling track etc. By the way, the money that was taken from us was not returned. We were told that it would not be returned.

We have to look at all of this. The budget for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow was £561 million, with around £460 million provided by public funds. The Scottish Government contributed over £380 million, and Glasgow City Council contributed the rest. No money was funded for that. Do we have that budget? We must look outside to get funding brought in, and the lottery has a big part to play. As I said, we contributed £60 million to the Olympics; surely, we can get part of that back. If they were to give us back the percentage that they took out of our total of money that we have here for our lottery, that would help to pay for quite a lot of the infrastructure that we need here to develop our sport. Otherwise, we will be totally struggling. For me, the key to the whole thing is funding.

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

Mr McMullan: I ask the House to look at where the lottery can play a major part here.

Mr McCausland: I support the motion. It recognises the tremendous achievements of the entire Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team. Obviously, it picks out the boxing team, which excelled so much in the competition. It is right that we should recognise it, and it is right that we should congratulate all those involved and go further. Congratulations should be given to all the participants, but especially those who achieved medal success. Also, our congratulations go to the officials, coaches, trainers and all those who supported the athletes.

This is one of the occasions when the name "Northern Ireland" is blazoned on the sporting world. It happens in football, where we have a Northern Ireland football team. It also happens in the United Kingdom School Games, where a Northern Ireland team takes part. The Commonwealth Games is another occasion and is, obviously, a much more high-profile event than the UK School Games. It is a very important occasion when a Northern Ireland team is entered. It is good for the athletes that they are able to enter that competition. It is an opportunity for them to excel and show their excellence. It is good for the sport because it raises the profile of the various sports in the country and encourages people to take up those sports. The more a sport gets exposure in the media and the more local success there is, the more interest there is and the more participants there will be. It is good for the country because it means that the name of Northern Ireland is out there in the media around the world and is identified with success. It is also good for society generally here because, as was pointed out earlier by Mr McGimpsey, we live in an age when there are issues with obesity and when many folk have a much more sedentary lifestyle. Role models in sport encourage participation, particularly amongst young people, and that is bound to be good for the health of Northern Ireland.

I want to pick up on the point that was made earlier by my colleague Mr Humphrey. If we are to achieve our very best in the Commonwealth Games, it is absolutely essential that we compete in as many sports as possible. It is just common sense that, if you do not enter as many events, you will not have the same level of success, and it is therefore particularly disappointing that it is not possible to enter a team in hockey and no team was entered in the rugby sevens. Those issues have been around for some time. Mr McGimpsey referred to his experience in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I go back to my experience in that regard. Then, the issue of hockey was raised. People within the ranks of hockey and who played hockey said that they wanted to be able to enter the Commonwealth Games but could not do so. It would make good sense for us to have a team there, so I encourage all those who can exercise influence here to work with the governing body to see what can be done to remove any obstacles and overcome any difficulties and to ensure that, by the time we get to 2018, Northern Ireland teams enter the hockey and rugby sevens competitions.

The success that we had was testimony to the dedication, skill, perseverance, talent and

passion of all those in the team. We did well, but we want to do better. As was pointed out, Sport NI had a deputation in regard to the issue of excellence in sport and elite performance. They were with us at the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure last week, and there was a positive response from the chief executive of Sport NI and from the others in that deputation. They were all very positive about ensuring that we can enter teams in hockey and rugby sevens in 2018.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé buíoch as an deis labhairt sa díospóireacht seo faoi na Cluichí Comhlathais. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak in this debate on the Commonwealth Games. The 2014 Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team achieved its best result since 1986 in the Edinburgh games. In fact, it could be said that the team achieved its best result ever. I say that because the 1986 games, if you remember, was the only time that Northern Ireland achieved a larger medal haul, but the games that year were less competitive. They were shrouded in controversy and subject to a wide political boycott, with 32 of the eligible 59 countries staying away due to Margaret Thatcher's Government's policy of maintaining sporting links with apartheid South Africa.

In any case, thankfully, this year's games and the Northern Ireland team demonstrated the power of sport as a unifying force. The men and women of the team — some of whom compete for Ireland in the Olympics, others for Great Britain and Northern Ireland — brilliantly represented the people of this part of the world. I hope that that spirit will continue and be encouraged across all our sporting codes. For example, I am heartened that the GAA will soon play at Ravenhill rugby ground for the first time in an all-star event that is being spearheaded by Anto Finnegan to raise much-needed funds for motor neurone disease, which, of course, is a hugely important cause. I hope that that is another sign of the burgeoning relationship between Irish rugby and the GAA, which will hopefully bring the Rugby World Cup to Ireland in 2023.

I also note the participation in the Commonwealth Games of Caroline O'Hanlon, the captain of the Armagh ladies' Gaelic football team. She was a Member of the Northern Ireland netball team that also excelled during the Games, even though they were not medal winners.

As other Members have said, there was great teamwork from the Northern Irish competitors at

the games, in particular from the bowlers, who came home with two team medals. That teamwork also extended to the preparation for the boxing ring and, as many others have said, culminated in our boxers picking up three more boxing medals than their previous best haul.

With such successes from our athletes, I am happy to support the motion and its call for the:

"appropriate training, resources and facilities ... to maximise our medal return",

not just on the Gold Coast in 2018 but in all upcoming global sporting tournaments. I am looking forward to Brazil 2016, when hopefully we will see our former world champion cyclist Martyn Irvine achieve his best, Graeme McDowell and Rory McIlroy make their Olympic debuts and Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlan go for gold.

Gan tuilleadh moille, tá mé an-sásta tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. With that, Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the motion.

Mr B McCrea: I have to say that I think that we are deluding ourselves. I have listened to the rhetoric in the Chamber and the platitudes about how well we did. You really have to say to yourself that we fund 42 sports — 28 elite sports — and if you were to take boxing out of our medal total, you would have precious little return for that.

I commend the proposer of the motion for tabling it. I was quite taken, as I said in Committee, by what Mr Humphrey had to say. There are a number of issues that we have not addressed. Some really important issues have not been taken on board. I refer to the document that is known as SPLISS. Some issues come out here when we talk about pillar one, finance:

"There is a reasonable argument to suggest that Northern Ireland subsidises the rest of the UK as it benefits less from UK Sport funding than other nations, notably England."

What is the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure going to do about that, as she has been exhorted to do by her party colleagues?

The document continues:

"There is an acceptance that the funding for elite sport in Northern Ireland is modest compared with other nations and does not

necessarily match Northern Ireland's ambitions in sport."

That is a failure in our structural approach. Our:

"inability to generate funding from other sources such as sponsorship and media rights"

is also a problem. One of the key issues that we could deal with is, I think, the point that Mr Humphrey made — he certainly made it in Committee. It says in the document in front of us here — our strategic approach:

"Many recognised governing bodies in Northern Ireland are actually branches of an all-Ireland or UK national governing body and therefore may present challenges for the planning, coordination and delivery of their sport."

That is the elephant in the room: we have no strategic vision for sport in this land. We have all-Ireland bodies, UK bodies, different bodies, but there is no great vision to take us forward. All we get is empty rhetoric where people try to cling on to the coat-tails of people who succeed in sport, largely because of their own ability.

4.45 pm

There are some suggestions for improvement in this document:

"Greater certainty in the planning process as DCAL and its non-departmental funded bodies are often subject to funding uncertainty from Exchequer funds and also National Lottery ticket sales."

"Greater incentives... to contribute funding to elite sport."

These are issues that DCAL ought to be taking on board. I am really interested to see what support the Minister can gather around the Executive table, because I realise that she can only deal with what she is given. We need to match our rhetoric with financial support.

I mentioned some other issues that I think that we need to address in this debate:

"Breadth of investment in Olympic/Paralympic sport; Commonwealth sport; and culturally significant sports means that policy has a broad rather than a narrow focus."

I think that we need some strategic leadership here, and I hope that the Minister will be able to provide some clarity on that. I also hope that she will tell us how she will tackle one of the other weaknesses brought forward:

"Processes can be perceived as being over bureaucratic and time consuming."

These are issues that we ought to be able to deal with.

The proposer of the motion mentioned wider social objectives linked to public health and obesity in his opening remarks, and those are addressed in Sport Matters. However, sport is not yet seen as an investment; it is seen as a luxury. We have to realise that sport should be something that we invest in because we want to achieve other objectives.

Others touched on the benefit of sport and what it can do. Just look at the passion that we saw when we watched the Ryder Cup, or when Ulster plays rugby, or when I watched the team triathlon come in sixth at Glasgow. There is a breakdown in our society; there is a growth in the importance of "me". Sport should be able to counter that, but sport is not being supported.

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

Mr B McCrea: Rather than have these meaningless debates, let us see real, strategic vision; let us see leadership for Northern Ireland; let us see what we can do. I would really like to see the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure step up to the mark, because Northern Ireland needs it.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have listened carefully to the debate and the views expressed on the motion. It is clear that there is widespread support for our local athletes, and I thank Members for providing me with the opportunity to once again congratulate the athletes, coaches, officials and families who were involved in the 2014 Commonwealth Games. I have had the pleasure of meeting those people on a few occasions, particularly when they departed Belfast for the games in July and again when I visited the athletes' village in Glasgow. On those occasions, I saw at first-hand the individual commitment of each of the athletes and the support that they received from the network around them. Those athletes are certainly deserving of the tributes that have come their way today.

Much has been made of the boxers' success, and rightly so: winning nine medals out of 12 is no mean feat. It is clear that there are significant interests here today to ensure that our athletes, current and future, receive appropriate training, resources and facilities in order to maximise medal achievements in all future competitions. Some of those have been mentioned here today: the next Commonwealth Games in 2018 on the Gold Coast in Australia and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016. I believe that the motion is worthy, and I wholeheartedly support it.

The motion also calls on the Assembly to recognise particularly the success of the boxing team and its achievements.

I do not think that any of us are in any doubt that boxing is the leading light in our Commonwealth sports and, indeed, across all sports competitions. The achievements are all the more remarkable when we consider the poor facilities — they are among the worst — that we have to offer our sportspeople. They achieve these successes despite the conditions that they train in. My Department's current investment in boxing will go some way towards addressing some of these issues, but it merely scratches the surface.

The motion also calls on DCAL to reassess other sports where we may excel in future games. On Tuesday 16 September, I advised the House that I had met the chief executive of Sport NI to discuss plans to review the performance of all our athletes in the Commonwealth Games. Sport NI will carry out debriefs with all the governing bodies of the sports that had athletes competing in the games. It will also talk individually to each athlete, the coaches and their support personnel. It will examine what worked well, what needs to be improved and what had a negative impact on performance. The debriefing process will be completed by the end of this year, hopefully by early December.

When all the information is collected, a review will be undertaken by Sport NI. The review will be used as an appraisal of performances at recent games and as a mechanism to identify the changes and improvements that are required. The review is scheduled to take place in January and February 2015, and it will allow Sport NI to make evidence-based recommendations to the relevant sports' governing bodies and the Commonwealth Games Council. The review will also set targets for the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Australia. It is therefore crucial that the

governing bodies involved engage completely in this process with Sport NI.

It is really important, especially in light of the reducing resources that we all face, that the governing bodies focus investment on the athletes capable of delivering a return on that investment. This will, no doubt, require difficult decisions to be made by the sports' governing bodies in the future. They will need to be objective and strong in their assessments, and I know that Sport NI will provide the necessary support and guidance to them as they go through the process. To improve athlete performance across all our competitive sports in the future, it is vital that any identified actions that are required are taken by the relevant governing bodies and their partners. The motion calls for appropriate training and for resources and facilities to be put in place to ensure that we maximise our medal return in 2018, and that is what we intend to do.

In Sport Matters — our strategy for sport and physical recreation — there are 26 high-level targets that set out key strategic priorities for sport and physical education. The strategy is used by DCAL and Sport NI to inform and prioritise investment, including in our high-performance athletes. Sport Matters targets are set around three clear themes of participation, performance and places, all of which provide the building blocks for us to develop systems to help our current and aspiring competitive sportspeople. Preparing athletes for major competitions is not about just a few elements of this strategy. Successful systems for athletes' performance must also include a range of important factors throughout the life of an athlete, namely encouraging initial participation in sport; having effective talent identification systems; having great coaches who will inspire and mentor athletes; providing crucial training and nutrition advice; providing access to suitable training facilities; and having effective governing bodies that will drive athletes forward, which is imperative. We have already achieved many of these factors; however, we recognise that there is much more to do. Sport NI is working closely with the governing bodies, the athletes, coaches and their support personnel who have Olympic and Paralympic aspirations for Rio in 2016 and Tokyo in 2020. As part of this, the Sports Institute at Jordanstown does an excellent job through the provision of direct technical support to sports and athletes as they prepare for major competitions.

Sport NI also provides financial support to sports' governing bodies through its performance-focused and athlete investment

programmes. Over the last two financial years, governing bodies that had athletes preparing for 2014 received funding from Sport NI of just over £2.3 million. That is substantial funding. In the same period, total funding of almost £834,000 was provided under the Sport NI athlete investment programme to athletes preparing for 2014. I anticipate that continued Exchequer and lottery funding will be provided through Sport NI to support athletes' preparation for future competitions. There will be a focus on 2018 and the Gold Coast games, and that focus will be shaped by the outcomes of Sport NI's review of the Glasgow games. In 2013, the Sport Matters monitoring group received a report detailing the actions around this target. It agreed that the target had been met and that facilities had been either newly developed or upgraded to support the player and athlete. The group toured nearly 20 projects that may be deemed as directly contributing to the PL23 target, including the 50-metre pool in north Down and new or upgraded facilities for boxing, which have yet to be completed, cycling, basketball, hockey, athletics, rowing and many more sports. However, it was also determined that, although that target had been partially achieved, there was evidence of significant additional need and demand for performance facilities to support sport governing bodies.

As part of that, Sport NI is working in partnership with councils to deliver a sports facilities strategy along with the 11 council areas. The documents will take into account the existing facilities and the demand for new ones. We must, however, where possible, continue the process of developing our sporting infrastructure so that we all have the opportunity to inspire and help those who want to compete. If they do so, they need all our support to realise their full talent and potential. Sport Matters recognises that there is a requirement for additional funding from not just government but stakeholders, including councils. There is much more to be done. As Minister for sport, I remain committed to ensuring that we do all that we can.

I welcome the fact that all Members spoke very positively about our athletes. They made special mention of the boxers, which is right. Mention was also made of all the other roles that we need to fulfil to ensure that the athletes have their opportunity. The role of rugby sevens and hockey was mentioned. As Nelson McCausland and Michael McGimpsey said, this is something that predates us all, but I intend to send a transcript of the debate to the governing bodies of those sports to try to ensure that we have full inclusion. It is regrettable that past athletes missed their opportunity to perform.

I also acknowledge that, despite the personal bests that they achieved, some of the athletes fell short of what they expected of themselves and were very disappointed. I was delighted, even from the tone of the debate, that it was not personal, because those athletes are children and young people with families supporting them. They need our encouragement to participate fully in future competitions.

I welcome the debate and all the contributions that Members have made. There is much more to be done, particularly on the investment that we need in infrastructure for things such as velodromes, track and field, and strength and conditioning. It is great that we hopefully have three stadia that will be developed for those sports to avail themselves of opportunities. There is much more to be done, but I welcome the fact that we have had the debate today.

Mr Hilditch: I add my support to the motion and acknowledge the many positive contributions made by Members this afternoon. I join in the congratulations to all who were successful, compliment those who came close and sympathise with the participants where situations and conditions may have gone against them on the day.

The achievements of the boxing team certainly carried Northern Ireland in the medal table. It was perhaps a wise strategy by the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council not to announce targets prior to the games, thus not pressurising athletes and building expectations. The Northern Ireland medal haul improved from four years ago in Delhi and was only three short of that from the Edinburgh games in 1986.

As a country, we have notably produced talented sportspeople. We seem to have that in-built psyche and DNA for cultivating talent, whether it be in amateur boxing or professional golf. Today's debate has again highlighted that. Indeed, there are many Monday mornings in the House on which the Matter of the Day is on a sports-related topic, where credit has been given and Members have spoken with pride.

It is a quick turnaround to the next games. Three and a half years of preparation can fly by, and today's motion certainly places the Department and the current Minister in pole position to ensure that the appropriate training, resources and facilities are in place to maximise any medal haul in 2018.

5.00 pm

Unfortunately, we are having financial difficulties outlined to us daily. Yesterday, I attended a departmental briefing to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee on the monitoring rounds. Perhaps, our expectation of delivery and our confidence in the ability to deliver resources and facilities are not as high as they should be. However, we must look beyond the barriers, and, setting aside the Commonwealth Games targets, we cannot lose sight of sport as one of the vehicles that constantly breaks down barriers in our society and has a major effect on other Departments, such as Health and Education, as Members mentioned.

We must remind ourselves that over half of our population is involved in sports-related activities. That covers those with disabilities, elite performers and those who wish to spectate socially. We have many unsung heroes in our sporting community, and not everyone gets the chance to fill the back pages, lift a trophy or covet a medal. There are hundreds who work away in the background, are dedicated to their sport, contribute to a lasting legacy and encourage others to follow.

Today's motion reminds me of a link between the Commonwealth Games and my home town. In 1998, cricket was introduced as a one-off to the games. Northern Ireland entered a side, even though cricket is usually played internationally on an all-Ireland basis. One local lad from Carrickfergus, Ryan Eagleson, was given the opportunity to compete in the games. That added to his experience and career, and he went on to represent Ireland in 65 internationals. He became a cricketing development officer, and he is now manager of the under-19s side. This year, 16 years later, he helped to lead Carrick to an unprecedented four-trophy haul, including the all-Ireland National Cup, the Ulster Senior League Section 1, the Ulster Shield and the T20 Trophy. Ryan has been an inspiration to local cricketers and is typical of the dedication, enthusiasm and will to succeed shown by many of our sportsmen and women. That is a story that could be repeated in many of the towns and villages across the Province, as those unsung heroes build that legacy.

It would be remiss of me to not revisit the issue of community sports hubs, which has been raised many times before, if we are looking to resource our facilities. I have stated before that sports provision impacts on health, education and the social economy. We can look closely at our neighbours in Scotland and, as was mentioned, how they have maximised their resources with community sports hubs. We are too small a country to provide facilities for

individual needs. We must look at bringing together different strands of participation, from elite to community and leisure.

To that end, it is crucial that the new councils and the local government structure have an important part to play. With the new councils in place from next April, a joined-up approach is needed. I will leave it to the experts to decide whether Sport NI will be the conduit to lead that or whether a strategic group will need to be set up with various partners. That is a pending priority as we try to develop our sports facilities.

Turning to the debate, all Members who spoke and the Minister offered their congratulations to the participants in the games. Mr Campbell ably introduced the motion and listed the medallists. He linked future improvement with health issues and the need to tackle obesity and to get greater participation generally. He also sought a strategic plan and used the Scottish model as an example.

Ms McCorley paid tribute to the coaches and the families and friends of the athletes for their support. Again, she linked sport to health and female participation. Ms McKevitt commended all athletes for their commitment and dedication and noted other recent sporting achievements. Mr McGimpsey used his experience in health promotion and talked of the potential in sports like rugby and hockey. Again, he raised the Sandy Row boxing issue. Ms Anna Lo highlighted the public interest in the games and potential venues, which would need a lot of work. Mr Humphrey listed some past medallists and highlighted recent progressive meetings that have taken place on future opportunities. He also mentioned rugby, hockey and representation issues. Mr McMullan outlined commitments from Sport NI and the sports lottery issues, including funding. Mr McCausland highlighted the Northern Ireland brand and the showcasing opportunity that the country has on these occasions. He also mentioned additional participation in rugby and hockey. Mr Bradley said that sport was a unifying force. Mr Basil McCrea, whilst indicating that we were deluding ourselves, highlighted some structural issues and the benefits of upping the ante in the process. The Minister then gave an account of the interaction with the Northern Ireland team; highlighted the success in boxing, without mentioning any investment for it; made a commitment to review performances along with the governing bodies; and gave a commitment to the terms of the motion.

We look forward to the Minister putting some meat on the bones of any review at a later date.

We thank everyone who made a contribution to the debate and commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the tremendous achievement of the entire Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games team at the recent Glasgow games, in particular the boxing team; congratulates all those involved; and calls on the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to urgently reassess other sports that might be expected to excel in the 2018 Commonwealth Games and ensure the appropriate training, resources and facilities are in place to maximise our medal return in 2018.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Sporting Provision: Dungiven

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic shall have 15 minutes, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé breá sásta páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht atrátha seo faoi ionad spóirt faoi dhíon agus áiseanna eile spóirt i nDún Geabhinn agus a cheantar. I am very pleased that my topic was accepted for debate, although that perhaps reflects the anger in the local community about the issue. We had a public meeting in August, and the anger was palpable, so I hope to address some of the outstanding issues that came from that.

First and foremost, I declare an interest as a sports club official, because of my community involvement and because I was part of the management committee of the Dungiven sports pavilion, which is one of the facilities that we are talking about.

Dungiven is rightly famous for its sporting achievements and the wide variety of sporting codes practised in the area, be it athletics, boxing, GAA, soccer, bowls, badminton, handball, tennis, ladies' football, camogie, angling, bocchia, squash, kick-boxing, golf, cycling and, believe it or not, we once had a cricket team as well.

I took exception to what Basil McCrea said about people riding on the coat-tails of some of our better-known sportspeople. Some of them, particularly some of the local ones, cut their teeth in amateur sports, where it was the efforts of volunteers to create the facilities that took them to sporting prowess in later life.

I think particularly of St Canice's ABC in Dungiven, which has had almost an embarrassment of champions down through the years. Probably the most famous is Paul McCloskey, who was Irish, British and European light welterweight champion before he challenged — unfortunately, unsuccessfully — for the WBA light welterweight title in 2012. Likewise, his colleague Eamonn O'Kane — he was not referred to by name earlier — led the

Commonwealth team that went to India in 2010 and returned with, I think, five medals, including three gold.

We also had five all-Ireland winners from the parish of Dungiven on the 1993 team: Brian McGilligan, Richard Ferris, Kieran McKeever, Eugene Kelly and Joe Brolly. Three went on to receive all-star awards. Jim McGroarty played professional soccer for Stoke City in England. In the Paralympics, Denis McMacken was the bowls gold medallist and world Paralympic champion. We also have a double amputee, Ryan O'Connor, a great young sportsman, and I want to touch on what he has done later. Of course, we have Special Olympians who competed for Ireland, such as Damien Murphy in swimming and bowls.

The current council facilities in the area are far from ideal. The council owns one pitch, which for much of the season is swamped. It has no floodlights, and the changing facilities are a converted shipping container. Recent building surveys of the sports pavilion building have shown that it is not fit for purpose. It was built in 1984 and is probably due for demolition and replacement shortly. Indeed, one recent survey showed such a deterioration that the showers, which have not been in use for some time, are a potential source of legionella.

The roof is leaking, the floor is lifting, and the entire building is not disability-accessible. Ryan O'Connor, one of our elite Paralympian athletes, cannot even use the sports pavilion.

Estimates are that it would require £1 million to rectify this. In fairness to the council, it had identified the requirement for new facilities some time ago. With that in mind, Limavady Borough Council commenced work on the delivery of replacement facilities, including the potential purchase of additional land adjacent to the existing buildings. A timeline was rolled out for delivery, including the consultation, which had over 200 people in attendance, including 70 clubs, organisations and individuals. An economic appraisal began this year, and a bid was made to DCAL for £2.5 million. That was agreed and accepted by the statutory transition committee.

In May, the Department of the Environment deemed that projects over £250,000 would need shadow council approval. That happened when the council was on the cusp of appointing a design team. We then had the elections, and, at its July meeting, the Causeway Coast and Glens super-council delayed the project for a one-month moratorium. There was a suggestion of an audit of Causeway Coast and

Glens council facilities, including the Dungiven project.

Last week, an all-party group visited Dungiven and the Limavady borough and was shocked at the provision of facilities. There was a question mark over the costings of the entire project, but, given the commitments under the Programme for Government, the framework document and some newspaper and media speculation about the costings being up to £7 million, I am not sure how they could have come to such a conclusion, given that, at no point, had a design team been appointed. The costings of the design team are much less than that.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Member for giving way. How did DCAL decide to give £2.2 million to a project that has not been costed?

Mr Ó hOisín: In answer to the question from the Member opposite, I think that the bid came from the council. Obviously, the overall spend will be more than £2.5 million, but what I am saying is that the figure of £7 million may or may not prove practical. It may — indeed, it should — come in at a lot less than that.

We also have to consider that it is a capital spend over 25 or 30 years. I know that, during my time in council — I am sure that George Robinson will remember this as well — when we delivered the Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre for £4 million, that worked out at an increase of about 28p a year to our ratepayers over that time. We also delivered the Scroggy Road 3G pitch for £650,000, which was fully funded. This is all part of an ongoing project that we have been trying to deliver. Unfortunately, some people voted against that. Indeed, some of the people who voted against it do not leave the place now and are very pleased with it, but that is enough about that.

There is some talk of legal challenges, which may happen, but I can assure Members that there is huge local anger because of the lack of provision. We should not involve ourselves in zero-sum politics, because equality delayed is equality denied. I believe that it is totally unreasonable —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó hOisín: Yes, go ahead.

Mr Campbell: The Member says that there is a lot of anger. If there have been campaigns for sporting provision, one can understand that people want them to be delivered, but is the anger directed against an audit of provision per

se to try to ensure equitable treatment across the new council, or is the anger directed in some other way?

Mr Ó hOisín: I think that the anger is directed at the dereliction, which has existed for historical reasons, and the fact that we do not have the facilities that we deserve and require. It is unreasonable for the Causeway Coast and Glens council to refuse to allow Limavady Borough Council to appoint a design team. After all, this is not the issuing of a contract; it is costings —

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ó hOisín: Yes, go ahead.

Mr Swann: I am looking for a point of information on the appointment of a design team. If there is the potential for a legal challenge — I think that Sean McGlinchey, a Sinn Féin councillor, mooted that legal challenge — would that delay the appointment of a design team in any way?

5.15 pm

Mr Ó hOisín: I am not sure that I got the meaning of the Member's question. I think that the legal challenge might be on disability access, for a start. or it might be on overall sporting provision. That is where the legal challenge will probably come from.

There is also the aspect of the interdependence of funding for the Rugby Avenue project in Coleraine, so I appeal for all-party unity on the delivery of all those projects for all the people of the new council area. I do not want to see any repeat of the deliberate dereliction of responsibility for the provision of sporting and community facilities. It has not been a very auspicious start for the new council, but I hope that it is not beyond redemption. I welcome the Minister's commitment to all the projects. There is a workshop next Wednesday, 8 October, and we encourage our council colleagues to attend and do as the Minister said, in her reply to an oral question from me on 16 September:

"I imagine that that position should be, and will be, sorted out with local representatives in the new council configuration and, indeed, with officials that are there. When I made my investment to Coleraine Borough Council, I was very clear that it was part of a north-west legacy plan. Maybe the officials there, or even the elected reps, did not fully understand the implications and the import of that. I urge all local representatives,

along with officials from both council areas, to come together to try to get the matter resolved, because proper sporting facilities are required in the Dungiven area." — [Official Report, Vol 97, No 4, p46, col 1].

I hope that other Members concur.

Mr Campbell: As I said to the proposer of the Adjournment debate in my intervention, it is difficult to establish where the anger is directed. I drive past an exhibition of it every day I pass through the town of Dungiven, where a huge banner says, "Dungiven says Yes, but the Causeway Coast and Glens Super Council says No". Of course, there have been a number of very unfortunate comments made by a Sinn Féin councillor, amongst others. They were referred to by Mr Swann. That councillor indicated that, in his view, this was a sectarian decision. I noticed that in the 10 minutes and 30 seconds that Mr Ó hOisín took to propose the debate he did not, on any occasion, mention the S-word. I just wonder whether Sinn Féin has had a rethink. I hope they have, and if so I would welcome it, because I fail to see how trying to establish an audit of sporting provision across the new council area — to establish what is required, where it is required and the best way to deliver it — could be regarded as a sectarian decision. The Member wants to intervene.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. The change of mind perhaps happened when part of that audit was carried out. A visit was made to the facilities in Dungiven and people actually saw the state of the facilities. So, there have certainly been changes of mind.

Mr Campbell: I am not much clearer now on whether there has been a change of mind on the use of the S-word. I thought that I was giving way for the Member to establish that, but I am afraid that he went off on a tangent.

The bottom line here is that every public representative wants to ensure that there is sporting provision across his or her constituency. As regards this Adjournment debate, that applies across East Londonderry. No one wants to see any sporting discipline, group of people, village or town denied sporting facilities. One would imagine that the audit will show what has been provided and where it has been provided. Hopefully, it will show that there are other locations that equally need provision. I hope that, at the conclusion of the debate, there will be consensus that sporting provision should be made across the district, irrespective of who the people are, as has been the case in

the past. I noted what Mr Ó hOisín said in relation to my intervention about where the anger is directed.

You could conclude from his response that the anger of local people in Dungiven was directed against what is a nationalist council in Limavady for not providing what it is they are now trying to get through the new super-council. I was seeking to establish where the anger was directed. Was it at the decision to have an audit? It does not appear to be. Yet, he said that it was directed at those whose delivery previously had been some sort of historical underachievement. Of course, the people who deliver in local government are Limavady Borough Council. The largest party in Limavady Borough Council is Sinn Féin. Therefore, I do not know whether we have today a Sinn Féin MLA criticising Sinn Féin councillors for not providing sporting provision in Dungiven, but that is what it sounds like.

Hopefully, we can get to an end where we do have that consensus and there is a determination to reach a position across the constituency and the Causeway Coast and Glens District Council area where that audit is carried out and completed and that the end result of that is equality of provision right across the council area for everyone irrespective of their religious or political belief.

Mr Dallat: I live in the neighbouring council area. I have a lot of sympathy for the people of Dungiven who apparently did not get the nod to go ahead with the design exercise. That is all that it was. Cathal Ó hOisín, in his introduction, mentioned all those famous people in Dungiven. I just want to remind him that we have Hannah Shields, who climbed Everest, and Martin O'Neill, who, of course, needs no explanation to anyone. Every community is proud of their people, particularly their young people, and they want to see the best provision for them. In recent times, because of health issues and so on, sport and such activities have become lifelong. The centre in Dungiven certainly did that.

I know that all of us could regret the past. I spent 33 years in Coleraine Borough Council. I hope that I do not cause offence by saying that it was unionist dominated. Every inch had to be fought for. There were no gifts.

Mr Campbell: You were the mayor.

Mr Dallat: I picked up Gregory Campbell saying that I was the mayor. The council came into

being in 1973. It is finishing next year. In that span, there has been one nationalist mayor.

Mr Campbell: How many councillors were there?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Dallat: I worried about Limavady and Dungiven in particular when the three models were mentioned; the seven-, 11- and 15-council models. I realised that if the seven- or 11-council model was chosen, a nationalist-controlled council was going into a completely new environment. I pleaded with Alex Attwood to support the 15-council model. At the Executive meeting — I hate to say this, but it is true — Martin McGuinness, after 10 minutes of debate, forced a vote, and we were left with the 11-council model. It means that actually only two councils switched — if we need to talk in those terms. They were Limavady Borough Council and Moyle District Council. Both happened to be in the new Causeway Coast and Glens District Council area. I was actually glad to hear Gregory say the name because apparently they cannot even agree on that. No; they cannot agree on that. The "Glens" part somehow causes problems to them and they need to get "Coleraine" into it.

With my 33 years' experience in Coleraine Borough Council, I would not wish that on anyone. Sporting facilities in Coleraine included 22 soccer pitches and no Gaelic games pitches. Only when legal action was threatened did that change. I can tell you that when the councils began to be a little more generous toward GAA clubs, it changed the whole atmosphere of the place. I am sure that the Minister would agree with me that sport is something that should bring people together. My God, it has in recent times. *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: All remarks must be made through the Chair, please.

Mr Dallat: I just find it impossible to accept that the same individuals who sat on Limavady Borough Council supported the project going to the design stage, and then, when they got in with their new cronies in Coleraine, they changed their minds. I would not call anybody a Judas — God forbid, I would never do that — but that is exactly what they did. They put one hand up to support the project in Limavady, and then the other one. You can say what you like, but that is what they did. That is an awfully bad start for a new council, and it certainly did not do anything for the type of unity that we need across the new council area. I do not want to

see the new council being a microcosm of what went before.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he think that the audit that the Causeway Coast and Glens District Council — I will say it as well, John; I have no problem with it — is carrying out is a good thing or a bad thing?

Mr Dallat: I am really grateful to my former colleague from Coleraine Borough Council. I have very fond memories of him sitting on the other side, barging across at me. You need to bear in mind that the shadow council started voting on single projects. Then, when it got down to the last three, which included the Dungiven project, it had a multiple vote. I know that I am being a suspicious person. Why do you think that happened? I will take your advice not to talk across the Floor, although it is very tempting to do it.

Adrian intervened there. Of course audits are very important, but this was not committing the new council to anything; it was only asking it to proceed to design stage. It was not being asked to pay any money; the money was already provided by the old council, which is going out of business next April.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. I thought that Mr McQuillan's question was fairly straightforward: whether Mr Dallat thought that the audit was a good thing or a bad thing. I posed that question to Mr Ó hOisín, but I did not get a response either. I thought that Mr Dallat might have responded about whether he thought that it was a good thing.

Mr Dallat: I would be very surprised if Mr Campbell did not think that his colleague on that Bench was talking an awful lot of sense, whether he was or not.

Audits are very important. Of course they are, but this was stopping a project that had already begun and that several years of planning had gone into. That is the difference. Why pick on it? Why pick on Dungiven? Was there something about that town that they did not like?

Mr McQuillan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: No. You have had your say, and I will have my couple of minutes of glory as well.

I want to conclude by saying to the ordinary people outside —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Dallat: — whether Protestant, Catholic or of no faith whatsoever, that this is not the way forward.

Mr Swann: First, I will explain to Members and the Minister why I am here today. It comes into the new Causeway Coast and Glens District Council area, which, as it will include Moyle and Ballymoney, will cover part of my constituency.

Mr Campbell: You can say it, too.

Mr Swann: I can say it, too. I have no shame nor embarrassment in saying it.

I think it was back in May when the Member for East Antrim Oliver McMullan brought an Adjournment debate about leisure facilities in Moyle. I thought that this would be along the same lines. At that stage, unfortunately, the Environment Minister responded because somehow they had put that responsibility under Environment rather than DCAL, even though it was about sporting provision. We got round that debate anyway. One of the things that I realised between that debate and today's, and which I think is important in regard to the audit, was that the motion that Sinn Féin brought about the lack of sporting provision and facilities in Moyle and the glens was on the same basis as they are talking about the lack of sporting provision in Dungiven. I thought that that is where an audit of the entire Causeway Coast and Glens area would bring those two problems together. At that stage, by conducting that audit, which I think was proposed by my party colleague Councillor William McCandless, the entire sporting provision would be looked at.

When you look at some of the recommendations of Sport NI, there are some areas in the Causeway Coast and glens that are oversubscribed with pitches and facilities. We should look towards an equality —

5.30 pm

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. I want to refer to something that was said earlier. A number of the projects went through and were approved, so what was the problem with the remaining ones? What were the issues there? Did they have to be seen, especially when they came from the old councils and not the new council, and, as others alluded to, at no cost to the new council?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for bringing that up. It also explains another reason why I am here today. It was not just Dungiven that was stopped. That should be made clear. It is not the victimisation of Dungiven that this debate should be focused on. The four projects that were stopped were Dungiven, Benone, the Riada playing fields and the Joey Dunlop centre in Ballymoney in my constituency, which comes under the Causeway Coast and Glens District Council. This is not about nationalists or unionists stopping one facility or another; it was about establishing an audit of a number of new councils coming together —

Mr Dallat: Will the Member spare me just a moment?

Mr Swann: Certainly.

Mr Dallat: One of the features of the Dungiven project was that the funding from various sources was time-limited. In fact, I think that it was limited to September. Refusing to allow it to go to design stage put the project in jeopardy.

Mr Swann: That is the point that I was trying to make to Mr Ó hOisín earlier. When it was put in jeopardy, do you start to talk about legal proceedings? As far as I am aware, the audit concludes this month. I will stand corrected if any Member in the House can inform me of anything different. The funding being in jeopardy is the big thing. I am glad that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure is here because I think that the DCAL funding was part of it.

I do not think that anybody here opposes support for sport; Mr Ó hOisín will know that from our time in the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. When it came to the provision of libraries in rural communities, he fought for Dungiven as much as I fought for Kells, and we fought for a similar cause at that stage. The provision of sport across the entire Causeway Coast and Glens is where the audit should be based and where we should be focusing for the ratepayers and the constituents in that area.

One thing that was highlighted — I know that Mr Campbell referred to the banner — I would almost take it personally that the decision by my council colleague was referred to as sectarian. If anybody here knows William McCandless, they will know that the man is far from sectarian. That is something that I want to clarify.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Member for bringing the debate. I will give you a wee bit of background to the debate, but, before I start, I have to say that it tells you something about the debate today when we have Gregory Campbell calling for consensus and Mr Dallat and Mr Ó hOisín using the S-word. There is something powerfully wrong about that.

Mr Ó hOisín: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. At no point was the S-word used in my supposition.

Mr McQuillan: It should not matter whether it is Catholic or Protestant; it is a sporting facility that we are talking about here. John Dallat is the guy who brought it into the conversation.

A feasibility study was conducted by Otium Leisure Consultancy on behalf of Limavady Borough Council in 2012. Proposals therein included three main elements: the refurbishment or development of Dungiven Sports Pavilion; the relocation of an indoor community sports facility to an alternative site; and the need for and development of an outdoor sports facility. The report was intended not to identify a preferred option for development but to put forward a range of solutions. Its basis included a consultation with the local sports club and community groups. It claimed that a consultation meeting was attended by 160 people representing 21 sports clubs and 23 community groups. Local sports clubs have a membership of 3,200, so it was not that well attended if you take that into consideration. Seven options were outlined, ranging in capital outlay from £1.95 million to £7.22 million. It said that a full economic appraisal was required to further test the options and identify the preferred solution. It went on to suggest observations in its conclusions. Those include the assessment of need — demand clearly demonstrates the need — for indoor sports and community facilities and outdoor sports facilities. That points to options that deliver indoor and outdoor facilities on one or separate sites. It also recommended that the site at Ballyquin Road/Main Street could be enhanced with the inclusion of the ground that has the PSNI station on it presently.

We move forward to this year and to the Causeway Coast and Glens District Council. A capital workshop held in Flowerfield on 16 July recommended that the new council would have a capital spend programme of £8.8 million. The £7.1 million version of the Dungiven scheme came before the new shadow council on 24 July — it has not been costed, but it is still £7.1 million; I do not know where that came from — at its second meeting, along with other capital

schemes from across the legacy councils. It was decided that decisions on all capital projects should be suspended for one month to enable officers to have more time to present more complete information on existing leisure provision in the area, other pipeline projects of significance to the new council area, population densities, travel times, demand and the impact that such schemes would have on rates etc. It was implied that a significant DCAL grant would be lost if the decision to proceed to the £250,000 design stage was not taken there and then. Our party felt that there was not enough information available to make an informed decision and that, on the face of it, spending £7 million to serve a population of 7,800 in Dungiven and district was disproportionate. There are modern leisure facilities in Limavady, Londonderry and Maghera, each 12 miles or less from Dungiven. Portstewart has a similar-sized population but has no council sporting leisure facilities, and we are not seeking to spend a similar sum on provision there.

Sinn Féin led calls for a special emergency meeting of Limavady Borough Council to discuss the situation — the meeting was held on 5 August — and of the Causeway council on 7 August. Ms Hickey endorsed the notice, giving Sinn Féin the eight names that it required to get the meeting called. It was agreed that decisions on all major capital projects not yet in contract should be deferred until October, giving the council officers time to put together a full appraisal of the current sport and leisure provision in the new council area and the impact of proposed projects on existing and other planned provision. The review would also examine population densities and travel times.

It should be noted that, when the decision to postpone making a commitment to the Dungiven scheme was taken, extension and improvement projects at the Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre were also postponed to allow the council to take a fully informed decision from objective and relevant information. This is good governance and a responsible attitude to ratepayers' money. It also caused some pain in our party grouping, as representatives from Ballymoney were keen to see the Joey Dunlop centre plan taken forward.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McQuillan: Yes.

Mr Campbell: The Member is outlining what Mr Swann outlined, which is that some of the other projects were also put on hold pending the audit. Is he aware of any campaigns or

accusations or banners being put up at any of the other locations, all of which require sporting provision as well? I am not aware of that; perhaps the Member could outline it if he is aware of it.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I do not know of any at all, so it is very odd that it is just Dungiven that has taken this stand.

The proposed scheme at Dungiven has not been refused; it is on hold pending completion of the sport and leisure facilities and services strategy development work for the new council area. The same type of work on leisure and sports projects in the Ballymoney and Coleraine areas is similarly on hold. It is not about Catholics and Protestants; it is about all the sporting facilities. There is nothing sectarian about it at all.

Mr Ó hOisín: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he realise that the Dungiven project was not only attracting moneys from a different source — namely DCAL, through the City of Culture legacy moneys — but had money set aside in Limavady Borough Council for the same projects? It was much further advanced than many of the other projects, including some of those that received approval.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Member for that, but I am not sure what projects received the go-ahead on that night. I am talking about the three main projects, the three that will take up the most spending. We also have to be mindful of areas such as Moyle, which has no sport and leisure facilities at all. They will be looking for help to build something there. I also know that Loughgiel GAA is looking to the Causeway council to help it to develop its ground.

As I said, the total capital spend for the Causeway council is £8.8 million. If it spends £7.2 million on the Dungiven project, the rest of the region will lose out. There is no doubt in my mind or the mind of anybody else who has visited the site that Dungiven needs some sort of facility, but it is about getting agreement on the facility that is required.

Mr G Robinson: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to speak in the debate. First, Dungiven has leisure facilities, and I will not argue that some facilities need to be updated. In March 2013, when I was a member of Limavady Borough Council, I opposed such large expenditure on a replacement facility in Dungiven. If that project had gone through, it would have cost ratepayers in the Limavady

area a substantial rates hike. Secondly, I will tell the Assembly of some facility provision that exists within a four-mile radius of Dungiven. There are the Gortnahey GAA pitches; the Burnfoot pitches; the Curragh Road football pitches; the Curragh Road play facilities; St Canice GAC in Dungiven town; the Drumrane Road GAC pitch; the O'Brien's state-of-the-art GAC facilities and council-provided play area; St Mary's Banagher GAC in Feeny, which has just received planning permission for an extension; and the main leisure centre in Dungiven town, to name but a few. Does that sound like an area — Dungiven and its hinterlands — in which there is a lack of sports facility provision for a population of approximately 3,000?

The so-called sectarian decision, as it was referred to by a Sinn Féin councillor, to put on hold the redevelopment of a new replacement facility at a cost of approximately £7.2 million to ratepayers was not, in fact, sectarian but one of a series of projects deferred by the newly elected Causeway Coast and Glens District Council owing to capital costs. Those also included projects in Ballymoney and Coleraine that have been deferred until October of this year. How that project was deemed sectarian completely baffles me.

I believe that sport offers great benefits for the population, and facilities are required to ensure maximum engagement. However, those facilities cannot be built regardless of cost, especially when there is an economic crisis created by the party of the Member who proposed the topic and the SDLP. Perhaps the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure will state where the proposed grant aid will come from, as her budget will undoubtedly be cut as a result of the current political posturing. If there is no grant aid, the likelihood of the project reaching fruition will diminish. My concern is that, although other suitable options for the redevelopment of Dungiven leisure centre were presented, the most expensive option was pushed through by a nationalist-controlled council with little thought of the economic consequences to the local ratepayers.

I believe that a workable and sensible accommodation on the size and price of the project can eventually be reached when other overall projects throughout the new Causeway Coast and Glens District Council area are appraised. Let Sinn Féin and the SDLP be positive for once and bring the matter to a conclusion by behaving responsibly and by reaching consensus for an area that, in my opinion, is reasonably well catered for with sports facilities.

From a constituency point of view, I have no problem with facilities in any part of the Limavady borough area, but, in the present economic climate, with so many constituents unemployed, the new council has a massive task and needs to be prudent when making decisions on the whole area's needs, economic and sporting. The facilities that I mentioned are just the facilities in the Dungiven area.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Gabhaim buíochas le Cathal Ó hOisín as an díospóireacht. I thank Cathal Ó hOisín for bringing forward the Adjournment debate to the House and the five other Members who contributed to the debate. All the contributors spoke about the need for facilities in the new council area. I will bank that, because we need to move forward. I appreciate the fact that Robin Swann, through representing other aspects of the council, contributed to the debate, but, for me, this is primarily around the capital investment legacy of the City of Culture. I might not go into detail about projects in his constituency, but that is not to say that I am oblivious or agnostic about them, because I am not.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly.

5.45 pm

Mr Swann: I think that Mr Ó hOisín said that this was connected to the Coleraine project. Just for clarity, what is the timeline on the funding for the legacy projects?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I imagine that the capital needs arising from the City of Culture in the city of Derry and the surrounding areas of Coleraine, Limavady, Dungiven and Strabane will not only come to the end of this mandate but, potentially, go into the next. Given that money is not flush, we may need to prudently organise and plan around having those facilities fulfilled if we can.

Mr McQuillan: Thank you, Minister, for giving way. Do you not agree that the Causeway Coast and Glens council is doing that? It is being prudent by asking for this audit and being careful.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am trying to be generous, and I hope that that is the case. Coming out of this debate, very soon, I will ask Limavady and Coleraine councils and the Causeway Coast and Glens shadow council to come together for

a meeting with me and my officials and their officials and elected representatives. I think that we need to assure each other that we are serious about sports provision regardless of where it comes from. It needs to be on the basis of need and not creed. So, if we are all agreed on that, that is a good way forward. I could lift a whole pile of stuff on sports provision in each of the constituencies that some of the sporting codes have brought themselves without the help of Sport NI or the lottery. That is not a good thing, but the fact is that, despite what was said about the population there, the population is growing. We have all been involved in debates about sporting provision, and we had one recently about the Commonwealth Games and even a velodrome. There is a wee bit of 'Field of Dreams' here: build it and they will come. You have to inspire people to become physically active, and you have to provide access to participation for them. If we can agree that that is a good way forward, we need to move forward.

People are suspicious about labels, and, if they feel that someone is potentially using bureaucracy to score points or potentially to be sectarian or to exclude, even if they are proved wrong, no one has the right to say that they have no right to say that even if they disagree. So, people have a right. Equally, I have a right to say to John Dallat, who I have huge respect for, without being patronising, that the Executive meeting that John described that Alex Attwood was at is not the same one that I was at. I will say no more than that.

The issue is that we have an opportunity. I want to go to my colleagues in the Executive as well, because it will involve working with my colleague Mark Durkan. I want to take the opportunity to wish him and Anne all the best on the birth of their baby daughter.

Comhghairdeas daoibh. I want to talk to and work with Mark on planning what we need to do. I want to work with Mervyn Storey now in DSD, and, indeed, I want to work with other Departments. The bulk of this money will, hopefully, come from DCAL, with Executive colleague support.

Let us be honest: in that whole constituency over decades, there has not been the investment that it was entitled to. There has not been, and my constituency and other constituencies can also claim that. By claiming it, we throw it out and walk away. We need to do something with it. With the councils coming together, I do think that we have an opportunity to provide sport and physical activities, but we need to look at this with a can-do attitude. Two and a half million pounds is no mean feat, and

£1.5 million in Coleraine is no mean feat. We are looking at Strabane, Derry and the outskirts in-between. I went and visited cricket facilities in Magheramason and other areas. I believe that the work that is done through sports is fantastic and needs support, but I do not think that our constituents need us coming here with big bust out crying faces and scoring political points. OK, stuff happened, and we need to move forward. In moving forward, the test for us all is this: what can we do?

I have visited Coleraine, Dungiven, Limavady and many areas in the constituency. There is a need for sporting facilities. How much it will cost and what those needs are for this mandate and future mandates is something that we need to work through, but, as sure as the day is long, there will be sporting facilities in those constituencies. Nobody is getting dragged to the table, but we can come with a collegiate approach from officials in the council areas, elected representatives and DCAL officials. We will have a meeting and work out what we need to do, where we need to go and how, collectively, we can provide constituents in the north-west with sporting facilities that are fit for purpose. The population in the area is growing, and doing that will provide a good stamp. It will be a stamp of value showing that there has been investment, and I believe that it will not only provide local employment, in the construction and post-construction phases, but will hopefully give people an opportunity to be healthier. It will provide a further opportunity for people, in that it has been proven that investment attracts more investment.

I welcome the debate, but, for me, the challenge is what we do next, and I am looking forward to working with you to achieve those facilities in the north-west.

Adjourned at 5.51 pm.



Published by Authority of the Northern Ireland Assembly,
Belfast: The Stationery Office

and available from:

Online
www.tsoshop.co.uk

Mail, Telephone, Fax & E-mail

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PO Box 29, Norwich, NR3 1GN
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ISSN 1463-7162

Daily Editions: Single copies £5, Annual subscriptions £325
Bound Volumes of Debates are issued periodically during the session: Single copies: £90

Printed in Northern Ireland by The Stationery Office Limited
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