



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Priorities for Youth: DE Briefing

19 September 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Trevor Lunn
Miss Michelle McIlveen
Mr Sean Rogers
Mr Pat Sheehan

Witnesses:

Mrs Cathy Galway	Department of Education
Mr Oliver McKearney	Department of Education
Mrs Julie Stephenson	Department of Education
Miss Linda Wilson	Department of Education

The Deputy Chairperson: With us from the Department are Linda Wilson, the director of families and communities; Julie Stephenson, the head of youth and schools in the community team; Cathy Galway, the head of the early years team; and Oliver McKearney from the early years team. Thank you for coming today. Will you make your presentation and give us some time for questions after that?

Miss Linda Wilson (Department of Education): OK. Thank you very much. Members will have received advance copies of the consultation document, and a briefing paper that provides a summary of the draft priorities for youth policy and the arrangements for public consultation.

The Department has a statutory duty to provide youth services. Youth work, as part of education, is recognised as an important part of a coherent package of education services for all children and young people. Youth services are available to all young people. However, they can be particularly relevant to young people who are at risk of disengaging from society; those who become disaffected at school; those who are at risk of offending; those who could become non-stakeholders in their communities; and those who are affected adversely by the legacy of the Troubles.

The key priorities for the Department are raising standards; closing the performance gap; and increasing access and equity. Youth services represent a significant financial investment, and the key question for the Department is this: how can we make the best use of those resources to support our key priorities and complement and support other very valuable funded youth work?

The 2005-08 youth work strategy needed to be reviewed and updated. Therefore, the Department embarked on a fundamental review of youth service provision to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of young people. The review process incorporated an extensive pre-consultation; engagement with key stakeholders; consideration of inspectorate findings; and an analysis of a broad range of evidence and statistical information. The outcome was a new proposed policy framework that, hopefully, will provide the impetus for continuing improvement across the youth sector.

The Priorities for Youth policy aims to provide a clear sense of purpose and focus to the added value that youth work brings to the education of young people. The five priorities and the key actions proposed will ensure that youth work contributes to the DE vision for education and is provided in response to the assessed need for a youth work intervention.

Key proposals include greater focus on a structured planning process, with three-yearly regional youth development plans implemented by annual youth development plans and developed in conjunction with stakeholders; and a sharper focus on disadvantage, with youth funding based on an assessment of need and allocated on a proportionate basis to the level of disadvantage experienced by young people.

Four distinct age bands are proposed: four to eight, nine to 13, 14 to 18 and 19 to 21. In line with the thinking around the greater need for early intervention, the priority age ranges will be nine to 13 and 14 to 18. Provision for 22- to 25-year-olds will be only where there is a compelling and evidenced need.

There will be a renewed focus on active and evidenced participation of young people at local, sub-regional and regional levels. The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will develop a model for strengthening participation and will provide access to a small grants programme for young people to administer grants to other young people. There will be a clear focus on the delivery of agreed outcomes, and statutory and voluntary organisations will report against agreed proportionate outcomes set out in approved plans. Regional funding will be capped at 10% and will complement and support local provision.

Following the publication of the draft Priorities for Youth policy on 17 September, the consultation will run until 10 December. We are keen to ensure that we consult with a wide range of organisations and individuals within and outside the sector. Arrangements are being made for a wide range of consultation events, including some that will be specifically for children and young people. Subject to the outcome of the public consultation and the Minister's final approval, it is the intention to publish the final policy in spring 2013.

The Priorities for Youth policy will be implemented in a phased approach. The detail is being considered, but our aim will be to ensure that there is a smooth transition to the new arrangements. Most importantly, young people and youth workers across the voluntary and statutory sectors will play a key role in the development of plans to implement the policy.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you very much indeed. Everything behind this is vital. As we saw from yesterday's Working with Youth programme upstairs, they really want to be part of everything that is going on up here, but we have to find a way of pulling them all together. From my point of view, there is a whole mass of concerns and questions about the paper and what you said. That does not mean that I am against it, necessarily, but there are lots of things that I want to find out more about. One big question is about ESA and whether we are getting it. Is ESA going to happen? This all seems to rely on ESA, and then we will get our chance to amend and change things.

You talked about the consultation that has happened. I wonder how many people in the room know of that consultation. Can we see a summary? Was anyone here the last time round? It would be useful if we could see the consultation. You talked about a consultation that was done in 2008.

Miss L Wilson: It was a pre-consultation.

The Deputy Chairperson: Can you give us a rough idea of what was in it?

Miss L Wilson: Certainly. The document is written on the presumption that ESA will exist, but, for a number of the statements, you could equally remove the education and library boards (ELBs). Cathy, I will ask you to say a few words about the pre-consultation. We have a summary of the pre-consultation in the supporting annex.

The Deputy Chairperson: OK, great.

Mrs Cathy Galway (Department of Education): In March 2008, we started to do some pre-consultation work because the 2005-08 strategy was coming to an end. Some things needed to be carried over, and we wanted to make sure that we were carrying over the things that had not been actioned while, at the same time, identifying new areas that we needed to address.

The Department developed questionnaires that were issued to youth groups, young people's groups, youth workers, managers and schools. The deadline for reply was October 2008, and we were very pleased with the response that we got. We also engaged the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, which conducted a separate piece of work for us with young people who were not engaged in the Youth Service. Youthnet, on behalf of the voluntary sector, carried out a separate piece of work, following on from the questionnaires. Then we did further consultation with some Big Deal staff when that initiative was running. As a result of the questionnaires, we had input from around 4,000 young people, 264 youth workers, leaders and volunteers and 106 managers. Some of those responses were on behalf of members of organisations as well.

The issues raised as a result of the consultation were analysed and presented to the Department. All of that is on the DE website and is summarised in the appendices and supporting documentation for the draft Priorities for Youth policy. When the issues were raised, we formed a stakeholder group, which met between March 2010 and August 2012. At each point, all the issues from the consultation were discussed, as well as all the other issues that had arisen. It was not a linear process. There were other issues as the process developed. We held a two-day workshop for youth workers and managers, and quite a lot of pre-consultation was carried out.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you for a very good brief.

Miss M McIlveen: Thank you very much for coming this morning. It would be remiss of us not to congratulate all the volunteers who are involved in the Youth Service on the amazing work that they do in all our communities, sometimes faced with very tight resources and support. As Danny has indicated, there are lots of assumptions in relation to ESA in the document, given that we are at pre-legislation in relation to the formation of that body, in whatever form it actually takes.

I am also conscious of the fact that I have been on this Committee for a long time, and we have come across a number of consultations. I understand that you have done some extensive pre-consultation work, but perhaps it might be useful for us as a Committee to have our own stakeholder event and invite some of the representatives of the Youth Service, the boards, etc, to speak to us. Sometimes, what they say to you can be very different from what they say to us. It is very early for us to make a judgement on the paper you have presented to us today. It is better for us to be informed. At this very early stage, I want to know what your vision is and what the difference will be for community groups in my area between what they currently provide and what will be the case after you roll out your policy.

Miss L Wilson: An enormous amount of work goes on outside the Department of Education. It is funded and recognised, and it is very valuable youth work. One of the things that I would envisage is a clearer statement, first of all, of the departmental-funded element and where that fits in, and also a clearer statement at regional and subregional level of what services are going to be needed over a three-year period, so that people can position themselves to provide those services and because it would make it much clearer as to where the funded provision will be operating and where others can operate.

The planning process that we are talking about is, potentially, quite a powerful process, and we will be asking, as a first step, for existing provision to be mapped. Clearly, we can only map what we know about in the first instance. The Youth Service, for example, is planned without looking at, say, where extended schools are operating, where full-service schools are operating or where any other youth provision is operating. If we had a map, we could see where provision was active, and then you could see where we need to invest and all of that would be much clearer. It would allow other groups either to tailor their provision so that they could be part of that or to operate in a way that complemented and supported provision. The voluntary and community sector will also be involved in that planning process.

Miss M McIlveen: Why has that mapping not taken place in advance of the policy being drafted?

Miss L Wilson: I do not think—

Miss M McIlveen: Rather than it being a priority in the policy, would it not have made sense for that mapping to have taken place to inform the policy direction?

Miss L Wilson: The policy direction is strategic, so it will contain a number of pointers as to the sorts of things and the sort of provision that we are looking for. The actual mapping of provision will, obviously, change as the policy changes. As I said, the boards have done a certain amount of local planning, but there has never been a published plan that everyone can look at, and that, in theory, would provide a basis for other Departments that are doing youth justice work, for example, to map their provision and indicate where they are providing their services. We have not had that kind of cross-departmental, joined-up approach. I hope that these plans provide a basis for that. The Departments we have talked to about it have been very receptive and interested.

Miss M McIlveen: This will be my last question. I appreciate that the focus is very much on disadvantage and know that all our constituencies have different levels of disadvantage. With the exception of Mr Sheehan, we all represent rural communities. What focus will there be on those communities?

Miss L Wilson: On rural communities?

Miss M McIlveen: Yes.

Miss L Wilson: The regional planning process and the mapping of need will allow the planners, effectively led by ESA or whatever other organisation, to identify where the gaps are and ensure that there is provision. The programme will make the provision of youth services universal. There will still be an element of that. Cathy, do you want to add anything?

Mrs Galway: One of the priority groupings is children who live in rural isolation or who do not have direct access to services. In developing the plan, they will be taken into consideration. In big boards, such as the Southern Board and the Western Board, that is already happening.

You also asked why the mapping was not done prior to the policy, and I suppose it is because there is so much of it out there. It is a huge task, and people have tried to quantify it before. We are trying to establish what our contribution is and set that in the context of raising standards and narrowing the gap in achievement, while seeing what contribution youth work can deliver to that.

There are other social aspects of youth work and interventions in areas such as juvenile justice. So, youth work can be spread out across a range of Departments. The policy is high level. We are trying to establish what our contribution is, where the need and unmet need is and how we can work together to try to address that. The policy provides an opportunity for other organisations or even philanthropic organisations with money to invest to see where they should invest their money.

You asked about communities and sectors in your own areas. We have focused on what children or young people will get out of the service, and, supported by volunteers and workers, they should be able to articulate for themselves what they have got out of the service. We have put in place proposals for a practice development unit to help people in local communities or areas who maybe do not have access to a wide range of support. That will allow them to say that to bring their practice up to the level that we want, they can now access a form of support that was previously unavailable. We are following the Every School a Good School principles, but we do not have the support structures for the Youth Service that are in place for schools. So, although we want the same level of quality, we do not have the same level of support. I think that that is where the big difference will come in for workers.

The Deputy Chairperson: Can I just follow up on what you have asked? Do you have the resources to do the mapping exercise within the time frame and have it in place? Have you got enough support coming through so that it gets done in time? It is huge.

Miss L Wilson: It is huge, and it is one of those things that will take several iterations to get right. We envisage starting in a modest way, in which we map the DE provision, and then see whether other stakeholders are in a position to add their mapping. I see this as an evolving document over a number of years. As more people see it and realise how it could help them, they will want to come to the table.

I envisage us starting off with something modest sooner, rather than spending two or three years developing the plan. We will work with it and refine it as we go along.

Mr Kinahan: As quite a few members want to ask questions, could we keep them brief?

Mr Hazzard: Thanks very much again for the brief. What role will young people, especially disadvantaged young people, play in the design and development of the regional plans? How can those plans ensure that they will target specific local need?

Miss L Wilson: We have not worked out, in detail, how the planning process will work. That is something that we are engaging in now. We are going to talk to the stakeholder group about that because we do not want to create a big bureaucratic process. Obviously, we need some layers of administration. We will target disadvantage through funding, priorities, and the need to raise standards and close the gap. Therefore, we expect plans to be drawn up to meet those. Clearly, there will be a range of youth work covering everyone. There is a sharper focus on disadvantage and issues such as outreach, but stakeholders and people on the ground know their areas and know where the need is.

Mrs Julie Stephenson (Department of Education): Development of the plans will be informed and assisted by advisory groups whose membership we will be considering, but we hope that young people will be represented on those groups. That will enable them to provide input from their perspective and tell us what they would like to see in their youth services.

Mrs Dobson: Thank you for your briefing. You say that the voluntary sector is by far the largest sector. Can you give us a breakdown of that in percentage terms?

Mrs Galway: Yes. We have around 2,000 voluntary units and about 126 statutory units. Therefore, there are more voluntary units than statutory ones.

Mrs Dobson: There are significantly more.

Mrs Galway: Yes. Around 70% to 75% of youth work that is funded by the ELBs and the Youth Council is delivered through the voluntary sector. The statutory sector's position is that it only sets up a statutory provision where there is no viable alternative, so it is not the first port of call. It will only set up a centre if a voluntary group or voluntary community group cannot establish a viable alternative.

Mrs Dobson: The voluntary sector makes up a very large proportion of the delivery of youth work. Many groups are under financial strain, which can often lead to pressures on other services if youth services close down. Does the Department actively help youth services to seek funding from alternative sources to ensure that they remain viable? What does the Department do to assist?

Mrs Galway: In some cases, where there is a philanthropic source of funding and the organisation requires a departmental contribution to enable that to happen. That has happened, and it is something that we look for in the plans. We recognise that leverage is very important because a very small amount of DE funding through the ELBs with the Youth Council can lever in huge amounts of money for the voluntary sector. Therefore, they place great importance on the money that they get. However, it has to come through a process. There are registration criteria for the boards and supported voluntary youth organizations, and other criteria that the Youth Council apply. Therefore, if groups meet the criteria, they can secure the funding. The Department does not fund anything directly.

Mrs Dobson: Has the Department received requests for assistance from youth services that are getting close to breaking point due to the financial constraints?

Mrs Galway: Not directly. There is always a constant call for extra resources. There has never been a point where anybody has said that they have enough money. It has always been that they need money. One of the issues that we have is about how that money is given out. We could make more use of the global youth budget if we had a converged process rather than separate funding streams.

Mrs Dobson: So, it is a process that they have to go through. Yesterday, I met a group in my constituency, which caters for more than 200 children. About 50% have special needs, and the group

is in an extremely difficult position at the moment. Bearing in mind the impact on the children involved, they feel that they are not being assisted adequately by the Department to help them to provide the youth services in these circumstances.

Mrs Galway: It would be the board that would provide the services, if it is a local provider.

Mrs Dobson: I understand that. You said that there are 2,000 voluntary units and 126 statutory units, and we need to bear in mind that if many of those services did not get funding or did not exist, the impact would be very significant.

Mrs Galway: That is why we need this policy framework and why these proposals are so important. The more that the Youth Service can demonstrate what it is actually delivering for young people, the more it can talk about how it is meeting actual need that has been assessed in an area, rather than historical funding patterns.

Mrs Dobson: Yes, but they do need assistance from the boards when they get into trouble.

Mrs Stephenson: It is hoped that there will be a strengthening of arrangements for support for youth workers who work with special needs children to provide them with the same support that is available in schools so that there is more capacity to cater for young people with special needs.

Mrs Dobson: The Department has invested heavily in the Youth Service over the years, and considering the good work that it does, it has a duty to keep it viable.

Miss L Wilson: Yes. We recognise the huge contribution that the voluntary sector makes in delivering the programme. It is always difficult for the Department or the boards to provide money purely to keep a group going, and we hope that the planning process that we envisage will clearly set out the services needed and will enable voluntary and community groups to ensure that they are shaping their services to meet that need so that everyone will see what will be needed in advance and will have an opportunity to offer to provide services to meet that need. Ultimately, that is how the boards, ESA or the Department will fund services for the young person.

Ms Boyle: Thank you, Linda, for the presentation. It is time for us to pay our respects to the youth workers on the ground who provide a very good service. I know that the boards are responsible for the finance end of it and how the money is distributed, but it is important that the budget reflects the needs of the area, and you touched on that.

Young people are influenced by their peers, normally in the settings of youth work and youth clubs. Many years ago, I was involved in my own youth club. You learn from your peers in those youth clubs, and you carry that for the rest of your life. Therefore, it is very important that the people who are working with young people are involved fully in this consultation. You reflected that in your earlier responses. I agree with Michelle that we should bring the boards here for a stakeholder event. It would help us to form an opinion when, as a Committee, we respond to the consultation. That would be helpful, and we could inform the youth workers and groups in our areas of the event.

Jo-Anne mentioned special needs. There has to be a big onus on people with disabilities. I know a number of young people who want to work in this area, but there is no real input from the boards on that. I am not saying that the boards are not looking at this and treating it fairly and equally, but, given young people's perceptions of social attitudes, it would be helpful if there were a better input for people with disabilities to work in this area. On the subject of social issues and attitudes, youth clubs provide a great tool for allowing young people to discuss social issues in their communities. It is great to see that there will be a refreshed approach to youth work. That has to be welcomed, and it is long overdue.

Miss L Wilson: Yes, youth workers are key, and the consultation involved youth workers. Tremendously good work is taking place on the ground, and some of it is quite inspirational. Through this policy, we hope to harness that, because, despite the very good work that can be happening at local level, it ends up being a bit of a poor relation. Sometimes, in the education world, it can be a powerful tool, particularly for young people who are not doing awfully well at school or who might have other issues that can be addressed elsewhere. We are hoping that this policy puts youth services more to the fore.

Ms Boyle: It often helps to bring on board people who are hard to reach, and allows them to develop academically or through training. It is very important that that is what this is about.

Miss L Wilson: With regard to the point about disability, the stakeholders will, hopefully, be a genuine mix. Should others forget, appalling as that would be, the stakeholder voice will keep all those issues well on the radar, particularly as regards disabilities.

Mr Rogers: Thank you, Linda, for your briefing. I am going back to the delivery partners mentioned on page 31 of the consultation document, and to the voluntary sector. You acknowledged the contribution of the voluntary sector in the delivery of youth work. Many in the voluntary sector can attract additional funding that the statutory sector cannot. I am led to believe that the education boards are introducing service level agreements for funding, and that some of those documents go up to 150 pages. Do you think that this is a good use of professional workers' time in the pursuit of funding? Will there be a more streamlined method to encourage the voluntary sector, in particular, to secure resources?

Mrs Galway: Throughout the document and proposals, the word "proportionate" is used. The service level agreement, the expectations, the outcomes and the monitoring evaluation will be proportionate to the investment. Therefore, for a group that has a professional worker and gets more than £100,000 a year in funding, the board will expect detailed plans. If a group gets £500, such details will not be required. The requirement will be proportionate to the investment that they get. However, where we are investing £100,000 in a group, it is very important that service level agreements are in place. If the amount is £500, it would be more about support and what they are doing and providing. The word "proportionate" has been used throughout this. We do not want the same approach for each group or setting.

Mr Rogers: It is very prohibitive, particularly for voluntary groups, if they have to wade through a 150-page document. Related to this is the fact that, for generations, the church and faith-based sector have delivered good youth work throughout Northern Ireland. In addition to providing that voluntary help, they provide buildings, resources, and so on, for working with young people. Given that historical contribution, do you feel that they have a priority in accessing funding for the delivery of youth work, considering that they are providing the buildings and other resources?

Mrs Galway: I think the priority will be the service that is being delivered to young people and not the sectors, per se. It will be on the services that are being developed and delivered. The needs base, not the sector, will determine where the priority funding should be. Any sector could say that it does this or that. It is about the needs of the children that the sector is serving. The faith-based sector provides quite a range of work, and, as part of this funding policy, we will fund the proposals to fund support services for Youth Link, for example. It operates on behalf of the churches. At a regional level, there will be support structures in place, and they will be able to access that. I do not think that we are saying that one sector will get priority over another sector.

Mr Sheehan: Thank you for your presentation. My question is similar to some that have been asked. On the practical level, what is going to change for organisations on the ground? In my constituency, for example, there are a number of organisations carrying out youth work. What is going to change for them, in a practical sense, when this new policy framework comes into effect?

Miss L Wilson: A young person walking through the door will still get the service as is. Organisations, rather than having the current approach whereby people offer services, will be more driven by the plan, so the board will be looking for specific services. For some organisations, there will be no change at all because the types of service that they provide are exactly what are needed. For others, there may be a greater emphasis on one type of programme than another.

Mrs Galway: At the moment, what the boards will fund is pretty standard; for example, it is a 46-week provision. However, in an area of specific or particular need as identified in the proposals, we propose longer opening times in response to the need identified. Organisations will be clearer about what support they can access and what the Department of Education expects them to do. Quite a lot of the feedback from the pre-consultation referred to youth workers in some areas not knowing what the Department wanted them to do. They were so busy chasing funding that they ended up working to several masters rather than simply doing what they were supposed to do according to the curriculum. Organisations will largely welcome the policy because they will be clear about what is expected of them. They will be able to access funding on the basis of need in an area, and they will also be able

to access support to drive up quality standards and to share their expertise with others. On a practical level, I do not know how much difference it will make on day one. It is a transition process. People want more clarity about what is expected of them.

Miss L Wilson: Our youth workers are a highly trained workforce with a great deal of potential. Our challenge is to ensure that that is fully exploited in working with young people through the programmes rather than, perhaps, chasing funding or other activities that are of less direct benefit to young people.

Mr Lunn: As usual, thank you for your presentation. I read in the documentation that this is the most challenging budgetary position in modern times, or something like that, which is hardly a surprise to us. It seems to me that you are being asked to provide a better service with a lower budget. That means better-directed finance, and so on, which we cannot argue with. That is fair enough. The documentation contains an awful lot of interesting information. It is far too much for me, so I want to read it again. That is not really a question, but I do have one. In appendix 1, at paragraph 1.52, there is a reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. The research quoted comes from the South of Ireland. Is there no statistical information available in the North of Ireland?

Miss L Wilson: The answer is that I do not know.

Mrs Galway: Youthnet undertook research on some of those issues. A range of research is referenced in the consultation document, but, if you wish, we can see whether we can source anything additional. Our youth organisations have undertaken research.

Mr Lunn: I am not necessarily asking you to do that. I wondered what you would say, because, as you probably know, schools in the North are not required to record homophobic bullying. I have asked questions about that issue. In fact, I think that we discussed it briefly last week. I find that quite amazing. Schools do not appear to have to record bullying instances at all, but, if they do, they can use a computer programme under C2k that has a subsection for homophobic bullying. The statistics from the South seem to indicate that that subsection would be quite significant if that sort of information were to be recorded. I wonder why schools do not record it. It is a big issue for the young people involved, which is why I am mentioning it to you.

Mrs Galway: I will take the matter back.

Through the Youth Service, young people may feel more comfortable exploring some of those issues, and it is a much less formal environment. We are trying to identify the priority groups to make it easier for young people to explore such issues.

Mr Lunn: That is a fair point.

The Deputy Chairperson: I have quite a few questions. The way in which we communicate seems to go wrong all the time. The mapping exercise is an enormous task, and you have two or three years to try to get it in place. More and more people are involved in the voluntary sector. They all have fantastic reasons for their involvement, and they really run Northern Ireland. What is being put in place to ensure that we communicate with those people so that they know what is going on? Is there advertising or are you working through councils and politicians to spread the word about this phenomenally important consultation? How will you choose the advisory groups?

Miss L Wilson: We have been working with stakeholders in the development of the policy. We have a small stakeholder group, and developing ideas, and so on, have been discussed widely. I hope that the consultation document contains little that will be a surprise to the sector. The Minister has made some changes, but we will be discussing the broad direction. Therefore, the sector is well primed and ready. We also need wider engagement with other sectors, which is more difficult and challenging. As I said earlier, youth work has been regarded as being slightly separate, but we are saying that this is an enormously powerful tool for engaging with all young people, particularly those who, for whatever reason, are starting to slip through the net. We want as much engagement with the policy as possible, and we want to hear the views of young people.

We have not worked through the detail of the advisory groups. We are now starting detailed work on the plans and the groups, and our stakeholders have kindly agreed to work with us on that and to draw up a process that might work. We want it to be manageable and not bureaucratic. We do not need large documents. We need them to say as little as they need to say. We need to consider how to get

that stakeholder engagement. We cannot fill the Waterfront Hall with interested people, but, equally, we need the right people at the table who can make that contribution. It will be a big exercise. We know a lot about it, but we have simply never written it down. The first time round, we will not get it right, and it will not be complete, but it is better to do what can be done and then build on it. We have talked to other Departments, such as the Department for Social Development and the Department of Justice, that also fund youth provision in different ways. They are interested to read the document and contribute to it.

The Deputy Chairperson: When I first read the briefing paper, my initial reaction was that funding was being limited and going only to disadvantaged groups. However, halfway through, it states that funding will continue everywhere. It will be proportionate to disadvantaged groups, which is good. However, on first reading, it struck me that the figure is only 10%, which is probably tiny compared with what some groups get to survive. People need to make sure that they always look at what they need to achieve their aims.

Miss L Wilson: The 10% is for the regional funding organisations. We recognise the valuable work of so many organisations, particularly the uniformed sector. We do not want them to have to scramble around to get a bit of funding through each regional plan. Regional organisations will need investment for headquarters infrastructure. That is the 10%, but we want the money to be in programmes not administration.

Mrs Stephenson: At present, the average funding for regional groups is around 10% to 12% overall. It is not too far away from the current level, so, for most groups, it should not make a vast difference.

The Deputy Chairperson: Good. That is what I wanted to get at.

Miss L Wilson: However, we may look at the groups that we are funding on a regional basis, because a number of organisations have crept onto that regional list. We know why certain organisations are regional, but we sometimes wonder why others are on the regional list. There may be changes about regional organisations, and we certainly need to consider the issue.

The Deputy Chairperson: That ends our questions. Linda, Cathy and Julie, thank you very much.