



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Draft Programme for Government

12 January 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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ENVIRONMENT**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)

Mr Cathal Boylan

Ms Paula Bradley

Mr Danny Kinahan

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mr Francie Molloy

Lord Morrow

Witnesses:

Mr John Quinn) Arc21

Ms Joan Devlin) Belfast Healthy Cities

Ms Jonna Monaghan)

Mr John McMullan) Climate Northern Ireland

Mr Colm Bradley) Community Places

Ms Clare McGrath)

Ms Barbara Boardman) Conservation Volunteers

Mr Robert Shearman)

Mr Aodhan O'Donnell) Consumer Council

Mr John French)

Ms Diane Ruddock) National Trust

Ms Meabh Cormacain) Northern Ireland Renewable Energy Group

Professor Sue Christie) Northern Ireland Environment Link
Ms Karen Smyth) Northern Ireland Local Government Association
Councillor Evelyn Robinson)
Mr Richard Devlin) Northern Ireland Marine Task Force
Ms Marguerite Tarzia)
Ms Sonya McAnulla) Omagh District Council
Mr Colum Delaney) Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Ms Anne-Marie McDevitt)
Ms Claire Williamson) Royal Town Planning Institute
Ms Diana Thompson)
Mr Wesley Aston) Ulster Farmers' Union
Mr Ian Marshall)
Mr Malachy Campbell) World Wildlife Fund Northern Ireland
Mr Geoff Nuttall)

The Chairperson:

I remind members and people in the Public Gallery to switch off all electronic devices, particularly mobile phones, as they interfere with the electronic system used to record the proceedings. Today's evidence session in the Long Gallery will focus on three areas relating to the Programme for Government on which the Committee agreed to seek further information from stakeholders: perceived gaps in the draft programme; the draft programme's milestones and outputs; monitoring progress. We have received 21 written submissions from organisations, and those have been provided to members in their event packs. Most of the organisations have representatives in attendance today.

I welcome everyone to the Long Gallery and thank you all for coming to Parliament Buildings to participate in this evidence-gathering event. As you are aware, the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for the Environment is preparing a response to the draft Programme for Government. To inform us, we agreed to invite your organisations, as the key stakeholders, to provide comment on the draft programme. The Committee is particularly interested to receive your feedback on gaps in the draft programme, its outputs and on monitoring progress. Having received so many substantive responses, we are holding today's event in a format that gives you an opportunity to impart as much information as possible to Committee members in the time

available. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your written submissions and for your attendance today. The evidence you provide will be recorded and will help to inform the Committee's position on the draft Programme for Government. The closing date for the consultation is 22 February. I understand that it is intended that the Executive will agree their programme early in March, after which there will be a plenary debate. I will relay the Committee's position on the programme at that debate. The timing of this event will enable me to contribute to any other debates or discussions on the Programme for Government, should they take place in advance of the plenary session.

Before I outline the format for the evidence session, I will quickly outline the housekeeping arrangements. There are toilets on this floor, which can be reached by going out any of the doors and turning left. You will see the sign for the toilets, which are on the right-hand side. If the fire alarm rings, leave the building immediately. Do not use the lifts, and follow instructions from the doorkeepers and Committee staff. If anyone feels unwell or needs assistance, please let a member of the Committee staff know immediately.

I will now turn to today's evidence session. Members of staff have microphones on each side of the room. The microphones must be used when speaking as it will help Hansard to report the session, and everyone will hear your point. If you wish to speak, please signal to me or to the Committee staff, and someone will approach you with a microphone.

I understand that a paper setting out the order in which evidence will be taken has been provided for everyone. As I said, there are three areas for discussion. I will be strict in keeping you within the confines of the discussion area. As frustrating as that may be for you, we simply do not have time to go through every aspect of the programme. If something is not within the topic of discussion, I will restrict you to speaking just on the topic. I will outline the area for discussion and then open the meeting up by calling the organisations listed against each topic to present their perspectives on it. I ask that you be as brief as possible, and I will stop you after five minutes if necessary, to let everyone have a chance to present their views. I have a big clock here and I will stick to it. Anyone who wishes to make follow-up comments should indicate. Before speaking, you should ensure that you state your name and organisation for the record. There will be an opportunity for Committee members to ask questions or seek clarification. I will allow about half an hour for each of the three areas. I think that we might devote a bit more time to the first topic, gaps in the Programme for Government. I may allow maybe 40 minutes on that,

and a shorter time for the other two topics. After discussing the three areas, we will have lunch, which will be served at the back of the room, during which you can continue your discussions with members in a more informal setting.

The first discussion is on the gaps in the draft Programme for Government. I invite Evelyn Robinson from NILGA to speak on this topic for two or three minutes.

Councillor Evelyn Robinson (Northern Ireland Local Government Association):

Thank you very much for inviting us here today. I thank the Committee members for their attendance, and, I trust, their attention, as well as for the boisterous welcome. I have been misled this morning; I was told I had five minutes. They gave me a tape that lasted for about 20 minutes, and then I cut it down to about 5·3 minutes.

We consider there to be gaps in the programme. We feel that there are some overarching gaps in the review of public administration, planning, timing of the reform, policy integration and integration of services. We see some specific gaps, such as waste targets and provision of waste infrastructure, and related funding. We also highlight food security, energy and water. I will start in that order, and you can stop me when you feel it is fitting, Madam Chairperson.

The gap as regards the review of public administration and local government reform is that only the number of councils is mentioned. We feel there is a commitment to define, objectively, the costs that would benefit the provision of resources, design of transfer functions, detail on preparation and implementation. Another gap is that the draft Programme has a large number of extremely laudable commitments requiring planning. At present, however, less than half of Northern Ireland has up-to-date draft or adopted development plans. This is likely to reach zero coverage by the end of this Assembly mandate. The gap is the lack of a commitment ensuring appropriate spatial development and community plans for Northern Ireland. We recommend partnership working as the solution.

The timing of the reform is also an issue. Local government reform legislation is coming in 2012, but lack of planning probably negates the ability to spend the allocated moneys; for example, through the social investment fund, again within the Assembly term. The document fails to prepare for a new system after 2015. Policy integration at strategic level is not fully structured. NILGA recommends greater integration of skills development with desired economic

and industrial development, or perhaps integration of waste resource management with R&D and economic development.

If meeting the needs of services should be paramount, then attention should be paid to integrated services. The draft investment strategy highlights co-location as a strategy for government efficiencies. Councils play a key role in addressing the [*Inaudible.*] societal issues at local level. It is our integrated citizen focus that makes councils a unique proposition. It will be vital for government Departments to view local government increasingly as a partner by sharing infrastructure and facilities.

In our opinion, it is perhaps vital that the relationship between central and local government matures over the term of this Programme for Government. Ratepayers are not best served by the plethora of policies, strategies and legislation being handed down to local government in a somewhat random fashion, as experienced by councils recently. A simple negotiation process at the outset can ensure agreement to maximise public sector resources and put the citizen at the centre of all of our work.

Services are better delivered locally, with councils providing greater efficiency. This view is enshrined within the EU Charter of Local Self-Government subsidiarity principle. At present, Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK and one of only three regions of Europe — together with San Marino and Monaco — not to have signed up to this charter. We encourage the Executive to do so as a matter of priority.

For some time, NILGA has supported the view that Northern Ireland's central government should agree a new burdens doctrine with local government similar to that in England. We believe that this should be included as a commitment in the programme. The new burdens doctrine is part of a suite of measures to ensure that council-tax-payers in England do not face excessive increases from new functions passed to local councils.

In examining the priorities, a number of specific gaps have been identified, particularly under priority 3, which focuses on making practical improvements to people's health and well-being and improving our environment. I did have a little piece on waste, but as John Quinn from Arc21 is with me, I will ask him to give the finite details, precision and perfection.

At this point in time, development of a regional food security policy is not included in the draft programme. That is, in our opinion, a matter of priority. There is no acknowledgement of the link between the provision of clean water, treatment of waste water and the huge amount of energy required for this, either in the context of energy reduction or of keeping costs as low as possible. It is our belief that making that strategic link could assist in preventing the introduction of the dreaded water rates.

In conclusion, although NILGA broadly welcomes the programme and the commitment that it outlines, it is our belief that addressing the gaps that I have highlighted today will make the document much stronger and provide a better plan for the next five years. Thank you again for enabling NILGA to participate today, and thank you for listening.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Evelyn; you have done very well in four minutes.

Ms Jonna Monaghan (Belfast Healthy Cities):

Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak. Belfast Healthy Cities is a partnership organisation that works to create better living conditions for people, with a particular focus on creating equity. Our role in the city is to work with partner organisations to deliver on the World Health Organization (WHO) requirements for healthy cities. The WHO co-ordinates a Europe-wide network of healthy cities and has almost 100 member cities. One of our key areas of work is a healthy urban environment, a concept developed largely by the WHO and the network, which focuses on how the physical environment and land use planning affects people's lives and, through that, their health and well-being. For example, it shapes people's job opportunities and opportunities to participate in social activities and so on, and our work has included sharing evidence with people and organisations and trying to develop concept projects that make that a bit more tangible.

We are pleased that the Programme for Government recognises that a healthy and well-educated population is a cornerstone of a prosperous and peaceful society. That reflects the WHO stance that is advocated in Health 2020, which will be the new health policy for all European member states in the World Health Organization. However, there are some gaps and things that could be taken into account a bit more. For a start, there could be a stronger emphasis on sustainability. Although the programme outlines that as a principle, there is quite limited

action included. We think that sustainable development is vital for people and can create significant synergies and can support the economy: for example, developing and investing in green space and sustainable energy. Green space has direct benefits for people's physical and mental well-being. It can generate jobs at a range of levels and boost tourism. Similarly, sustainable energy can create jobs at a range of levels, which is vital to tackling issues such as poverty and deprivation. It can also help make Northern Ireland a world-class innovator and leader, which will help sustainable prosperity over time. It might be worth mentioning that other places, such as Stockholm in Sweden, have chosen sustainability as a core focus. In addition to creating a greener city, it has hugely supported the concentration of technological knowledge and boosted the population of the city.

We feel that it is important that something is said about the implementation schedule for land use planning. As well as that, planning should look not only at economic benefits or investment but at how it affects and can benefit people in the widest sense, in line with the new planning Act.

More could be said on road safety. For example, 20 mph zones are key to encouraging more vulnerable people, particularly children and older people, to be physically active and use their local neighbourhoods more. That has direct benefits and potential savings for the health and social care budget.

Finally, at this stage, we feel that food, as a cross-cutting issue, is not addressed in great detail. Food has implications for a number of Departments and Committees. We are aware of that. Much more could be said about procurement and about providing access to healthy and affordable food for all.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Jonna. We have now had two presentations, so I am going to open the meeting for comments from other organisations.

Mr John Quinn (Arc21):

Thank you. I am also on the NILGA waste working group. I complement what Councillor Robinson said on the issue of waste. We see some gaps in the draft Programme for Government, and in comparison with the previous Programme for Government, particularly in relation to the current need to review the waste management strategy for Northern Ireland, which is a

requirement arising from the new waste framework directive. That has to happen this year. There is no mention of it in the document. In that context, there is an appropriate focus on recycling in the Programme for Government. However, the programme omits other issues within the waste hierarchy, like prevention and re-use, which are important and are above recycling in the hierarchy. There is a lack of focus on that in the strategic context.

We also feel that there is a big focus on domestic waste. Domestic waste is only a small fraction of all the arisings, when you take into account construction waste, commercial waste, agricultural waste, and so on. We would like to see a bigger focus on integrating and including those other areas of priority waste within the strategic context. It is not inappropriate to have a focus on domestic and municipal waste, but we think that that should be widened to other waste streams.

We also feel that there is a need to integrate the policy on waste as a resource with other policy areas, in particular, those on energy. We must recognise the need for diversity of supply in Northern Ireland and what waste can do in respect of being used as a resource, particularly in the context of our being at the end of a very long supply chain.

Look at the complementary waste investment strategy in ISNI III relative to the previous investment strategy. Waste infrastructure was a big focus embedded in ISNI II. However, ISNI III has lost that focus, and waste infrastructure is not mentioned in the Programme for Government at all. Given that it was essential and critical to the delivery of the previous strategy and, ostensibly, the revised strategy, its omission from the Programme for Government is important. We would like to see it re-included. We would also like to see a commitment to support from government to delivering that infrastructure and, ultimately, financial support, as happens in the other administrations.

Mr John McMullan (Climate Northern Ireland):

I am from Bryson Charitable Group, but today I am representing Climate Northern Ireland as its chair. Climate Northern Ireland is a construct set up by the Department of the Environment (DOE) to enable organisations participating in looking at adapting to climate change to share experiences. I do not want to read out the evidence that we have given to you in writing. However, I would like to make three brief points.

First, it would be useful if the Programme for Government were more explicit on the development of the Northern Ireland climate adaptation programme, in particular, the climate change risk assessment, which will be produced by the end of the month. Those are important documents in ensuring that the Programme for Government is effective as regards the changing climate.

The second point is that we can all have a different view on what drives climate change or whether it is accelerating, but the inevitability is that the climate is changing. Actions that support adaptation and mitigation could be drivers for the Northern Ireland economy, and that is not specifically driven within the Programme for Government. It would be good to get that in place. We can and will create sustainable green jobs, which would contribute not necessarily to just our local economy but nationally and internationally.

My final point is on public procurement and its potential for contributing to a positive environmental outcome. If you add the procurement spend by local authorities and Departments, it comes to very close to £3 billion in spend. The Programme for Government needs to provide for the intelligent use of that spend to ensure that we have within those procurement exercises clauses that support a positive impact on the environment and mitigate as well as adapt to climate change.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, John.

Ms Anne-Marie McDevitt (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds):

I am conservation manager with the RSPB Northern Ireland. We believe that the Programme for Government lacks vision overall. It is light on commitments for the natural environment, which raises the question as to whether it is a solely economic strategy with environmental considerations tacked on to the end. A healthy environment is needed to underpin a healthy economy.

Another concern is that the programme is based on pre-existing targets and commitments and lacks medium- to long-term ambition and imagination. In response to that, at the end of last year, the RSPB, in conjunction with other environmental NGOs and academics in the field of sustainable development and planning, drew up a vision for Northern Ireland and what we wanted

to see in the Programme for Government. I will not go through every piece of that; it is in our response. However, we are asking that:

“laws and annual targets ensure carbon emissions are reduced by 80%”.

The existing Programme for Government has no mention of a climate change Act for Northern Ireland. We also ask that:

“An independent champion for sustainability and environmental protection is in place”.

Again, there is no distinct mention of an environmental protection agency. We want “A modern planning system”. There has been talk today about the lack of mention of the review of public administration. We are asking that:

“A range of protected areas at sea is introduced, and simplified coordination of marine activities for all sea users through a Marine Management Organisation”.

There is no mention of a marine Bill for Northern Ireland, which is a very important piece of legislation.

In a general sense, there is a lack of vision. We see specific gaps, which are included in our response, so I will not go into those in any more detail now.

Mr Malachy Campbell (World Wildlife Fund NI):

I thank the Committee for the invitation to be here today.

On a general point, the Programme for Government lacks a lot of detail. It is quite vague and ambiguous, which is a fundamental weakness. However, planning is one area in which it is not particularly vague. The point I want to make today relates to the plan to give job creation potential additional weight in the planning system. We think that that is seriously and fundamentally flawed. We believe that that is inconsistent and incompatible with many existing government policies and national and international legal obligations. For example, it would not really comply with PPS1, PPS2, PPS4, the regional development strategy, or the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. Getting into international obligations, we are talking about the birds directive and the habitats directive. In no other sphere is one aspect of the social, economic or environmental considerations given additional weight.

The fact that there are no criteria means that a proposal could, potentially, create one additional short-term, low-paid, temporary job and be given additional weight. It is a seriously flawed proposal, and our view is that it should be withdrawn. Also, the proposal to give additional weight for job creation seems virtually identical to the proposal that was previously in draft PPS 24. That proposed giving additional weight to, as it then said, “economic considerations”. That

was rejected by the current Environment Minister, so we are curious as to why it once again sees the light of day. Thank you.

Mr Ian Marshall (Ulster Farmers' Union):

I would like to highlight a couple of points. First, we support the eradication of brucellosis by 2014. However, the union is disappointed that there is no reference to the eradication of bovine tuberculosis (TB), which costs the Executive significant amounts of money. The testing regime costs in excess of £24 million a year, and compensation has to be paid to farmers for the removal of often healthy animals. Despite having had a testing regime for a number of years, there has been no movement towards eradication. The union feels that part of the problem that must be addressed is the identification of TB levels in wildlife and that some meaningful attempt should be made to address this and the eradication of TB in the Province.

Secondly, the union supports the encouragement of renewable energy. However, microgeneration must be included as part of that. At farm level, strategically, we identify that the resource is there to generate a lot of power. It is often not the headline-grabbing stuff, but we think that it is a fundamental part of delivering on renewables in a Northern Ireland context.

Finally, the union is completely opposed to the introduction of national parks. We feel very strongly as an organisation that there is currently no appetite for national parks, and that is supported by feedback from people on the ground. We feel that people who live, farm and work in those areas and are, ultimately, the landowners must have the final decision on national parks. It must be their decision and theirs alone to push forward with that initiative.

Mr Richard Devlin (Northern Ireland Marine Task Force):

We are a consortium of eight environmental organisations working specifically towards a Northern Ireland marine Bill. In common with many who have already made points, we have concerns about a number of areas in the draft Programme for Government. The word “marine” appears once in the document beside the word “planning”: two words used in isolation. We are concerned that the draft contains no commitment to a marine Bill and are hopeful that that has been addressed. However, as the Bill comes forward, the issue of resources must be very carefully looked at. The focus of the Bill needs to be environmental in order to mirror marine conservation in the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.

The ambiguity of the language throughout the document also caused us some concern. We have issues with the question of resources. We have concerns about the idea that the marine budget, which was cut in draft budgets last year, will somehow be supplemented by the income raised by the plastic bag levy. There is still talk an inherently non-environmental practice being encouraged to try to get moneys to secure environmental progress. Much greater attention must be given to the development of sustainable environmental issues around the economic programme. There is great potential for sustainable job development, and I do not think that the draft Programme for Government has addressed that. Those are the general, basic points we have about the gaps in the draft.

Mr Aodhan O'Donnell (Consumer Council):

Thanks to the Committee for organising today's session, which gives us an opportunity to add to the submission that we provided.

I will outline some perceived gaps. We want to focus on an area in which the Committee is taking a keen interest, namely, the cost of insurance. An Office of Fair Trading report found that, on average, we pay 11% more for car insurance. The figure is between 30% and 70% more in rural areas. We will work with the Committee to look at what the Department of the Environment can do on graduated licence schemes and continuous insurance. However, the Office of Fair Trading said that altering consumer behaviour would be another way to drive down premiums. In Northern Ireland, we do not shop around to look at other available offers or deals. That goes back to the wider role that the Programme for Government could have in developing a financial capability strategy, because Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of financial capability of any region and is the only region without such a strategy. That would provide consumers with the skills and confidence to make more informed purchasing decisions, and we think that the draft Programme for Government is missing a focus on ensuring that consumer behaviour is supported through the likes of a financial capability strategy.

Some evidence from elsewhere shows that, if the economy is to get back on track, consumer purchasing behaviour and consumer confidence are key. Around 60% of the GDP comes from consumer spending. If we can build consumers' confidence, skills and proficiency through a financial capability strategy, everyone across government and throughout Northern Ireland will be in a stronger position. Although that is probably not directly related to the Department of the

Environment and the Committee, we believe that a financial capability strategy across government is essential legislation to support consumers over the next four years.

Professor Sue Christie (Northern Ireland Environment Link):

I very much support what many of my colleagues have said today. I will briefly expand on something that John said about Northern Ireland leading with procurement. That should be expanded, and, through the Programme for Government, we want Northern Ireland government as a whole to lead in the way that it operates its own estate and in the way that it procures. We want a more integrated approach to provide the lead for industry, jobs, renewable energy, sustainable practice in the workplace, waste management, and so on. That could operate as a major integrating tool across the Programme for Government.

Ms Claire Williamson (Royal Town Planning Institute):

We are delighted to be involved today. A lot of the comments that we wanted to make have been covered by others, particularly NILGA. However, we feel that much of the planning process has been overlooked, considering that the changes about to take place in planning reform are the most significant in 40 years. In particular, we want a commitment of resources and to a programme of councillor training. That would have a big impact on the planning process, and the public need to know what is going on, too. A review of area plans and a commitment to community consultation and community planning are also required.

Ms Diane Ruddock (National Trust):

I want to identify a gap in the draft Programme for Government's context and introduction. A great deal of information is given on the current economic situation, but that is not in any way balanced by any context of the environmental situation specifically in Northern Ireland or climate change on a broader scale. It is essential that that forms part of the context for the Programme for Government, because setting the scene and providing that information is the beginning of an understanding that will enable people to grasp why actions need to be taken on climate change and environmental issues. That serious gap needs to be addressed.

The Chairperson:

Members, do you have any questions to put to the audience?

Mr Molloy:

John, what is the position of Arc21 and other waste groups on the revised incineration targets?

You talked about energy, but what form of energy is derived from waste?

Mr Quinn:

The revisions to the waste framework directive include technical issues re the performance of waste energy plants. There is a need to move towards a more efficient form of energy derived from waste. The revised directive states that energy waste facilities, to be classified as recovery, must perform beyond a certain level. It looks not only at electricity generation but at the possibility of recovering heat. That is where that lies in a strategic context.

On the island of Ireland, there are also issues with the single electricity market. It has an impact on the way in which energy from waste and the generation of electricity from waste facilities is prioritised, or otherwise, in the new national grid for the island. That has implications for energy from waste plants on the whole island and applies not only to incineration but to gasification, pyrolysis and anaerobic digestion. Those are issues in a strategic context that are, I guess, somewhat outside the control of the devolved Administration.

Within the local infrastructure are three waste management groups, all of which have specified, through an output specification, what is required to deliver the waste management strategy for Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to residual waste that cannot be recycled. That has been put to the market, and bids have been received as to how that happens. I understand that all three include some element of energy from waste. That was not specified or prescribed in any way in the tender documents. Rather, it was left to the market to decide what was most appropriate for that application. The bids returned from all three waste management groups incorporate elements of energy from waste, including advanced thermal treatment and conventional thermal treatment, which is incineration with energy recovery. The market has offered a whole gamut or continuum.

In a strategic context, the revised waste framework directive has an effect on that, and that has been transposed to local legislation. The one element that we have to look at this year is the

waste management strategy, but I am sure that, as we move forward, that will also look at the whole issue of technical solutions.

Mr Molloy:

As a wee follow-up to that, earlier today the Committee heard evidence from independent processors on waste management. They said that there were recycling and reusing alternatives. Do you still see a need for the proposed programme for the treatment that you outlined?

Mr Quinn:

I understand that that will be the subject of a more specific conversation with the Committee next week. In the overall strategic context, the DOE has assessed the need for infrastructure. That is being delivered by all three waste management groups through PPP-type arrangements, which, by definition, require a tenure that allows them to be capitalised over time, usually about 25 years.

The Chairperson:

We need to focus now on the draft Programme for Government.

Mr Boylan:

Today might be the only opportunity to bring up my next point. Anne-Marie from the RSPB and Malachy from the Word Wildlife Fund Northern Ireland mentioned the additional weight given to planning applications. The draft Programme for Government states:

“ensure 90% of the large scale investment planning decisions are made within 6 months”.

Obviously, there is a problem with that from your point of view, but do you not think that most of the preparation for any planning application should be done and presented within that time? Is six months not a fair length of time within which to make a decision on any planning application?

I also want to tie in the issue of capacity-building, which is a key issue that the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) mentioned. It is not only councils and local authorities that need capacity-building. I have seen the absolutely ridiculous standard of some of applications. If we are serious about creating employment, in the absence of giving additional weight or economic preference to certain applications, we need to look seriously at how we address that issue. It is a problem for us with planning applications. Perhaps you would like to comment on that.

Ms A McDevitt:

At this stage, I am happy just to say that the issue is less about the six months and more about the potential for job creation. Our point is that we do not want jobs to be created at the expense of the natural environment. We feel that our natural environment provides many opportunities for job creation in Northern Ireland. We talk about renewable forms of energy, for example. That, rather than the six-month period, is our concern.

Mr M Campbell:

I just want to add to that our position is similar to that of the RSPB, in so far that the issue is not that of speeding up the planning process. We recognise that the planning process is often an obstacle and often too slow. Our concern is the “additional weight”. Planning for economic development can be more sustainable. Ours is not an argument against development. However, the stated aim of PPS 4, which deals with economic development, is:

“to facilitate the economic development needs of the region in ways consistent with protection of the environment and the principles of sustainable development.”

The whole question of that type of development is already covered in PPS 4. We do not need any additions. Our advice, which we checked with our legal team, is that the current proposals are potentially unlawful, in which case it would not be a good idea to pursue them.

Mr Boylan:

As a public representative, I deal with planning applications every day of the week. You read the policy and try to adhere to it, but it is not as black and white or as simple as that. It is all about the interpretation of the policy, which is inconsistent from one area to another. When Malachy reads out an excerpt of policy, it sounds fine. Sometimes, however, when you go to implement it, it reads differently and is open to interpretation. I think that the RTPI representative wants to respond.

Ms Diana Thompson (Royal Town Planning Institute):

I am the outgoing chair of the institute. I want to come back on the two points you raised, the first of which was on building capacity. The RTPI would be delighted to work with the Department of the Environment to help to deliver a programme of events that would help councillors to build capacity. In fact, we ran some events in 2009, when we thought that the RPA would happen sooner rather than later. We have a series of workshops, and so on, and would be

very keen to work alongside the Department. I would like to make that offer now, and we hope to work with the Department later this year in delivering that.

We can police only our members on the way in which planning applications are made. All sorts of people submit planning applications. Part of our code of professional conduct requires us to achieve a high standard of application. I can say only that our members are not, I hope, submitting the poor planning applications that you mentioned. If they are, they are subject to scrutiny and disciplinary procedures.

The Chairperson:

Danny, please be very brief. I am conscious of the time.

Mr Kinahan:

I am very keen to comment on what we have just heard. What is missing throughout the draft Programme for Government is the detail of how we will get the strategy to happen. Perhaps we need to set up think tanks or to involve all these organisations and ask them to tell us what needs to be done under each heading. We have just heard that they are doing that themselves, and we need that to happen under every heading, particularly to make the Programme for Government correct environmentally.

The Chairperson:

Many responses suggest that there is not enough detail in the draft Programme for Government, that it is too ambiguous and that we need more information and set targets so that we can work on and monitor it.

I am conscious of the time. We have only another 40 minutes or so, so we will move on to the next topic. I call on Colm Bradley to give us a presentation on the draft Programme for Government's milestones and outputs.

Mr Colm Bradley (Community Places):

Thank you, Chairperson, and thanks to the Committee for today's event. Community Places provides advice on planning issues to disadvantaged communities and individuals, and we support community planning. It will not surprise you that I will address those two broad areas.

We welcome many of the commitments that fall in the Committee's remit from the draft Programme for Government. However, the Department has a broad programme of work and a broad agenda over the next few years, and we want to see more of that reflected in the final Programme for Government. For example, under planning reform, as others mentioned, the area plan coverage in the region is poor. We do not want that to be unfinished business when we hand over planning to the new councils, so we feel that there should be milestones in the Programme for Government that clearly establish the targets that must be met to ensure that area plan coverage is across the region as far as is possible.

We understand that elements of the new Planning Act, which was recently approved by the Assembly, are being brought forward so that anything that can be put in place will be put in place before the new councils are formed. The Department is preparing a planning reform Bill that is not referenced at all in the draft Programme for Government when it clearly should be. On that point, there are two particular issues of concern to communities. The first is the absence of any commitment to a statement of community involvement. As that would require only a commencement order to begin work on it, it is fairly straightforward.

Secondly, there was much discussion during the Committee Stage of the Planning Act about pre-application consultation. Again, there is nothing in the draft Programme for Government about how that will be brought forward and particularly about how communities are to be involved in shaping guidelines for pre-application consultation, and so on. That is crucial if communities are to have any confidence in such a major change in the planning system.

Similarly, the right to third-party appeals sparked much discussion in the Committee and the Assembly. Unfortunately, it failed at the last minute, even though there was a lot of support for it. There was also much support during the consultation process: 60% of respondents wanted third-party appeals. We ask that the Programme for Government commit itself to beginning a new debate on the need for third-party appeals. That was a commitment from the Minister at the time. He said that the issue would not go away and that it would be brought back at a later date. May we have a target for that later date, please?

There has been some mention of the need to develop the capacity of councillors for all the changes that will emerge from local government reform. We suggest that there also needs to be capacity-building for communities. Despite councils not having a great deal of power,

communities look to their local council and their local elected representative in the first instance for help and support. Given all the changes coming forward, communities will continue to do that and will do it even more, so we need to ensure that communities and people understand what the new powers are, understand how new councils will be structured and work, and are able to build those relationships with them for the future. There should be some kind of programme to support that.

Community planning is, in our view, the most important power that the new councils will have in the long run, yet it is entirely missing from the draft. Statutory guidance will be required, and there is already a commitment to provide that, but there are no dates or anything in the draft Programme for Government. We suggest that there should be pre-consultation on the guidance, on how community planning will work, and so on. The Big Lottery Fund has supported a number of pilot community planning processes. There is a great deal of learning. A new learning report will soon come out, and the Department should draw on that to help form its new guidance on community planning.

Finally, I do not think I have mentioned interface areas. That is a planning issue as well as a community issue. Again, the draft contains a very welcome commitment to trying to do something about interface areas. A lot of good work has been done, in some of which we have been involved. Recently, with Belfast City Council, we produced community action plans for a number of interface areas across the city. All that should be drawn on when trying to achieve a very ambitious milestone.

Ms Sonya McAnulla (Omagh District Council):

I thank you on behalf of Omagh District Council for the opportunity to present evidence. It was very difficult to separate the milestones and outputs from the other strands being discussed today, such as the gaps and monitoring, so some evidence may overlap.

Omagh District Council has always advocated that one size does not fit all. Therefore, we ask that the Programme for Government recognise the challenges faced by large geographical, primarily rural, areas and identify priorities according to needs in such areas. Resources should be skewed towards them to ensure equality and opportunities on a par with urban and city areas. Our evidence on milestones and outputs concentrates on the commitments that are most relevant to you as the Committee for the Environment, and we have looked at some other areas of concern

for Omagh District Council.

The key commitment in priority 5 is to establish the new 11-council model for local government by 2015. The milestones refer to legislation, a programme for managing change, the establishment of shadow councils, proceeding to the 11-council model and the transfer of functions. The council concurs with the requirement for the delivery of high-quality and efficient public services, recognises the need for change and is actively working towards collaborative working, including on efficiencies in service delivery. However, the question must be asked: is the 11-council model the appropriate one? The draft Programme for Government's associated key commitment to establish the 11-council model for local government lacks detail on the rationale for supporting the proposal, the associated costs and how it will be funded. Initially, there is a need to look at whether the model is appropriate, whether it will result in better outcomes for local people and local decision-making and whether it provides value for money. The initial milestones and outputs should be established first to identify the role of local government and define what exactly is meant by local. The first step should be to develop a vision for local government that incorporates the role and functions of strong local government. To date, a disproportionate focus on the number of councils has eclipsed the real issue, which is the role and function of the councils and, as I said, the importance of local subsidiarity. Local government itself is best placed to identify and take forward proposals for efficiencies and improvement in service delivery.

Omagh District Council has always strongly advocated the county council model, which recognises historical links, traditional ties and natural affinity. Historically, Omagh and Strabane district councils have worked closely and successfully on areas of mutual benefit, and that relationship has recently been further strengthened through the interim chief executive's management arrangements. The two sets of councillors now work on a joint collaboration working group, and management teams also work on a collaborative level. If progressed, the proposed 11-council model would diminish that relationship.

The council also has concerns about the milestone to establish shadow councils in 2013-14. It believes that much can be learned from the previous transitional arrangements about how to do things differently under the new arrangements. If the 11-council model is to proceed to shadow councils, they must be elected at the earliest juncture. Elected councillors should be willing to make the new arrangements work and take the process forward constructively. There is also a

need to include a milestone to establish a programme structure to manage the change. Consideration should be given to the Welsh Government's work, which was on the basis of a partnership approach that set out the broad policy agenda for local government but avoided the use of powers to control how it operated.

Much good work has also been undertaken by the sector to develop the improvement, collaboration and efficiency programme, which has the potential to transform service delivery across local government. The improvement, collaboration and efficiency (ICE) programme is not dependent on the RPA or any configuration of councils. It concentrates on the optimum design of service delivery, whether that is an individual council, a group of councils or a region. It is important that the potential of councils to progress the implementation of the ICE programme with immediate effect is not undermined by any suggestion that efficiency savings will be used to support the reform project, including the facilitating of transferring functions.

I will move to priority 1, which is the key commitment to ensure that 90% of large-scale investment planning decisions are made within six months. The council commends the commitment, but feels that the milestones and outputs of 60%, 75% and 90% achievement rates respectively over the lifetime of the Programme for Government lack detail and substance. Although the target will assist in making commercial decisions that are vital to revitalising the economy, there is a concern that planning in general has not been given adequate attention in the Programme for Government and, as has already been mentioned, that the absence and out-of-date area plans need to be addressed, with local councils playing a significant role in their development. As an example, Omagh's area plan is 10 years out of date. Equally, there is no reference in any milestone to community planning and the role of local government in leading that process. It is not specific as to whether planning will be part of the vision of local government or be undertaken as a service to central government. All those issues need to be addressed within the milestones in the Programme for Government.

The council has concerns that regeneration plans are very much focused on city-based projects. The council acknowledges the importance of cities as generators of economic activity; but that cannot be at the expense of the wider region. Although the Programme for Government makes a very welcome commitment to grow and promote sub-regions outside the two cities, the specific emphasis placed on the cities is cause for concern, as it has the potential to result in an imbalanced approach where priority is given to supporting and funding the cities over the rural

areas. We currently have an imbalance between east and west and between urban and rural, and the Programme for Government must redress the balance.

If I move to the key commitment —

The Chairperson:

Sonya, I have to ask you to speed up a bit. You have already had four minutes.

Ms McAnulla:

OK.

On the commitment to upgrade key road projects and to improve the roads network overall, the council believes that greater investment should be made in the transport infrastructure, given its significance to our economic well-being. The west of the Province is heavily reliant on the movement of people and goods by private transport, due to the lack of public transport infrastructure. For that reason, the council believes that there should be a milestone in the Programme for Government that includes the A5 as a key commitment and retains the £400 million funding allocated to it. In doing so, regional imbalance can be addressed, as the A5 is the key to the north-west's economic and social advancement.

The council welcomes the commitment to invest more than £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of travel; but, again, the milestones deal purely with a breakdown of how the money will be apportioned year on year. They lack the detail required to show how the money can be apportioned appropriately across the Province and how priority will be given to new or developing schemes. Omagh District Council has been working towards the development of an Omagh riverside walk and cycle path, but that has been piecemeal because of the lack of funding. It is felt that there should be emphasis in the Programme for Government on addressing the funding gap and ensuring that there is firm commitment to take sustainable transport forward.

The Chairperson:

OK, Sonya, I think that we will have to ask you stop. Have you much more to say?

Ms McAnulla:

Can I just mention one other priority?

The Chairperson:

Yes.

Ms McAnulla:

Priority 4 is to significantly progress the plan for the Lisanelly shared education campus. Omagh District Council welcomes the inclusion of the Lisanelly shared education campus but is worried that the investment strategy does not actually show security of funding for that project. We would like to see those correlate and see construction commence earlier than 2014-15.

The Chairperson:

OK.

Ms McAnulla:

There are other areas that I can submit in the written response.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Sonya. We have one more presentation on this subject and it is from Diane Ruddock from the National Trust.

Ms Ruddock:

Thank you, Chair, and I thank Committee members for taking this approach to consultation on the Programme for Government. The fine words and aspirations that go at the start of any plan or programme attract the headlines and paint a very desirable picture. The draft Programme for Government offers us the prospect of peace and prosperity, fairness and well-being, and none of us could disagree with those aspirations. However, in any strategy, it is not the fine words, but the hard graft and the dull detail of targets, performance indicators, milestones and outputs that translate the words into action. Sadly, I think that the Programme for Government is particularly weak in that area; and even more worrying is that, of all of those areas, the milestones and outputs given in the Programme for Government in relation to the environment are among the weakest of them all. They range from being very specific on single-use carrier bags, about which some reservations have been expressed, to a very broad commitment to project to a reduction in greenhouse gases by 2025. There are also some administrative ones around, for example, producing a biodiversity strategy. The production of a biodiversity strategy is a good thing, but that, in itself, will not save a single species or benefit a single blade of grass. It is delivering on

the actions in there that will drive success.

The milestones and outputs included are not sufficient. They will not drive us towards the change that our society and environment need. It has been very interesting this morning to reflect on the fact that many issues identified as gaps are so because there are no outputs attached to them. If there is no milestone to help us to know whether we will make any progress, we cannot have the confidence that the issues that concern us in the environment and society will be addressed.

I have a long list of issues that perhaps needed to be looked at as milestones and targets. I will not go into them in any specific detail, but the ones that have been picked up on this morning include the need for the following: a climate change Act; the marine Bill; progress on environmental protection agency, and a raft of milestones to let us know that our planning system is fit for purpose, both for the economy and for the environment. That is what underpins sustainable development. If I might offer a brief aside; the definition of sustainability in the Programme for Government really needs to be looked at. It is complex and does not say what sustainability needs to say.

There is a specific gap that has not been referred to this morning, which is our built heritage. We really need to see milestones and outputs in relation to that, particularly ones that will reflect the important role that the regeneration and restoration of our built heritage in towns, cities and the countryside can play as a driver for economic regeneration and development. That can be of massive benefit to society and local communities.

Those are some specifics, but I feel that, if the Committee's response to the Programme for Government can address the issues highlighted as gaps and refer to those in ways that can be seen as milestones and outputs, that will go a long way towards helping to improve the Programme for Government significantly. All of the milestones must be SMART — specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound. Without those, the Programme for Government offers us a map of the Promised Land, but one in which there is no key and on which the roads are not marked, although the boundaries of the Promised Land itself are clearly defined. To continue that analogy, I fear that without putting in the milestones and outputs, we will be wandering forever in the desert of hope and not achieving what the Programme for Government could and needs to achieve for Northern Ireland. Thank you.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Diane and Sonya. We agree with you as regards fine words. We really need outputs and milestones, and we need to see action so that we can monitor it.

Mr John French (Consumer Council):

We want to make a couple of points about the milestones and outputs. We support the Programme for Government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gases by 35% by 2025, but we reiterate the comments made earlier that there still needs to be a long-term target, and we want that to reflect the target in the UK Climate Change Act 2008 to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050. We did some research last year on consumer education and consumer information and on making responsible consumer choices to help towards that target, and we found that there was a low level of understanding among consumers. We felt that there should be something in the Programme for Government about educating consumers to become more responsible in the future.

Another part of the Programme for Government is about supporting sustainable energy dependency. We feel that the affordability aspect of energy and the milestones around achieving the eradication of fuel poverty are often missed, and we have long called for a target and road map to alleviating and eradicating fuel poverty.

I will go back to the points that were made earlier on procurement. A year or so ago, the Consumer Council, Bryson Charitable Group and the Housing Executive did a study into how councils, local government and the Executive could use their purchasing power to look at measures such as energy brokering, through which they could purchase that energy collectively to provide cheaper energy for householders in Northern Ireland. This has already been done successfully with local government in Great Britain and across Europe.

Mr R Devlin:

I am tempted to ask about the milestones and outputs for the marine environment because, as I pointed out previously, there is very little reference to marine issues. That needs to be addressed in the Programme for Government. There is talk of a marine Bill for Northern Ireland: why is that not in the programme? It needs to be included, and detail needs to be given and resources committed to that. I will reiterate a point that has been made several times: there is far too much

ambiguity in the document. It uses words such as “revised” and “consolidate”, but words can mean what I want them to mean. We need a lot more precision in the Programme for Government.

Mr M Campbell:

We also support the development of a climate change Act with targets similar to those in the UK. However, I want to address the point in the Programme for Government about the target to invest more than £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of travel. Again, there is the issue of what is meant by the word “promote”. I hope that we will not just have a very expensive advertising campaign. The main issue is that the draft 2011-15 Budget says that the Department for Regional Development is allocated a budget of £2 billion, which includes £1.2 billion for roads and around £200 million for public transport, with the remaining £668 million for water and sewerage. Despite the fact that there is a huge imbalance in favour of roads, which we do not agree with — we would prefer more of a 50:50 split — the Budget says that there is £200 million for public transport, and the Programme for Government says that there is £500 million to promote sustainable transport. That apparent discrepancy needs clarification. If a higher amount of money is to be spent on sustainable transport, we welcome that, as I am sure other groups do. However, there is a discrepancy between the apparent £200 million allocated and the aspiration for £500 million for promotion. So, that needs clarification. Also, if £500 million is to be spent on sustainable transport, that would make a significant and quantifiable difference to transport. If it is to be the higher amount, a SMART, clear target should be made rather than just a vague aspiration.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Malachy. Are there any other comments or questions from Members?

We will move on. We are doing well for time. The next topic is monitoring progress, and I ask Sue Christie to comment.

Professor Christie:

I welcome the opportunity to have an open discussion about the draft Programme for Government with the Committee. It is a very positive way forward.

If we do not know how we are doing, we do not know what we are trying to get to. Without

monitoring, we do not have a Programme for Government. We need to have a full and clear monitoring mechanism within that programme to inform us of how we are doing. We must also report openly and publicly, and we must demonstrate that those in government are serious, are addressing the issues and are looking at their performance against the Programme for Government, as opposed to writing a document and, five years later, saying, “That was last year's Programme for Government; what do we want to do now?” That seems to be what happened a little bit last time. We want a usable and used document that helps us to see how those in government are doing and helps them to see how they are doing.

The levels of reporting must be appropriate and intelligible to the audience at whom they are aimed. Slightly different mechanisms may be required for the public, politicians and those who are directly involved. The people who are intimately involved may need a much greater degree of monitoring and reporting than the general public, who may just want to see headline figures on how we are doing. Annually, we need a full and open report to the Executive, the Assembly and the public. At the end of the period, we need a fully detailed report on progress throughout, not only to assess how we have done but to inform future work. We need to see what we have done in this Programme for Government, how that measures up to what was aspired to and show how we can form the next Programme for Government to be much more in line with its aspirations and ability to deliver.

I reiterate the need for SMART targets for monitoring and reporting. Without clear targets, we do not know what we are trying to do. We must have them. Perhaps, we should have a simplified system of traffic lights, or something similar, to allow all audiences to have an easy and quick understanding of how we are doing on all of the many targets. If we are to have proper monitoring, those must be SMART targets, not big aspirations. Proper monitoring requires a fully implemented programme.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Sue.

Mr Colum Delaney (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds):

I echo what everyone else has said. We appreciate the opportunity to engage with the Committee today. It is my understanding that not all Committees are holding similar events, so we particularly appreciate the Environment Committee's doing so.

I will be brief, because a lot of what I wanted to cover has already been discussed, and I agree with a lot of what Sue said about monitoring progress. There is no clear monitoring mechanism beyond the effective monitoring and regular quarterly reporting regimes, as is mentioned on the last page of the draft Programme for Government. It is, therefore, unclear what criteria the Executive will use to measure success over the course of this term.

We would like more detailed information on how the Executive plan to monitor the Programme for Government's progress, including, for example, the role of Committees and stakeholders, such as the RSPB. There is also concern, which has been mentioned already, about the lack of joined-up government and departmental silos affecting cross-cutting commitments and targets. Those probably fall alongside the other things that we talked about in the discussion on tackling milestones and outputs. There is also a need for any progress on Programme for Government targets to be communicated effectively to the public so that people can see and understand the progress that is being made. What action will be taken if targets are clearly slipping, or will they simply be discarded at the end of the mandate?

The Chairperson:

OK, you made some good points, Colum. Now that we have heard the two presentations on monitoring, I invite comments from the floor.

Ms Joan Devlin (Belfast Healthy Cities):

It is difficult to separate milestones, outputs and monitoring progress. However, the Scottish Government have adopted an outcomes-based approach. We can deliver a large number of actions but we really do not know their outcomes. I encourage an outcomes-based approach that emphasises cross-departmental working and budgeting. For example, the Department funds community transport but not trips to hospital for older people. It is a question of how we maximise budgets in the current economic crisis.

The WHO, particularly because of the economic crisis across a number of European countries, is working on what are known as best-buy interventions. So can we in Northern Ireland look at what interventions or actions have most impact? Likewise, we support a number of people who identified the importance of SMART targets.

Recently, we did some work on regeneration frameworks and identifying indicators by which we could measure the impact of regeneration on well-being. That is particularly progressive work and provides a model. We need to encourage work across Departments and look broadly at whether we can have a core set of outcomes and indicators by which we can monitor such progress.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Joan. I very much agree with you about outputs. Outputs are what you do but what you want ultimately are results. Therefore, outcomes, benefits and how people's well-being will improve are the most important things. Sometimes, that is difficult. Departments tell us that it is easy to measure outputs but difficult to measure outcomes.

Ms J Devlin:

I agree. Very often, we gather the data that is easily collectable, so there is a real challenge in looking at the high-level outcomes that we want to deliver. We need to consider what data is there that tells us that we are making progress but also what new data we need. One example that I will cite, somewhat cynically, is whether we really need to know the colour of cars. We do not; we need more serious data for measuring progress.

The Chairperson:

If you have enough data, you can benchmark to inform you about how much you have improved.

Ms J Devlin:

I think that the Scottish model is particularly good.

The Chairperson:

Are there any other comments about monitoring?

Mr M Campbell:

Although we said that the draft Programme for Government was quite thin on detail, it does refer to, for example, supporting the creation of jobs. However, it does not address the potential to create jobs through developing a low-carbon economy. That is fundamental. There is lots of research on that, the subject is included in the WWF's submission, and I would be very happy to have a conversation with any Committee member about that. That is where the smart money in

all major economies is going, and that is where we need to go. You want to create jobs, and the development of a low-carbon economy has huge potential, but the draft has no reference to it.

The Chairperson:

Do you mean more electric cars?

OK. I am jumping back to the last topic. Colm, you talked about capacity-building for communities. I agree with you that community planning is very important. It is a big issue that is very new to communities. In my constituency, I am constantly amazed by residents who know so much about planning policy statements. They know them like the back of their hands. How do you envisage community capacity-building happening, and who should be doing that?

Mr C Bradley:

It needs to be done by people who are in touch with those local communities and who already have a track record in providing support to them. Existing networks across the region, with the right kind of professional planning support, are capable of providing capacity-building for groups and communities.

As you say, huge changes in planning are coming down the road. The Department's assessments, by way of its customer satisfaction surveys, show a lack of understanding in the Planning Service and a lack of good communication between the planning system and communities. Those customer surveys are completed by applicants. I dare say that, if you were to ask people who object to applications, you would find a much higher level of dissatisfaction. We can solve that, but we have to put our minds to it. It would be a terrible pity to bring in an important and valuable new change to the planning system without building in the confidence measures to ensure that communities and people affected by planning understand the new system, the responsibilities of councils and how to work with their local representatives in the best way possible. If we were to lose that opportunity, it would be a terrible pity

The Chairperson:

Yes. That really should be done well ahead of local government reform. Do you want to come in on that issue, Patsy?

Mr McGlone:

Not on that one particularly, but I have a couple of points to make.

The Chairperson:

OK. I will come to you next.

Ms Thompson:

I want to follow up on what Colm said. In England, a mechanism called planning aid, which is run by the RTPI, is a bit like the legal aid service. We had it in Northern Ireland about 10 years ago, when it was partly funded by the DOE. In fact, there was a commitment to funding it by the DOE in the 'Modernising Planning Processes' document that came out in 2003. The funding was withdrawn, but it is a very good model of how the community can engage with the planning process. I suggest that as a possible way to engage communities.

The Chairperson:

I know that some communities are concerned that it is a new area and can be quite complex. People do not have planning knowledge or skills, and they worry that whatever happens will be rubber-stamped by councils and that they will miss the opportunity to have a real input. Training in capacity-building is, therefore, very important.

Mr McGlone:

I have a couple of points arising from issues raised from the floor. Joan made a point about the Scottish monitoring model, but I do not know anything about that. It could be useful for us to get some detail on how that works.

Secondly, Malachy made a point about how jobs can be created from a low-carbon economy. Obviously, we are moving into the area of the green new deal. Given this morning's news that Invest NI is again handing back substantial amounts of money because it cannot create jobs or sustain projects, it is important that we think more creatively. Two things spring to mind: obviously, you will make a submission to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on the draft Programme for Government, but I do not know whether that Committee will carry out a similar consultation exercise on these issues. I hear someone saying that it will not, so it might be useful for us to reflect those views to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to give it a nudge in that area, because, clearly, that is the way forward. Most other countries have

already recognised that, but this region does not appear to have done so yet. The £40 million given back over the past six months could have been better spent on creating employment rather than sending people to Australia to get jobs. Can we devise some sort of mechanism for reflecting those views to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment?

The Chairperson:

Yes, we will do that.

You are the best witnesses that I have ever known for finishing dead on time, which leaves me only to thank you all for coming. Thank you for your time and for the considerable expertise that you have given to the Committee. I am sure that I speak for all members when I say that it has been a very productive event.

A transcript will be circulated to all participants in the next few days for your comments. The finalised transcript will eventually be made available on the Committee's web page. Its content will feed into the Committee's position on the draft Programme for Government, which will be submitted to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister as part of the consultation. I will also represent the Committee's position during debates.

Finally, I would like to say a quick thank you to the Assembly's Official Report for transcribing the event, Assembly Broadcasting for providing the recording service and the catering and support staff for their help today.

Thank you all for coming. We will now adjourn for lunch, which will be served at the back of the room where we can continue our conversation informally. Thank you very much again.