

# Official Report (Hansard)

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The Editor of Debates, Room 248, Parliament Buildings, Belfast BT4 3XX.  
Tel: 028 9052 1135 · e-mail: [simon.burrowes@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:simon.burrowes@niassembly.gov.uk)

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 April 2012

*The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

### **New Assembly Members: Mr Sean Rogers and Mr Christopher Hazzard**

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before we begin business, I welcome Members back. I advise Members that I have been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Sean Rogers has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Down constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of Ms Margaret Ritchie. Mr Rogers signed the Roll of Membership and entered his designation in the presence of the Speaker and the Director of Clerking and Reporting on 2 April 2012. Mr Rogers will now take his seat.

**Mr A Maginness:** Literally. *[Laughter.]*

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I have also been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Christopher Hazzard has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the South Down constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of Mr Willie Clarke. Mr Hazzard signed the Roll of Membership and entered his designation in the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk/Director General this morning. Mr Hazzard will now take his seat.

## Private Members' Business

### **RMS Titanic Centennial Commemoration**

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I advise the House that junior Minister Bell will respond to the debate on behalf of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who is abroad on official business.

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

**Mr Douglas:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly notes the 100th Anniversary of the maiden voyage of RMS Titanic; acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design and construction of the world's most famous ship; welcomes the creation of Titanic Belfast and the commemoration by the Assembly; and calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1,517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912.*

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion on RMS Titanic, or, to give her her proper title, Royal Mail Ship Titanic. I hope that we will conduct this debate in a spirit of dignity as a tribute to the 1,500 or so people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the Speaker's Office for this morning's Titanic service. It was very dignified, and there was a big turnout. Again, on behalf of the rest of the Members, thank you.

We have had a remarkable few weeks of activities and events surrounding the Titanic centennial commemorations. However, it is fitting that the Assembly has the opportunity today to pay its tribute and respects to the

Titanic story — a story that will live on for many years as testament to a rich engineering and industrial heritage. Despite the obvious pride and passion that was evidenced at the Belfast launch of the Titanic on 2 April 1912, 13 days later, the ship lay at the bottom of the Atlantic, and over 1,500 people had perished. That pride was badly dented for many years to come. My late father, who was a red leader in the yard, never talked about the Titanic. I remember my mother quoting this proverb from the Bible:

*“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”*

She felt that we had brought the wrath of God upon us by claiming that God himself could not sink the Titanic. Over the years, we, like many families, spoke little of the world's most famous ship, which was built here in Belfast. Looking back, I think that the disaster was, certainly in our family, the elephant in the room.

The media focus from across the world over the past few weeks has shown that we have put most of that collective guilt and negativity behind us. In some ways, it has helped us to restore that sense of pride and reclaim our natural maritime heritage. Last Saturday night, I was a guest at a Titanic ball in the welders' club on Dee Street. There was a real sense of pride as men and women, dressed up in clothes from the Titanic period, came together to tell stories about the people who were on the Titanic and spoke about the pride of their involvement as ex-shipyard workers.

The global recognition of Belfast's part in such a wonderful ship is to be warmly welcomed. Many cities claim links with Titanic, but only Belfast can claim to be the birthplace of the genuine Titanic story. This is now our time, our place. With the renewed interest in the Titanic, our great story is being told from a tourist angle, and Northern Ireland as a whole will benefit from the increased interest right across the world.

Titanic is remembered for the dramatic story of her sinking. Yet, in 1912, she was an icon for all that was great about the 20th century: breathtaking innovation; the most luxurious liner ever built; and the most awe-inspiring, largest-moving man-made object on earth. Let us not forget that when the White Star Line approved the designs of the Olympic class liners with Harland and Wolff, initially ordering two, we did not have a big enough dry dock in Belfast to house the massive ships. So what did we do?

We built the Thompson dry dock — the biggest dry dock in the world at the time.

**Ms P Bradley:** I thank the Member for giving way. How significant was the dry dock at that time?

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Member for her question. Certainly, the Thompson dry dock and the pump house were at the leading edge of innovation, and we would not have had the Titanic without them. We have to remind ourselves that the pump house pumped out 23 million gallons of water in one hour and 10 minutes — what a feat. To think that there was no internet or computer-aided design (CAD) then. What a ship, and what a heritage. We built the Thompson dry dock, which was the biggest dry dock in the world at the time, as I said earlier. What vision, enterprise and leadership. We have every right to be proud people.

It was encouraging to hear the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, speak with pride about his father's uncle, Hugh Rooney, who worked in the shipyard as a carpenter/joiner and helped to fit out the Titanic in 1911. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, although we rightly celebrate the innovation and ingenuity of such a magnificent, iconic ship — the ship of dreams, as it has been described — for me, the inspirational aspect of this story is that of the people, the Titanic people; the yard men who built the Titanic. These were some of the greatest workers in the world, men whose labour built some of the biggest and best ships in the world. Let us not forget that over 1,700 ships were built at Queen's Island, or the island of dreams, as it is fondly known locally.

In the present economic climate, we need people of vision, people who can dream dreams. As CS Lewis, one of east Belfast's most famous sons, reminds us:

*“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”*

Perhaps that is our thought for today.

**Mr Allister:** The Member, quite rightly, pays tribute to the craftsmen who built and kitted out the Titanic. Does he agree that one of the issues that has raised public disquiet is the fact that one of the most iconic pieces of fitting-out that they completed, namely the staircase, has been excluded from public visiting at the Titanic centre, and only seems to be available to those who use the extra facilities? Certainly,

among constituents of mine, that is causing resentment. Will he join in calling for a review of that, so that the public might enjoy that aspect of the reproduction of the craftsmanship of those who built the Titanic?

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Member for his intervention and agree with him wholeheartedly. I think that that has been an own goal in many ways. I spoke to the chairman of Titanic Foundation to say that surely we could build another staircase or have some sort of access. Minister Arlene Foster has said that she will call on the operators to look at this again. The last thing that we want to do is to drive people away from Northern Ireland. When tourists come, that is the one place where they want to stand and have their photograph taken. I hope that the operators will take note of that.

We have heard about the great designers of Titanic, the architects and the draughtsmen, but let us also remember the red-leaders, the riveters, the heater boys, the holder-uppers and the catch boys; catch boys such as Samuel Joseph Scott, a 15-year-old who was the first person to die during the building of the Titanic. As I have said before in the Chamber, last July I was honoured to unveil a headstone in the City Cemetery in Belfast to Samuel Scott during Féile an Phobail, the West Belfast Festival. That is a fitting memorial to a young life that was forgotten for 100 years.

That brings me to another fitting tribute that acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design, construction and tragic story of the world's most famous ship. It may have taken us 100 years to build, but Titanic Belfast is the world's largest Titanic-themed, must-see visitor attraction. There have been 50,000 visitors to date, and I believe that there will be more if we can get that staircase sorted out. That is very impressive. It is Northern Ireland's largest tourism project, and it is achieving international stand-out and delivering economic and social benefits. I pay tribute to Minister Arlene Foster, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Executive for catching this vision and delivering such a huge, iconic project, built on time and within budget. Is that not a good news story this morning?

We also have the SS Nomadic, which was brought back to Belfast by the Department for Social Development and berthed beside Titanic Belfast. This is the last remaining White Star

Line vessel in the world, which will play an important role in the story of the Titanic.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Douglas:** Am I getting an extra couple of minutes? No? Oh, for goodness' sake. OK. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Finally, I have already mentioned the financial support that the Assembly has given to Titanic Belfast and the SS Nomadic. Is it in order that the Assembly Commission investigate the potential for a small memorial? It is sad that, in the whole of Parliament Buildings, we do not have anything that marks the Titanic.

### 12.15 pm

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Is maith liom an seans seo a bheith agam labhairt i ndilchuimhne na ndaoine uilig a fuair bás ar an long Titanic ar 15 Aibreán 1912. I welcome the chance to speak on this matter and am very proud to do so. I have always had an interest in maritime affairs, although I am not from a seaport as such. I remind Members from Belfast that Derry had a shipyard 100 years before Belfast did, but that is another story.

We have seen a lot of tasteful, poignant and significant commemorations over this period, and, for the most part, they have been delivered fairly well. This is the first commemoration of a decade of commemorations, and, after it is over, we will have to do a critical analysis of how it went, how it was dealt with and how we could deal with it better somewhere down the line. It took 100 years for a proper memorial for the Titanic. I pay tribute in particular to my colleague the Mayor of Belfast for his very enlightened speech at the opening of the memorial garden yesterday. The garden commemorates, for the first time, all those who died on the Titanic, which is, perhaps, a reflection of the social mores that were in place at the time that the Titanic sunk.

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

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Absolutely.

**Mr Humphrey:** For accuracy, I should remind the Member and the House that there has been a memorial in the grounds of Belfast City Hall to those who lost their lives on the Titanic. The advance and progress in the new memorial garden that was opened yesterday is that the

memorial names all those who tragically lost their lives. A memorial has been there for some time.

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

**Mr Ó hOisín:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I am aware of that, of course. However, as of yesterday, the memorial actually names all those who died. It is rather incredulous that the crew members, in particular, were never previously named on the memorial. Another salient point is that a number of reports mentioned different figures for the number of people lost, and, 100 years on, that has to be addressed.

For many, the Titanic was a celebration of what was good about the engineering and progress of the period. For my community, it sometimes had a different resonance in that there was not a shared history in the shipyard, and there were social difficulties. I hope that other Members will address that and that we might be able to move forward here in a shared future and commemorate what has gone on in the past. The Member rightly pointed out the kind words of the deputy First Minister on the subject, and I also pointed out the words of my colleague the Mayor of Belfast.

The subject has perhaps come to our notice because of Mr Cameron — Mr James Cameron, not Mr David Cameron. His film 'Titanic' brought the subject back into public consciousness. Yesterday, I watched 'A Night to Remember' and realised that that film not only paid tribute to the courage and heroism of all those involved but referred to the blunders that led to this great disaster. That also needs recognition. The Titanic brings many mixed feelings for many people because of all the things that went wrong and because of all the inequalities that it flagged up. We must remember those things when we have our solemn and dignified recollection here. As we move on, I hope that this will be looked at so that we will be able to recognise the way that we should hold the commemorations and celebrations of the next 10 years. Sin é. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha uilig.

**Mr Swann:** As someone who worked in Belfast harbour for 14 years before entering this place, I thank the Members who brought the motion to the House today. It is very poignant.

The construction of the Titanic began on 31 March 1909, and, having left Belfast on 2 April, her maiden voyage commenced on 10 April from Southampton. Over 100,000 people watched the launch from Belfast, which shows the pride and excitement that existed at that time. The number of people who have taken part in commemoration events, especially over the past weekend, shows that that has been multiplied. It is fitting that we have opportunity to speak about the Titanic in the Northern Ireland Assembly today, which is nearly 100 years to the day since she was lost, to celebrate the launch and to remember those lives. I thank the Speaker and his office for organising such a solemn and moving cross-party event as the ceremony that was held earlier today. It was definitely a tribute to this House, and it shows how we can go forward together and celebrate organisations and decades of celebrations jointly.

I want to concentrate on the last part of the motion, which:

*“calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1,517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912.”*

In questions throughout this Assembly sitting, my party leader and my party colleague Sam Gardiner also raised the issue of that solemnity and the dignified manner in which we remember this event in this place, and I thank them for that and for taking note of what was to come.

Of the 2,228 people on board — 1,343 passengers and 885 crew — 1,517 died. We must remember them today. We must also bear in mind the 17 men who died during the construction of the Olympic and the Titanic, including the father and son and, significantly, the shipwright, James Dobbin, who was injured during the launch of the Titanic when his legs were trapped under the ship as it launched. He died the following day in hospital.

Although there are many great orators in this House, I feel that it would be unfitting to use our words throughout this debate. I will take time to recount one individual's story and, if I have time, possibly that of a second. Archibald Gracie was just one of the 1,517 people who died. When the disaster happened, he spent most of the remaining time assisting women into lifeboats. Mrs Straus almost entered lifeboat 8, but she turned back and rejoined her husband. She had made up her mind: “We have lived together



for many years. Where you go, I go." Gracie tried to persuade her, but she refused. Mr and Mrs Straus went and sat together on a pair of deckchairs and listened to the band play.

Gracie continued to assist in the loading of women and children into lifeboat 4. At around 2.00 am, all the Titanic's rockets had been fired and all the lifeboats had been lowered, except for four collapsible canvas-sided lifeboats. Collapsible lifeboat D was lifted, righted and hooked to the tackles where lifeboat 2 had been. The crew then formed a ring around the lifeboat and allowed only women to pass through. The boat could hold 47, but after 15 women had been loaded, no more women could be found and men were then allowed to take the vacant seats. That was when Gracie found Mrs Brown, who was later to become known as the "Unsinkable Molly Brown", as she went on to establish a welfare fund for the survivors of the Titanic. Mrs Brown and Miss Evans were still on board, so he escorted them to the lifeboat.

When Gracie arrived with the female passengers, all the men — I repeat, all the men — immediately stepped out and made way for them. Thinking that there was room for only one more lady, Edith turned to Mrs Brown and told her, "You go first. You have children waiting at home." Mrs Brown was helped in, and the boat left the Titanic at 2.05 am under quartermaster Bright. Edith Evans would never find a space in any of the lifeboats, and she died in the sinking.

Elizabeth Shutes, aged 40, was the governess of 19-year-old Margaret Graham, who was travelling with her parents, and these are her words:

*"No laughing throng, but on either side [of the staircases] stand quietly, bravely, the stewards, all equipped with the white, ghostly life-preservers. Always the thing one tries not to see even crossing a ferry. Now only pale faces, each form strapped about with those white bars. So gruesome a scene."*

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

**Mr Swann:** Yes.

**Mr Wells:** I wish to hear the end of the Member's speech.

**Mr Swann:** Thank you very much, Jim, I appreciate that.

*"We passed on. The awful good-byes. The quiet look of hope in the brave men's eyes as the wives were put into the lifeboats. Nothing escaped one at this fearful moment. We left from the sun*

*deck, seventy-five feet above the water. Mr Case and Mr Roebing, brave American men, saw us to the lifeboat, made no effort to save themselves, but stepped back on deck. Later they went to an honoured grave."*

They were two of the 1,517 men and women who passed away in the sinking of the lifeboat.

As I said, I cannot bring to a conclusion the accounts of the survivors or the details of the brave men and women who lost their lives helping others when the Titanic sank. I once again thank the Members who brought the motion to the House and all the Members who took part with the solemnity and dignity that the topic rightly deserves.

**Dr McDonnell:** I too would like to add a few comments to the discussion, because, given the sheer amount of media interest in the Titanic story, it can be quite difficult for many of us to keep a proper sense of proportion. The first point we need to make and hold onto is that, although we may remember the launch of the world's greatest ship with pride, we are, first and foremost, commemorating a massive human tragedy. Although we should not judge historic events simply by the standards of our own time today, nevertheless, the tragedy was all the greater because many of those human lives seemed not to have been valued at the same level in escaping to the lifeboats. Tragedy was concentrated in the steerage cabins and further below the decks, where men shovelled coal into the engines.

Yet, despite the many stories and the many tragedies within that great tragedy, I believe that the Titanic story has much more to tell us. It was a tragedy for which nobody was to blame except nature. It marks the beginning, for all of us, of a decade of what may well be much more contentious commemoration. What we might take from the Titanic story is the simple fact that, at the level of the individual human being and the family, all loss is equally tragic. As we go forward over the next 10 years, we need to show the same respect for all of those who lost their life in the years after 1912 and for all the families who suffered loss, just the same as, today, we are thinking of and commemorating those 1,517 souls who found a cold grave in the north Atlantic.

Within that, we can also commemorate the time when we in this city were at the cutting edge of world-beating technology. Indeed, let us seek to

emulate the ingenuity and endeavour of those who built that ship, which has been described as the equivalent of a space shuttle in its day. Much good can come from the tremendous tragedy that was the Titanic. The loss of that, with over 1,500 souls, was, by any standards, a historic landmark. I welcome the fact that Belfast, Northern Ireland, and, indeed, the world, have come to be able to embrace the Titanic story, because, for so many years — indeed, most of the last 100 years — we have grieved for the Titanic. We have felt a little guilty, a little unsure and a little uncertain as to whether it would be decent to celebrate the benefits in the context of the tragedy.

I think that we have matured enough to be able to rationalise that. Indeed, the events of the past few weeks have shown that we can.

### 12.30 pm

The Titanic is not just our history. It is not just Belfast, Northern Ireland or Ireland history — it is global history. Whatever the arguments about good news, bad news or indifferent news: the Titanic icon in 2012 has put Northern Ireland very firmly back on a global stage.

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I concur 100% with what he said about how Northern Ireland has been put on the map. In fact, in giving evidence recently to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the First Minister stated that the Titanic brand is much bigger and more readily recognised globally than are Northern Ireland or Ireland. That must be fully exploited by the Executive here in Belfast.

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

**Dr McDonnell:** I accept that point fully. We are back on the global stage and we have to use that. We have got to take whatever strengths, assets, potential and ambition that we can garner from that tragedy in 1912 to create a future for our children of tomorrow.

As my colleague rightly said, the Titanic is not a story just in Ireland or in Europe. It is a story in New York. It is a story in Atlantic Canada — in Halifax, Nova Scotia. While the living went to New York, the dead who were not buried at sea were buried in Halifax. In what was a poignant moment for me, I and my colleagues visited the cemetery in Halifax and saw the hundreds

of graves there. There is a connection there. Indeed, I learned more about the Titanic in Halifax, where they have a museum and where they were able to come to terms with the tragedy without the sense of guilt that we had here.

We can make so much out of our Titanic history. I dare say that we can make it a flagship for our tourism, our economic recovery or both. Titanic is big news and we can use that fact as an anchor for a large-scale tourism project that will not just affect Belfast.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Will you bring your remarks to a close?

**Dr McDonnell:** It will push tourism out of Belfast, if we wish, to the Mourne, the Antrim glens, the Sperrins, Derry, Fermanagh and right across not just Northern Ireland but the northern half of the island. I see it as having vast potential.

**Mr Lunn:** We, of course, support the motion and I thank Mr Douglas and his colleagues for tabling it. These past few days and weeks have, at times, been a surreal experience, as Northern Ireland has done its best to celebrate the creation of the biggest ocean liner of its day — indeed, we are often reminded that it was the biggest moveable object on the planet — while solemnly remembering and commemorating the enormous loss of human life. For those conflicting reasons, we have had various events over the past days and weeks — mostly tasteful; all respectful, I hope — that culminated over the weekend in an MTV concert and the first performance of Philip Hammond's 'Requiem for the Lost Souls of the Titanic'.

There have been many absolutely fascinating programmes on TV and radio. Sometimes they were just old films, but there has been some really interesting factual stuff, and I think that we all know more about the Titanic now than we did before all that coverage. There has also been a lot of press and media comment about the celebratory aspect of the remembrance. For that reason, I welcome the final part of the motion, which calls for future anniversaries to be marked in a "solemn and dignified" way. That is how it should be, because the truth is that we are marking the anniversary because 1,517 people died and not because Harland and Wolff built a succession of great ocean liners, which it did, culminating in the ill-fated Titanic. Mr Deputy Speaker, you had only to look at the faces of the descendants and relatives of

those people in the past few days, and during this morning's service in the Senate Chamber, to realise the emotional effects and legacy of Titanic, even after 100 years.

The rest of the motion — I congratulate Mr Douglas and his colleagues on bringing forward a very sensibly worded motion — relates to the unprecedented engineering feat of creating the vessel, given the much more basic engineering techniques that were available at the time. I noticed in a TV programme the other night that, in 1912, welding had just been invented, but it was not in use, so, presumably, there was no welding on the Titanic. That would be the reason for the three million rivets that we have heard about. I do not know who counted them, but that is a lot of rivets. The ship was, effectively, built by hand, with the aid of some cranes and pumps and rudimentary equipment. Its memory stands testament to the days when Belfast led the world in heavy engineering and shipbuilding.

The motion also welcomes the creation of Titanic Belfast. I completely welcome that. Belfast, in tourism terms, is finally catching up with the rest of world's fascination with the Titanic story, and quite rightly so. The world interest in what happened is undiminished. It is right that Belfast, as the city that created the ship, should be at the centre of that interest. We are bringing thousands of tourists here, on cruise liners in particular. I have no doubt that, in future, the first port of call will not be Stormont or the Crown Bar; it will be the Titanic centre, which will be the first thing that they see as they dock. Everyone else with a Titanic connection is exploiting it, and we are entitled to do the same in a dignified and respectful manner. I look forward to the further redevelopment of the overall site. It is good that the centrepiece building has been completed in time. Images will go around the world showcasing Northern Ireland in a way that, in tourism terms, money just could not buy.

The final section of the motion welcomes the Assembly's commemoration. I join with others in congratulating the Speaker on the organisation and nature of this morning's commemoration. It really was a lovely event and it was very poignant. On Saturday, I think, Belfast's Lord Mayor unveiled the new memorial with the names on it outside the City Hall. That is marvellous, but even more marvellous was the fact that he said that it was built by our people. Hopefully, we have lost the view that it was built by people of one

denomination and not another; it was built by the people of Northern Ireland, and that is the way in which we should celebrate it.

**Mr McLaughlin:** You have just made a very important point, Trevor. This is probably the most auspicious start that we could have had to this decade of centenary commemorations. We should reflect that the history of the employment practices at that time is one of the issues that the Assembly should address. We should not be afraid to look at it; we should draw the positive lessons that we intend to apply to building a shared future. There has been some downplaying of that.

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

**Mr Lunn:** I thank Mr McLaughlin for his intervention. Of course, the employment practices of that time were completely different to what they are now. We have made so much progress in that area, so we should try to put behind us what was happening 100 years ago.

We have quite a few centenaries coming up. I really hope that we can deal with all of them in the way that we have managed to deal with the Titanic. They are all of a different nature, but there is no reason why we should not acknowledge our differences. We should think about a shared future and bring the same approach and attitude to all those centenaries. I support the motion.

**Ms P Bradley:** I support the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak to today's debate. I, like the proposer of the motion, Mr Douglas, was born in east Belfast, and I have a family history that is steeped in east Belfast. My great-grandfather was a French polisher at the time. We believe that he worked on the Titanic as it was being built, so it is with great pride that I stand here today.

As other Members have highlighted, the Titanic was the greatest of innovations. Its sheer size, design and grandeur made it the greatest vessel ever built. It pushed the boundaries of shipbuilding to a new level. It used cutting-edge techniques and technologies that resulted in the creation of a vessel never before seen. It surpassed all others that came before. The Titanic was the ship of dreams.

It is of great importance to mark, remember and celebrate the men of Belfast who made

this city the envy of the world. Thanks to their dedication, hard work and skill, Belfast became the centre of world-class shipbuilding. As the rest of the world played catch-up, our humble city produced the fastest, largest and greatest ocean liner to sail the seas. I am immensely proud to represent the city that designed, produced and manufactured what was, arguably, the most famous vessel of all time. That is why it is so important that we thank and remember the men who risked their life to produce what remains today one of this city's greatest achievements.

**Mr Wells:** For the sake of the record, and of someone looking back on this debate in 100 years' time, will the Member confirm that the vessel was perfect when it left Belfast?

**Ms P Bradley:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I heard it said on the radio this morning that we were not responsible for the iceberg. The Titanic was absolutely perfect when it left Belfast.

The creation of the Titanic Quarter and Titanic Belfast acts as a fitting tribute and an opportunity to showcase to the world the endeavours that lay behind the creation of such a monumental ship. Once again, I thank Belfast City Council and my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for all the hard work that enabled the creation of such sites. The Titanic Belfast building affords the city the opportunity to remember those who placed Belfast on the world stage and offers a great tourism opportunity as the world flocks to share in the celebration of this city's rich past and great achievements. The slogan "our time, our place" is more than fitting. One hundred years ago, the men of the shipyard took full advantage of the skills they had to offer. They worked tirelessly, and their endeavours ensured our place in maritime history as the city that gave birth to a ship to which the whole world paid homage.

Although the city is rightly proud of what it has produced and it is important that we celebrate its achievements, as has been said, it is also important for us all to remember those who lost their life on that fateful night of 15 April 1912. It can be all too easy for us to get caught up in the romantic discourse that has dominated much of the recent legacy of the Titanic and focus on the famous depictions that Hollywood has given us. The work of the Assembly and, indeed, today's debate allows us all to give true reflection and

to pause to remember the women, children and men of all nationalities who died when the ship sank. The Assembly plays a vital role in ensuring that those who died are not forgotten, that those who gave their life to save others are not neglected and that, when the world comes to visit the city, we give a fitting and dignified tribute to all who perished with the ship.

The Titanic and its legacy will continue to be a major part of this city's culture and heritage. It gave us our rightful place on the world stage and enriched us in the books of history. We should not pass up this opportunity to celebrate this great achievement while also remembering those who did not make it home. This opportunity to commemorate and celebrate should not be passed up. Once again, I give thanks and pay tribute to all who were involved in that great ship. In the words of Jack Dawson, the ship was a modern wonder of the world.

I support the motion.

**Mr McMullan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank Mr Douglas and his colleagues for tabling it. In a sense, I may be creating history myself; I believe that I am the only Member in the Chamber who has worked in the shipyard. That might surprise a lot of people. I was based at the Beersbridge Road.

The Titanic was launched on 31 May 1911. While on its maiden voyage, it hit an iceberg and sank with the loss of 1,517 people. Little did the world know or realise at that time that from that tragedy would come the foundation of one of the biggest events of the millennium. Now, in 2012, on the 100th anniversary, we have opened Titanic Belfast. This was all done as the world's press looked on. Even 'The Times' magazine lists Belfast as the place to go. Tourism Ireland promotions reach over 100 million customers around the world. In England, Scotland and Wales, some 4,700 Titanic ads are running over a two-week period, and some 3,500 of those will be seen on the London Underground, one of the busiest underground systems in the world. You can imagine the number of people who will look at those ads.

#### 12.45 pm

Television will reach 70% of all potential viewers in 2012. MTV shows, rock concerts, special stages of the Circuit of Ireland Rally, the Titanic light show, events at the Waterfront Hall, plays,

exhibitions, and events at the Ulster Folk Museum are just some of the things planned to celebrate the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic.

The Titanic signature building will be the central feature of the Titanic Quarter. When completed, it will be practically twice the size of the City Hall and its shape will represent the five-pointed White Star Line logo. It is already being looked on as an iconic building, standing alongside the likes of Sydney Opera House and the Empire State Building. The project building cost nearly £100 million, employed over 600 workers and, it is estimated, will employ some 20,000 people over the next 15 years.

What do we have now? We have a worldwide tourism product, a Titanic Quarter and £24 million predicted to go into the economy in 2012, which is to be welcomed. However, if Tourism Ireland is to promote the Titanic experience, that must be done on an all-Ireland basis, which means that Cobh must be included in the package at all times.

We have created a £100 million tourism product, so we must expect criticism along with praise. I was a little bit disturbed and perturbed that the Audit Office came out with criticism from the start. That should have been held back to see how everything goes. It was not warranted.

The onus is now on us to make sure that the projected 900,000 visitors expected to visit the centre are told that we have other sites in the Six Counties. Those sites must benefit from the experience. I think that other Members mentioned that. This cannot be a Belfast experience alone. It must widen itself out to the other tourism sites that we have here. That is paramount.

I agree with those who said that the marking of the anniversary must be solemn and dignified. Now that it is a centenary project and 100 years have passed, I hope that the site of the Titanic will become internationally protected. One thing that I really do not like is people making massive profit from all those artefacts that come on to the market. Now that the site is protected, I hope that there will be no more robbing of it and that things will be left the way they are.

When we talk about that fateful night on 15 April 1912 and the large loss of life, the main passengers are very little thought of, and those

are the passengers who left Ireland and other countries on the ship that night —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Draw your remarks to a close.

**Mr McMullan:** — to start what they called a new life in another world. They were actually locked in and did not get off the ship. We must bear that in mind, too.

I support the motion and hope that everything is dignified as we go forward.

**Mr Frew:** I commend my party colleagues for bringing the motion to the House. It is a very special day, and it is great to see. I thank the Speaker's Office for the way in which it organised and conducted the commemoration this morning. It was very fitting that we in the Assembly did that. As some of my party colleagues and others in the House commented on the Titanic and the memorial over past weeks, you will not have failed to notice the emotion on their faces as they were talking.

It is not just about the here and now; it is about how they have grown up and the stories that they have been told. In certain degrees, there was a sense of shame on Belfast, and indeed the Province, about the sinking of this great liner and the lives and souls that were lost to the icy waters on that fateful night.

As someone who was educated on building sites, mostly in Belfast, I relate to titles like "heater-uppers" and "catch boys", because some terms like that could still be used on the building sites of Belfast and other places in the Province. To most people, those terms mean very little, but to others they mean a lot.

I have worked on building sites since 1991 and dipped in and out of the shipyard many times and had the opportunity to work in east Belfast a lot. In the early 1990s, the Connswater area, which was the site of the old ropeworks, was being redeveloped. At that time, like the shipyard and Queen's Island in particular, there were rows and rows of sheds and roofs of buildings. Some were in use, some were not. Some were in a terrible state. They were all dirty. If you ever had the opportunity to work in them, you certainly came out very dirty.

Even in that landscape, there was a sense of shame. The dry dock was there, but nobody talked about it. The slipways that built these massive ships were there, yet nobody really

talked about them. The drawing office, where I had the opportunity to work a number of years ago when a small section of it was being renovated, was in a very bad state, yet nobody talked about it.

As I worked in later years in the Queen's Island area and saw the open-top tour buses coming in and out, I could not help but feel a sense of sorrow that people were coming from all around the world to see the birthplace of the Titanic and there was not really anything on the site for them. Those people could go all round the world, and there would be museums everywhere about the Titanic.

There was a sense of shame that people grew up with in Belfast throughout the years and there were stories that they would have been told about uncles, aunts, grandfathers and grandmothers and the loss. There was scripture quoted earlier with regards to pride before a fall. That sums up what Belfast felt for all those years. However, we did not need to do that; we did not need to be in that position.

I agree with the motion; the anniversary should be a solemn matter when we remember the 1,517 souls that were lost. However, every other day of the year, we simply should be celebrating our culture and history in that area of Belfast, which provided employment for so many. One thing we should always remember is that 17 people lost their lives building the Titanic and the Olympic and all the other ships. It was deemed to be acceptable for lives to be lost in the making of these great ships.

I would like to see us moving forward. We are providing employment. Look at Queen's Island now: we have a financial centre, which I worked on, as part of the Gateway project. We also have the Odyssey complex, which I worked on, an enterprise centre, a scientific centre, an education centre, a public records centre and people living in an area where no one would have dared to live 10 years ago.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr Frew:** We should move forward, and this country and Province should move forward in hope and commemorate what we have achieved in Northern Ireland and in Belfast.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I rise to support the motion and talk about the Titanic because I had some

connection with this as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure some 10 years ago and was involved in early work on the project. It is important to remember in a dignified way what happened to the Titanic.

I have listened to the remarks of others. I, too, am well familiar with the story because both my grandfathers worked in the shipyard at that time. My paternal grandfather, who was a blacksmith, died when my father was only eight months old, so I never heard his stories. However, my maternal grandfather lived long enough to tell some of his grandchildren about what the Titanic was like. As a carpenter in the finishing trade, he was able to recount to us its sheer breathtaking opulence, grandeur and, indeed, size.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to move closer to the microphone because amplification is being lost.

**Mr McGimpsey:** I beg your pardon.

As a man coming out of 176 Cambrai Street as the eldest of eight children, my grandfather was familiar with the harder side of life. Therefore, he was, of course, full of tales. I listened to Mr Frew but I have to say that I do not recall my grandfather exuding any essence of shame about what happened to the Titanic. There were, of course, stories in the yard about how and why she sank. There was sadness at losing such a magnificent monument to the effort of the workforce. There was also genuine sadness at the loss of Tommy Andrews, who was very highly regarded by the workforce.

I would like to focus, however, on another side of the story. Harland and Wolff was the largest shipyard in the world. Workman Clark & Co was another yard. It was referred to as a small yard but, in some years, it had a greater output than Harland and Wolff. Shipbuilding was not the only big business in Belfast. We had the Belfast Ropeworks Company, tobacco works, the largest linen manufacturer in the world and a series of specialist, world-famous, engineering firms, such as James Mackie and Sons, Sirocco and H J Scott. We also had the world's first aircraft factory. Before aircraft were built by Boeing or Hawker or anywhere else, they were built in Belfast. Belfast was the very first place in the world where aircraft were manufactured. Therefore, this is not simply a story about a ship or three great ships. It is about what was happening in Belfast at that time.

There was absolutely no reason why Belfast should have been the centre of all this. Some 50 or 60 years beforehand, it had been merely a river crossing — a bridge and a causeway over a delta. However, through the inventiveness, creativity and innovation of the people who lived here, and the way in which that was assembled and brought together, we created some of the biggest businesses and greatest enterprises in the world. If we did that once, surely there is a possibility and an opportunity to do it again.

We are finally trying to capitalise on the fact that we built the most famous ship since Noah's Ark and all that goes with it, and the tourism product is wonderful. However, there is so much more about this to inspire us to create businesses, enterprise and activity in our city and Province to again employ large numbers of people and stun the world with our innovation and creativity. We can provide the jobs needed by our people, particularly our youngsters, to give us the opportunity to build our society. That is the inspiration for all of us. What happened before can be done again. We can once again unlock the creativity of our people if we do not spend our lives in division but give our opportunities a chance. All the businesses that I talked about —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr McGimpsey:** — started as local businesses. They were small businesses that grew. They were not brought in through investment from America or anywhere else. They were local businesses that grew, and that is the inspiration for the future.

**1.00 pm**

**Mr A Maginness:** I, too, pay tribute to the Speaker's Office for the conduct of this morning's memorial service. It was a moving and very dignified commemoration of the people who lost their life so tragically on the Titanic.

Most aspects of the Titanic commemoration have been dealt with adequately this morning, but there is a tension between the commemoration of the Titanic tragedy and the celebration of the engineering genius of those who constructed such a wonderful ship. It is about trying to get that balance right and understanding it. We recall and rightly celebrate the engineering feat of the Titanic, but there is a very historic tragedy associated with it. I am not

sure how we resolve that. However, throughout the debate and discussion about the Titanic both in the Assembly and outside, there has been political maturity. All political parties and all sides of our community have come together to focus on the narrative of the Titanic, dealing with the tragedy, the pathos and, indeed, the romance of the ship. That maturity is a great tribute to the Assembly and to the way in which our politics have developed.

We have taken the Titanic story and built an iconic building. That word is sometimes misused, but the building that now sits on the shores is truly iconic. It is a spectacular building, and people will come to see it and to go through the Titanic experience and see the state-of-the-art technology that has been used to recreate it. It is a work of genius, and it is important that we pay tribute to the people who constructed the building to commemorate the Titanic and to celebrate the genius of those who built the ship. In that sense, it has brought together a disparate community, which, in some respects, is divided, to develop the Titanic story, to attract visitors to our shores and to create an experience for people from right across the globe. That should be commended. Although it was long in its gestation, it has certainly borne fruit and will continue to bear fruit for all in this society not just financially but culturally, because it puts us on the international map for good, sound reasons. That is something for all of us to celebrate today.

We, of course, remember those who died so tragically, but it is good to look forward and to unite this community and the House, and that is what we have done.

**Mr Dunne:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. I commend my party colleagues for bringing this important and timely matter to the Assembly this afternoon. It is important that we mark this significant centenary in a balanced way that remembers and respects the whole story of Titanic. It is important to always keep in our mind the 1,517 people who sadly lost their life on the Titanic's maiden voyage.

Today is certainly a significant day across the world. As many stop to remember this historic occasion, it is important that we keep a focus on the tragedy of Titanic. The tragedy of Titanic, which shocked the world, could probably have been avoided if the warnings of icebergs had

been properly heeded. The ship contained passengers of all classes, nationalities, faiths and backgrounds, many of whom planned to travel to the USA to start a new life and to seek new opportunities. However, tragedy struck as 'Nearer my God to Thee', the last hymn, was played. Sadly, 1,517 people lost their life in the icy north Atlantic seas.

One of the legacies of the terrible tragedy is increased safety standards, including the global iceberg warning systems and on-board life survival equipment that are used now on marine craft throughout the world. The significance of Titanic as the world's largest liner, which was built by Harland and Wolff in Belfast and took three years to complete, was the sheer scale of the 50,000 workforce who worked on that great ship. It is difficult to imagine the number of workers in "the yard", as it was known locally. That has since disappeared and changed the employment base of east Belfast and, indeed, the greater Belfast area and beyond, with the loss of all of those engineering skills and support services. What, 10 years ago, was part of a derelict shipyard now houses such exciting projects as the Belfast Metropolitan College, Citibank, the Northern Ireland Science Park and innovation centre and a number of other thriving businesses, as well as the Harland and Wolff part of the yard, which has been reborn in the renewable energy sector with the manufacture of wind turbines at Queen's Island.

Just as Titanic has become a household name right across the world, the Titanic story presents an excellent opportunity for Northern Ireland to benefit from it. I commend the Minister, Arlene Foster, for leading on the project. The recently opened Titanic signature building tells the full story of Titanic in a balanced way, and I believe that it does so in a respectful, accurate and inspiring manner. The world-renowned Titanic brand name has presented an opportunity to help put Belfast and Northern Ireland on the world map in a positive way. The whole project shows how a negative story can be transformed into something positive. Today, we are beginning to move forward, and Northern Ireland is beginning to present itself in the positive way that it deserves to be presented. The ongoing Our Time, Our Place campaign is an excellent programme of events and activities that has been designed to celebrate this important year for our country.

It is important that the House notes this significant centenary, acknowledges the innovation of Titanic, welcomes the Titanic Belfast project and looks forward to a brighter, more positive Northern Ireland in years to come, without forgetting the full tragedy of Titanic. I support the proposal.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Mr Chris Lyttle. He has two minutes.

**Mr Lyttle:** I support the motion and thank Mr Sammy Douglas and his colleagues for bringing it forward today. It is my understanding that journalist Andrew Marr has described the commemoration of the Titanic centenary as distasteful and dull. Esteemed journalist as he is, I think Marr, on this occasion, is ill informed of the many dignified and creative ways that civic, community, church and political leaders have come together to balance the celebration of world-class innovation and endeavour with remembering and respecting the tragic human loss of life that occurred 100 years ago.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to community and civic leaders for the work that they have done. Such people as Chris Bennett and his team at the cross-community Dock church deserve our thanks for the dignified and creative way in which they are remembering Titanic and building community at a local level in Titanic Quarter. I also pay tribute to the congregation at the shipyard church — Westbourne Presbyterian Church on the Newtownards Road — for its 'Titanic People' exhibitions and its work with the East Belfast Partnership Board and local artist Ross Wilson to place the inspirational sculpture of the yardmen at Pitt Park on the Lower Newtownards Road, which has given the community an opportunity to reclaim and demonstrate a pride in the connection to that history and the world-class shipbuilding that was supported by men and women in east Belfast.

I had the privilege of attending the Titanic commemoration service at Belfast's St Anne's Cathedral yesterday. It was a creative but solemn service of remembrance in honour of the more than 1,500 people who died in the icy waters of the north Atlantic. I also want to recognise the shared nature of the commemorative event at Belfast City Hall that launched the memorial, which, as has been said today, respects all those who died. At the Titanic commemoration service, Dean John Mann called



on political leaders in Northern Ireland to look at Titanic in a way that:

*"honours its past sacrifices, recognises its failures, celebrates its successes and works towards producing a healed and renewed people whose experience of difficult times will stand it in good stead in meeting very different challenges which ask the best of us all."*

That is a fitting challenge that we can rise to in the Assembly.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call junior Minister Bell to respond on behalf of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

**Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** There is a tremendous sense of unity of purpose in the House as we strike the balance between commemorating those who died and celebrating the brilliance of the maritime history that we have in the Titanic. As a working-class boy from east Belfast, born in the shadow of the shipyard, I remember the thousands who worked in it in the 1970s, and it is a privilege to take part in the debate. I thank Arlene Foster, the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and past and present members of the Executive who have done so much to bring this about. Nowhere in the world has a stronger claim to RMS Titanic than Belfast and Northern Ireland, which is her physical and spiritual home. No place on earth better understands the centenary of her maiden voyage. Gordon Dunne and many others referred to the tragic loss of life. We are what this is all about.

Alban Maginness said that it was important that we struck a balance with the commemorative event in the Waterfront Hall on Saturday night, and I think we have done so. It saw a host of well-known performers create a marvellous and dignified tribute to those who lost their life and to the ordinary shipbuilders of Belfast. The ship was built by everyone —

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

**Mr Bell:** I will give way only once, because I have a lot to get through. Could you be brief, Mr McNarry?

**Mr McNarry:** I thank the Minister for giving way. Does he agree that, because of Thomas Andrews, Comber town in our constituency has a lasting legacy that we should be proud of and that Ards Borough Council is to be congratulated on the unveiling of a very fitting Titanic memorial

on Saturday? In bringing all that together, Minister, I am sure that you will agree that celebrations and commemorations are nuances that Comber has portrayed throughout its lifetime since the tragedy. It stands us in good stead, and it is something that we should all be proud of.

**Mr Bell:** I fully endorse Mr McNarry's remarks about Comber. Mr McGimpsey also referred to Comber's affection for Thomas Andrews and for keeping that history alive. The legacy and the commemoration of Titanic is worthy of note. I congratulate the mayor, Mervyn Oswald, and Hammy Gregory, the deputy mayor, and those in Ards Borough Council who unveiled the memorial in Comber recently.

We have a wonderful maritime heritage. I thank and praise Mr Sammy Douglas for his contribution to the recent Titanic commemorations in bringing forward this debate. I also thank him not only for his work on the Titanic Foundation Limited but for his work with the east Belfast community, which is linked to the regeneration of the Titanic Quarter. When we think of Titanic, it is important that we never forget the yardmen. We should never forget their key work. A number of key events have taken place already. Chris Lyttle referred to the event in Pitt Park, which was marked by Rev Mervyn Gibson and the Westbourne Presbyterian Church, and the shared celebrations led by the Rev Chris Bennett, which put in place the work of the yardmen. I think it was Paul Frew who mentioned the heaters and holder-uppers and the hard conditions, which Michael McGimpsey also shared with us, that many of those people had to endure to give us that brilliant ship.

### 1.15 pm

It is important to be solemn and dignified. This is a commemoration of the fate of the Titanic, as well as a celebration of our world-famous maritime heritage. We do not celebrate a disaster; rather, we hold in delicate and respectful remembrance the more than 1,500 passengers who did not survive — a terrible loss of life. At the same time, we recognise and salute the excellence of our maritime and industrial heritage, which Trevor Lunn brought out, and our great feat of engineering in building the Titanic. We should celebrate too today the place that we have reached as a society 100 years after the tragedy.

Yesterday's dedication of the Titanic memorial at Belfast City Hall is a significant step in recording all those who sadly perished. William Humphrey referred to the memorial at Belfast City Hall. He and Cathal Ó hÓisín referred to the fact that the memorial reminds us that each name marks an individual story. Each person had their own circle of family and friends, and every name recorded tells a story. They are more than a number. It is a catalogue of tragedy that aids our understanding of the inspirational and heroic travails of passengers and others.

Many stories were told at the wonderful service this morning, shared by every party in the House. We heard 'Anthony Frost' by Mick Nolan, so beautifully read by Allison Murphy of the Belfast Titanic Society. Robin Swann referred to Mrs Brown and, if you will indulge me, to one of my personal heroes, John Harper. John Harper, a wonderful, outstanding Christian man and missionary, placed his daughter into lifeboat number 11. He was invited onto lifeboat number 11 because, as a widower, he had the right to be in a lifeboat. Such was his Christian faith, he wanted to go back to others and bring to them not only support but the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. When he hit the water as the ship went down, he bumped into many people in need and helped them. One man recalls that John Harper took off his life jacket and handed it to him, saying, "You have greater need of this than me." Such was his Christian faith. As he went down, he said, "I am going down, I am going down." However, such was his Christian faith, his last words were these: "No. I am going up." The survivor whom John Harper gave his life jacket to was rescued — one of only six, I believe, to be rescued. That stands testament to the Christian conviction of not only John Harper but many of the heroes who lost their life serving others.

We have witnessed a range of world-class events. The Titanic Belfast visitor attraction is one of five tourism projects spearheaded by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. It was specifically planned and timed to open for the Titanic's centenary. We should wholeheartedly welcome the creation and opening of Titanic Belfast, which Alban Maginness correctly referred to as iconic. We say proudly that we have the world's largest Titanic-themed visitor attraction. It is a fantastic symbol — one which, as Paula Bradley said, enriches us and puts us in the books of history — of the world-famous shipbuilding and maritime heritage of the

Titanic, which Trevor Lunn correctly referred to as the largest moving man-made object of its time. We remember all the incredible vessels built by our skilled tradesmen in the Titanic shipyard.

We have referred to all the people in our society who helped build the Titanic, from Martin McGuinness's great-uncle through many of the experiences people have had to my colleague who served in the modern-day shipyard. They represent the rich maritime history of Belfast and the new Belfast and the new Northern Ireland, which is confidently moving on and which we as a society are embracing.

In innovation and design, opening on time, mirroring the skill and ingenuity of the shipyard men, and built within the timescale of the original construction of the world's most famous ship, our Titanic visitor attraction is something that we can be very proud of. The opening of the attraction has been captured by the international press. As Alasdair McDonnell reminded us, we are on the global stage. We are generating positive stories and replacing old preconceptions of Northern Ireland's troubled past. We are proclaiming a new, resurgent Belfast and a Northern Ireland that is open for business and where, as Michael McGimpsey correctly said, we can continue to unlock our creativity.

The opening of Titanic Belfast is one of eight substantial events in our 2012 Our Time, Our Place campaign. Let us look forward to the other major events, such as the Land of Giants, the Irish Open, the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in Londonderry and the opening of the Giant's Causeway visitor attraction.

One of the key commitments in our Programme for Government was to provide financial and other support to ensure the success of Our Time, Our Place in 2012, including marking the centenary of Titanic's maiden voyage. Investment in the 2012 programme through DETI and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has been significant. We expect that the campaign will attract an additional 100,000 visitors to the region. It will provide hundreds of new jobs. It will contribute £24 million to the local economy. The aim is to see tourism transformed into a £1 billion industry by 2020, attracting 4.5 million visitors annually and creating 10,000 additional jobs in hospitality, transport, expert services and food processing across Northern Ireland. I am convinced that Northern Ireland 2012 will be

our time, our place and that the local companies that we want to grow, with their innovation, creativity and enterprise, can be a catalyst for driving forward Northern Ireland's tourism economy.

We are upping Northern Ireland's tourism game. The tourism industry is central to our economic strategy for the next four years, as detailed in the Programme for Government and the draft tourism strategy. There is recognition of the potential of tourism, which so many Members mentioned, and the need to invest in events, facilities and amenities, such as Titanic Belfast, the Giant's Causeway and the Walled City of Londonderry. Those will enable more people from abroad to experience and enjoy our unique and natural physical assets, as well as the warmth and welcome of our people. We want to excite international visitors and, indeed, people throughout Northern Ireland, the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland and to encourage them to become engaged in what represents the most comprehensive campaign ever undertaken to promote tourism here.

The Northern Ireland 2012 initiative is about not only tourism and tourism targets but changing perceptions of our place in our own minds and in those of our families and friends living abroad, as well as in the heads and hearts of all the potential visitors to our shores. Today, the eyes of the world are on Belfast for all the right reasons because of the Titanic. The appetite for information and experiences related to her is voracious. Her story resonates with people throughout our globe. Every opportunity is being taken to increase visitor numbers and spend in 2012.

By celebrating the Titanic, we do not forget the people who lost their life in the tragedy. It is right and fitting that, under the Northern Ireland 2012 initiative, the sinking and loss of life have been commemorated with consistent sensitivity to date. A series of exceptionally sensitive events has taken place to commemorate the ship's fateful end and to remember the passengers who did not survive. We want to ensure that all further marking of the anniversary will be sensitive and dignified, as a continuing tribute to each and every person who lost their life aboard the Titanic.

As Alban Maginness said of Northern Ireland, it is a new time and a new place. We have the iconic building. We have the political maturity to unite on what was a terrible tragedy and

loss of life and to mark the ingenuity and brilliance of all the shipyard men from all their communities — different communities, different religions, different backgrounds — who came together and built us a world-renowned ship. They gave us a ship that we can all be proud of. In marking deeply the significant loss of life, let us keep the balance absolutely right between commemoration and marking the brilliance that went into the Titanic.

I thank Sammy Douglas and Paula Bradley for tabling the motion. I also thank all the Members who took part in making today's debate a success. Given its unanimity, the debate will show the world what we, as a society, have become. Belfast is a new place. We are open for business. Potentially, we can reach the targets that I have set out. It is time for every one of us to put our shoulders to the wheel to ensure that the hard work, ingenuity, brilliance and skills that went into building the Titanic can again be used to build local business, build tourism and create a shared Northern Ireland that each and every one of us can be proud of and can celebrate globally.

**Mr Easton:** The Titanic is one of the most famous things to have left Northern Ireland. Her construction in Belfast was a showpiece of the high standard of work ethic that exists in this part of the world. It is right that we should take this time to recognise the work that many men put into the construction of that ship.

It should not be forgotten that Titanic was not the only ship built by our great shipbuilders at Harland and Wolff. She had sister ships that showed beyond doubt that craftsmanship in Northern Ireland is unrivalled. For too long, we have been afraid to show pride in our connection with Titanic, preferring perhaps to stay in the background for whatever reason. However, I welcome the commemorations that we are embracing, which remember our strong shipbuilding traditions. It is right and just that Northern Ireland's role in the Titanic is commemorated and that we give those interested in the story the opportunity to come and visit key sites that have connections to the ship. However, it is right that any further commemorations should continue in a dignified and solemn manner, in keeping with the rest of the programme.

One hundred years ago, 1,517 people perished in the icy sea, many of whom were from Northern

Ireland. In fact, because of the lack of records for those who embarked or left the ship at various ports, the figure could be higher. Many men would have absorbed the news as they read newspapers: the ship that they had worked hard on was now at the bottom of the ocean.

Although the film industry portrays Titanic as the love story that time forgot, we must remember that relatives of those who died are alive today, as are relatives of those who survived but had terrible memories of what happened in that short period of just 160 minutes between Titanic hitting the iceberg and her submersion. Unlike today, when a host of counsellors would rush to help survivors to deal with the emotional impact, many of those saved had to deal with the impact themselves. The same is true for the men who worked on the Titanic, as shipbuilding in those days was not the hotbed of health and safety regulations that it is today. Skilled workers earned just £2 a week, and unskilled workers earned £1 a week. Many young boys also worked on the construction of the ship. The monetary cost of building the Titanic in 1912 was just \$7.5 million, but the human cost was higher even before she set sail. During the building of the Titanic and her sister ship, RMS Olympic, 17 men died, including a father and son, as one Member mentioned. Riveters who worked in the shipyard often ended up with hearing loss as a result of the noise of their work.

The Titanic history is not a brand like Coca-Cola; nor is it an abstract idea. From 1909 to 1912, it was the mainstay of hundreds of families living in Belfast. Real people living in our cities helped to build the ship, and their contribution and sacrifice must be recognised in a way that highlights the seriousness of what happened 100 years ago yesterday. We must acknowledge that nothing that our men did contributed to the sinking of the Titanic. Northern Ireland's workmanship was of a high standard, and we must remember that when speaking of the Titanic. We should also use the Titanic commemorations to celebrate our shipbuilding history. It may be our most famous ship, but we were once major world players when it came to shipbuilding.

We are a proud people here in Northern Ireland. We have many achievements to be proud of, and the Titanic is only one of them. We must be careful not to turn the Titanic into a cheap gimmick. We must always keep at the forefront of our mind the fact that real people built the

ship and real people perished on it. Let us be proud of and dignified in our achievements. Let us remember not only the Titanic but all the ships that we as a people helped to launch. Let us remember all the men who lost their life in the shipyard over its entire history. Let us remember what that meant for the families who were left behind, and let us remember the people who needlessly died on the Titanic on that fateful night in 1912 in a way that befits the impact that it had on those left behind.

I will now address some comments made by Members. Sammy Douglas, who proposed the motion, said that the debate was a tribute to all those who lost their life. He mentioned all the events that have been happening to commemorate the Titanic over the past several weeks.

He mentioned his sense of pride in the building of the Titanic and in the skill of the workforce from Northern Ireland. He said that the Titanic was an icon of her time and that she was the biggest ship at the time. He also said that the Thompson dock was the biggest dock to be built in the world at the time.

### **1.30 pm**

Mr Swann said that it is fitting that we are debating the commemoration of the Titanic today. He mentioned the 17 men who died during the construction of the Titanic and her sister ship, and he gave an account of the bravery of some of the men and women who were on the Titanic. Alasdair McDonnell mentioned the other commemorations that are to take place. He also mentioned that the shipyard was at the cutting edge of technology at the time and that the Titanic now has a global history.

Trevor Lunn praised the motion and the fact that the anniversary was commemorated in a solemn and dignified way. Paula Bradley mentioned her grandfather, who, I think, polished the Titanic or had something to do with polishing it. She mentioned that our forefathers had produced the fastest and biggest ship of their time and that we should be proud of their work.

Mr McMullan mentioned that he worked in the shipyard. He also said that the Titanic Quarter will be a worldwide tourist destination, and we all agree with that. Paul Frew mentioned the emotions shown by Members in the debate. He talked about the culture of nobody wanting to

talk about the Titanic and about how that has now changed.

Mr McGimpsey mentioned his family connections with the shipyard. He also mentioned Thomas Andrews, the designer of the Titanic. He touched on all the manufacturing businesses that were in Belfast at the time and said that we should all be proud of them. Alban Maginness mentioned that there was political consensus on how we have commemorated the Titanic and said that that was welcome.

Gordon Dunne said that it was important to remember all the people who lost their life. He also said that the Titanic story is an excellent way to promote Belfast in a positive light on the world map. Chris Lyttle mentioned how the different churches commemorated the Titanic and how he had enjoyed that.

Junior Minister Bell remembered the thousands who have worked in the shipyard over the years and not just the Titanic years. He praised the Titanic Quarter and all those who were involved in designing it and getting it up and running. He said that we should never forget the shipyard and the men who worked there. He mentioned all the benefits that will come from the Titanic Quarter: over 4.5 million people are to visit over the years; an estimated £24 million is to be brought into the economy; and, I think, about 10,000 jobs are to benefit from tourism.

In conclusion, it is important to remember the motion. We are looking for the Assembly Commission to mark the tragedy in some way and to show our appreciation of the men who worked on the Titanic. I support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly notes the 100th anniversary of the maiden voyage of RMS Titanic; acknowledges the innovation and ingenuity of the design and construction of the world's most famous ship; welcomes the creation of Titanic Belfast and the commemoration by the Assembly; and calls for any further marking of the anniversary or memorial to be solemn and dignified as a tribute to the 1,517 people who lost their lives on 15 April 1912.*

## **Disappeared Victims**

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have five minutes. Before we begin, I remind Members that they have a general duty and responsibility as regards what is said and how they behave to ensure that nothing that is said prejudices any future proceedings that may be taken in relation to these matters.

**Mr D Bradley:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on anyone with information which might help in the location of the remains to share that information with the commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I want to begin by addressing the amendment. Although I can see the thinking behind it, I think that we need to be careful not to in any way compromise the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, considering the fact that it is subject to legislation that prohibits information shared by it being passed on to any other agency. We also need to respect the commission's independence and not put it in a position in which that independence may be in any way tainted. We already know what more can be done and by whom it can be done. We in the House, in the right spirit, can highlight those issues in the debate. That said, it is not my intention to divide the House on this important issue.

Seventeen people disappeared during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. To date, the remains of 10 victims have been recovered. Joseph Lynskey was from Belfast; his remains have yet to be located. Seamus Wright was also from Belfast; his remains have not been located. Gareth O'Connor was from Armagh; his

remains were recovered in 2005. Kevin McKee was from Belfast; extensive searches have been carried out in the Coghalstown area for his remains as well as those of Seamus Wright, but the remains of neither have yet been recovered.

Jean McConville was a widowed mother of 10 from west Belfast; her remains were found at Shelling Hill in County Louth. Peter Wilson disappeared from his home in west Belfast in August 1973; his remains were found at Waterfoot beach in County Antrim in November 2010. Eamon Molloy was abducted from his home in the Ardoyne area of Belfast in 1975; his body was discovered in a coffin left in a cemetery near Dundalk. Columba McVeigh from Donaghmore, County Tyrone, was 17 years of age when he was abducted and killed in October 1975; his remains have yet to be recovered.

Robert Nairac was an officer with the Grenadier Guards; his remains have not been recovered. Brendan Megraw was a 23-year-old married man from west Belfast; his remains have not been found, despite intensive searches at Oristown in County Meath. John McClory and Brian McKinney were from west Belfast; following information received by the commission in 1999 and a search at Inniskeen, County Monaghan, a double grave containing the remains of John McClory and Brian McKinney was discovered.

Gerry Evans was a 24-year-old painter from Crossmaglen who disappeared in March 1979; his remains were recovered from a site in County Louth. Danny McIlhone from west Belfast went missing in 1981; his remains were recovered near Blessington lakes in County Wicklow in 2008. Charlie Armstrong was a married father of five from Crossmaglen; in July 2010, the commission recovered his remains in County Antrim. Eugene Simons disappeared on New Year's Day in 1981; his body was found three years later in a bog at Knockbridge, County Louth. Seamus Ruddy from Newry was a 33-year-old teacher of English in Paris, France when he disappeared in 1985; despite searches on the outskirts of Paris having been carried out, his remains have not been recovered.

There are strong indications that the remains of Brendan Megraw may be buried in Oristown bog in County Meath. More accurate information may help to locate his remains. Kevin McKee and Seamus Wright may be buried near Wilkinstown, four miles from Oristown. Likewise, more accurate information could help to locate

their remains. Quite often, groups of up to 15 people were involved in the disappearances, and although some members of those groups may have come forward with information, others may not have. It is important that the call goes out from here today that those who may not yet have engaged with the commission should do so and provide more information. Every piece of information is important, and the smallest piece of information may be of help. The commission has specialist skills and knowledge to help to locate remains, but they can be used to the fullest extent possible only when coupled with good information.

Seamus Ruddy's disappearance is different, in that his remains are believed to be just outside the city of Paris. It would help if the two Governments, along with the French Government, were to intensify an information campaign locally in France to jog the memories of local people who may have heard or seen something. It was people from Northern Ireland and the Republic who were responsible for and involved in all the disappearances. They are the people who have the vital information, and they are the people who can bring the suffering of the families to an end.

I place on record our thanks to all those who have come forward to date to the commission with information leading to the recovery of remains. "Information" is the key word. It is the key to progress. I take this opportunity to renew the call for information about the victims whose remains have not yet been recovered. Now is the time for those who have said nothing or who have not said enough to come forward, speak and give information. That is why I ask all Members to join me in appealing to anyone who has any piece of information whatsoever that may be of help to the independent commission to bring it forward by whatever channel they feel comfortable with, either directly to the commission, to a member of the clergy, through the media or to a public representative.

It is worth reiterating that the legislation that governs the commission ensures that any information received by it is privileged and can be used only for the purpose of recovering the bodies of the disappeared. It cannot be passed on to any other agency or authority. The commission has a confidential telephone number: 00800 555 85500. It also has a confidential postal box, which is PO Box 10827, Dublin 2, Ireland. As a former paramilitary has said, there is no

longer any justification or reason — if there ever was any — for withholding information on the location of remains. I ask all those who can help, or who think that they can, to do so, and I ask all public representatives to use their information to help the commission to get the information that it needs.

When we have debated the plight of the disappeared and their families, we have done so in a non-party political spirit, and I ask Members to respect that approach once again. The families ask not for revenge or prosecution and not for the where, why or how or even for the truth to which they are rightly entitled. They simply ask for information to help locate the remains of their loved ones so that they can afford them a Christian burial and so that they and the community in which they grew up can say goodbye and have a place — a grave — where they can be remembered publicly and where they may rest in peace and have the fact that they lived on this earth marked publicly.

All here today have lost loved ones in various circumstances. Some of our loved ones passed away at the end of a long life, some were taken from us in tragic circumstances, some were the victims of serious diseases and some survived only for a short period after birth. The sadness remains with us, and we struggle with our grief. Time heals the hurt and helps us to come to terms with it all, although it may never completely leave us. What helps us to deal with the initial trauma of a death are the rites that have grown around bereavement in our culture, such as the wake —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr D Bradley:** — where neighbours and friends call to the home. All of those rites give us comfort at that time. Those comforts are denied to the families of the disappeared. Let us today, through our call for information, help to bring comfort to those families and end the long period of suffering that they have had to endure.

**1.45 pm**

**Mr Nesbitt:** I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “waiting;” and insert

*“and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families.”*

I thank and acknowledge Mr Bradley and the SDLP for bringing this matter to the House; indeed, for bringing it back to the House.

I acknowledge the work of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains, and what groups, led by WAVE Trauma Centre, continue to do to ensure that the remaining families do not feel totally forgotten at this time. Remembering my time as a victims’ commissioner, I pay personal tribute to Anne Morgan, whose brother Seamus Ruddy remains one of the disappeared and is believed to be buried in France. Anne remains tireless in highlighting the issue, and I thank her personally for reminding me of the human impact of what was done in whatever name it was done.

As I said, we have been here before, in November 2008 and October 2010, and that is why we tabled our amendment. We understand that it is a difficult next step, given the legal constraints on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains, but we believe that it is necessary if we are to move on and change the dynamic. We acknowledge that the commission is bound by confidentiality and is independent, but, 13 years on, we must find a way of moving forward.

As Mr Bradley said, I am sure that all of us have lost loved ones from time to time. It is part of my Christmas ritual to visit some graves at Roselawn Cemetery on a Christmas morning. I visit my father’s grave, my maternal grandmother’s, my aunt Edna’s and those of several other family friends and relatives, and I am always encouraged and heartened by how busy the cemetery is. I am sure that all cemeteries in Northern Ireland are as busy on Christmas morning as individuals and families go through that ritual, which has its roots in faith, family and humanity. It reaches as far back as we can remember. Indeed, so far today, we have remembered the 1,500-plus who lost their lives 100 years ago on the Titanic. However, the ritual takes us back much further than that. We think of the ancient Greeks and the importance that they placed on burial. The ancient Greeks gave us the democracy that we practice in a particular form in the House today. It was a Greek belief that those who did not receive proper funeral rights were doomed to wander by the River Styx — the entrance to the underworld — for eternity with their souls never at rest. The Greeks believed that denying burial to a corpse

not only insulted the body but damned the soul for all time.

I will take you back to Roselawn and to 13 March 1987, when I reported on a funeral. I remember it well because the man being buried was by the name of Nesbitt. He was no relation of mine but was a Reserve constable by the name of Peter Nesbitt, who, three days previously, had been blown up by a terrorist bomb when attending an alleged robbery at Ardoyne in Belfast. Three days later, the IRA attempted to blow up the funeral procession when it exploded a bomb at the Roselawn gatehouse. Four people were injured. When mentioning this, I am conscious of Michael Stone and of what he did at Milltown Cemetery. I am also conscious of what happened to corporals Derek Wood and David Howes at the funeral of one of Stone's victims, when more inhumanity was visited upon man during our Troubles. In that context, I turn to the shameful situation of the disappeared.

As a victims' commissioner, I attended the funeral mass for Danny McElhone in 2008. He was disappeared for longer than he was alive. He was 21 years of age when he was killed, but he was not buried for a further 27 years. I will never forget the picture of Danny that was used at the requiem mass. It was a picture of a young man entering his 20s, not the picture of a man being buried nearly 50 years after he was born. The family, of course, had no choice, because, for those 27 years, they had no picture, as he was dead but not buried. What a very stark visual reminder of how unnatural, inhuman and perverted it is to "disappear" somebody. I remind you that we lost Danny McElhone because somebody decided that he needed to be questioned about a gun. The IRA thought that he might have stolen one of its weapons, so it took him away and killed him. At that requiem mass, the priest said:

*"What is clear in these circumstances is that time doesn't heal. Truth heals, justice heals, righting a wrong heals. We are still in a society that is continuing to come to terms with its past. What happened to Danny is not in the past for the McElhone family, it has been very much in the present."*

The same could be said for so many directly impacted by our Troubles.

I have no doubt that the debate might include another call for a concerted effort to deal with

the past. Let us put on record the stark statistic that, of the 17 disappeared, seven bodies remain out there. Seven families still await the opportunity to bury their loved one. Seven groups of friends and acquaintances await the chance to pay their final respects. Seven stains remain on the fabric of our society.

Nearly half of all disappeared cases remain open and unresolved. If we take the number of dead from our Troubles as being around 3,500, that would mean over 1,750 families having no realistic prospect of the truth, of justice, or of righting the wrong that I heard defined at Danny McElhone's funeral mass. The Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) at the University of Ulster says that the IRA was responsible for 1,824 deaths. A calculation based on seven of the 17 still being disappeared would mean over 900 families being left with no realistic hope or prospect of closure.

It is not just a question of acting in a civilised, humane and Christian manner. It is also a question of credibility — the credibility of any process of dealing with the past that involves those who took part divulging accurate information about what happened. A building near the new Titanic project is called W5, the science park. The five Ws are who, what, when, where and why. How can we have confidence in dealing with the past when we cannot even satisfy four of the objective Ws? We know the who, we know the what and we know the when, but we do not know the where. If we did, we would locate the missing bodies. As for the fifth W, the why, it remains subjective. As we look to deal with the past, we must have confidence not just in the truth but in it being delivered in a credible manner. It is not credible when we cannot even deliver the first four objective Ws.

The Consultative Group on the Past, headed by Eames and Bradley, put much store in reconciliation, but do we have a common understanding of what reconciliation means? To me, it is an internal process, whereby an individual who has lost a loved one comes to accept what happened. It is different from closure. I do not believe that there is any such thing as closure this side of the grave. There is a burden to be carried by the families of the disappeared. Some days that burden will be lighter, some days heavier. The challenge for us is to try to lighten that load by trying to help those families locate their loved ones and offer them a Christian burial. Those who withhold that information



contrast darkly with the dignity that we discussed earlier as we remembered the Titanic.

I will close by quoting from a speech by Sinn Féin's national chairperson, Declan Kearney. The speech has received much publicity of late, and it begins:

*"Many years ago, unionists told republicans that our words could not be heard over the sound of guns and bombs ... with the benefit of hindsight provided by our peace process, their assertions have been proved right."*

There is another right and another truth to be heard today, and that is the call of the families of the disappeared. I support the amendment.

**Mr S Anderson:** Back in October 2010, we discussed an SDLP motion broadly similar to the one before us today. However, I welcome the chance to debate the issue of the disappeared again today. It gives us an opportunity to highlight an issue that simply needs to be resolved to bring comfort and closure to the relatives who still await news of their loved ones. The previous motion also called on those with knowledge of the location of victims' remains to bring that information, in confidence, to the Independent Commission without further delay. Action not words is the key. I support the motion and the amendment. Indeed, the amendment adds to the motion, as it calls on the Independent Commission to spell out what can and needs to be done to properly conclude this long-running and painful issue. It is vital that those with any information come forward. Surely, anyone with a shred of compassion who knows anything of the missing victims would and should want to provide that information, which will bring long-overdue closure to the suffering and grieving families.

Shortly after the debate in the Chamber in October 2010, the remains of Peter Wilson were found at Waterfoot beach in County Antrim. Since then, the always painfully slow progress seems to have come to a complete halt. Although 12 bodies have been found, and some closure given to the grieving families, the remaining families are still waiting and living a nightmare. All they want is to be able to give their loved ones a proper burial. Some members of these families have passed away without finding out what happened to their loved ones.

The disappeared were all very different people with different backgrounds, outlooks and

lifestyles. The mother of a young family, Mrs Jean McConville's only crime was to show compassion and offer help to a dying soldier. Charlie Armstrong was an innocent man simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Aged 17 when he died, Columba McVeigh has yet to be found. His mother worked tirelessly for the recovery of his remains until her death in 2007. She went to her grave not knowing. Captain Robert Nairac has also never been found. He was a soldier doing his job in the battle against terrorism. I could go on, for each victim's story is unique.

No matter who they were, there is absolutely no justification for the illegal abduction and brutal murder of any of those people. The terrorists who carried out these vile deeds need to be brought to account, even at this late stage. I suspect that some Members of the House may have a fair idea about some of these cases. If they do not personally know, I am fairly certain that they know people who could provide that vital information. It seems to me that some Members on the Benches opposite are only too keen to call for selective inquiries into the past, but not so keen to have the spotlight shone on their past and that of their friends. Indeed, I often wonder to what extent Sinn Féin has really moved forward. Apart from hare-brained suggestions that we might fly the flag of a foreign nation over Parliament Buildings, Sinn Féin seems to want to continue to glory in the terrorist campaign of the Provisional IRA. Plans to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Loughgall are an affront to decency and a studied insult to the victims of republican terrorism, including the disappeared.

Information that will identify the location of the remains of the victims is vital, but so too is information that may cast light on the decisions that led to each person being abducted and murdered. In that context, I hope that the PSNI succeeds in its efforts to obtain access to the Boston College tapes. It would be interesting to find out what role some people in Sinn Féin had in the murder of Mrs Jean McConville. Gerry Adams says that he has nothing to fear from the tapes, but then he also says that he was never in the IRA. The time has come for open, honest and forthright confessions from some key people who, I believe, hold essential information. Justice demands it, common decency demands it and the grieving families demand it. Only in that way can the situation be satisfactorily resolved.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. I welcome the fact that, in proposing the motion, Dominic Bradley addressed his concerns about the amendment but indicated that he would not divide the House. That is also our position: we will be content to support the motion and the amendment.

The issue of the independence of the commission is well enough protected by statute and its members are experienced enough to judge how far they can go. However, I think that the amendment is intended to go the extra mile, if necessary, to encourage people with information to give it.

## 2.00 pm

I support the motion because I support the right of the families to have redress after so many years of injustice piled on injustice. The policy was wrong then and it is wrong now. The testimony of the commission should give some assurance to the families and to the Member opposite who spoke before me. The commission acknowledges the co-operation that it has received and the quality of the information that was made available to it. Clearly, however, more information is needed. The motion is particularly relevant and important because the commission has indicated that it has sufficient information to commission only one more planned dig. It has indicated that, after that, it is difficult to know what more it can do to address the issue. That should concern us all.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Member for giving way. I am not out to score party political points, but I was interested in your use of the word “policy”. You said that the “policy” was wrong. If that refers to the sequence of deaths, can you confirm that it was a policy rather than a random series of events?

**Mr McLaughlin:** Anyone who studies the history of conflict in this country will know that it was a practice or policy that emerged much earlier. In fact, it emerged very early in the previous century. It visited this generation: the generation that is represented in the House is that which lived through the most recent example of that conflict. Thankfully, it has ended in a peace process and agreement on how we can address issues in a non-violent, democratic and political fashion. It was a practice or policy that was carried forward. The IRA stated publicly that it came to recognise the injustice of that policy, which it inherited and then ended. What I

regret, and what I think we all should regret, is that, as well as ending the practice or policy, it should also at that time have taken steps to try to identify where the remains were buried. You talked about people being denied a burial. In fact, the bodies were disappeared by being buried in secret locations. That simply compounds the terrible trauma that the families have endured. For that reason, I say that it was an injustice then, and it is an injustice now. I repeat and reiterate —

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

**Mr McLaughlin:** Yes, indeed.

**Mr Allister:** Would the Member then like to withdraw the statement that he made in January 2005 that the killing of Jean McConville was not a criminal act, or is it still the position of Sinn Féin that the vile murder of Jean McConville was in some way justified? If it is the Member's stance that it was not a criminal act, so much of what he says today has no credibility.

**Mr McLaughlin:** I thank the Member for that intervention. I will address that issue in the context of a process of truth recovery and genuine reconciliation. That would mean that I could expect people from all sections around this room to acknowledge the role of the British security services in procuring murder and collusion with murder gangs. If we address all those issues — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr McLaughlin:** If we address all those issues — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order. At the beginning of the debate, I asked Members to be careful about what was said so that it would not in any way jeopardise any future proceedings. I ask Members to remember that. The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr McLaughlin:** I repeat: we need to have a truth recovery process in which all will come to the table with all the available information. A partisan approach means that we will ask only some questions and will end up with only some of the answers. Let us go for a genuinely inclusive process.

We should support the motion because the commission has made it clear that it is almost at the end of the road unless those who have even the slightest piece of information come

forward. The commission has the experts, the resources, the structures and the DNA and forensic experts all available. Let them judge the quality of the information. However, if anyone — a landowner or a local person — who noticed something or anyone who is connected in any shape or form with the burial of these remains has information, they should pass that information on now as a matter of urgency. The commission urgently needs additional information to move forward.

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

**Mr McLaughlin:** Thank you.

**Mr Lunn:** The Alliance Party welcomes the motion and commends the SDLP Members for bringing it forward today. I will talk about the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment in due course.

At a time when the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains has indicated that, unless fresh information is forthcoming — as Mr McLaughlin rightly said — it will have to wind up its activities, it is timely to remind those who may have the knowledge to allow progress that they still have a moral obligation to pass on that knowledge.

Our Troubles, or, more correctly, the vicious terrorist campaign that we have endured from 1970 onward, produced many atrocious acts. Indeed, it seemed, at times, that it had become a contest to see how obscene an act of murder could be. So we had bombs targeted at innocent civilians, proxy bombs and gruesome murders on a grand scale, including the tit-for-tat slaughter of innocent workmen and the killing of people, including women, for no obvious reason whatsoever. We also had the retaliation, more murders, the Shankill Butchers and the disgraceful activities of so-called defence organisations before good sense began to prevail. We are now in a relatively peaceful society, but we have still the legacy of our past to deal with, hence today's motion.

Through all the sadness, for the most part, the bereaved were at least able to give their loved ones a Christian burial, a proper funeral service, a wake, a headstone or a memorial to visit and to help people remember. The disappeared victims are, of course, in a different category and, frankly, it is hard for me to comprehend the suffering involved when a son, husband or mother is simply taken away and killed, without

explanation, by a self-appointed judge and jury, and the body hidden for all those years. It is also impossible for me to understand the mindset of an organisation that adds more agony by not only committing a murder but refusing to return remains or at least indicate where they might be. Why would it do that, Mr Deputy Speaker? What is the point? Why will those who know — given that they now have absolute immunity and the fact that, legally, the information that they could provide cannot be used in court — not reveal what they know and, perhaps, why they felt justified in doing what they did in the first place? No one is expecting convictions at this stage, but how can those left behind find closure without a body, in the knowledge that there are people out there who could help but still refuse, for reasons known only to themselves?

In the history of the past 40 years, the taking of those people and the continued despair of the bereaved stand out as perhaps the worst open wound. It is, as Mr Nesbitt said, a stain on our society. It is unfinished business of the worst kind. I hope that, even at this late stage, those who know — there are plenty of them — will, even now, come forward, in the words of the motion, to:

*"the commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay."*

I turn to the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment. It seems to miss the point. The motion calls for people who know to come forward. It is pretty simple. The amendment would perhaps have been better had it been an addition to the motion rather than one that takes out the final paragraph of the SDLP's motion. There is no harm in asking the commission to tell us again what it needs and what can and should be done. It is not as though it has not told us many times before. We know what needs to be done, and what needs to be done is expressed in the motion.

For all that, it is pretty obvious that the House will not divide on the issue, so the Alliance Party will not divide the House. However, I hope that the words of the original motion will still stand on the record as a demand from this House, and a rightful demand.

Lastly, Mr Bradley read out the list of all the disappeared. There is one name that does not qualify for that list; that of Lisa Dorrian. Her disappearance is a more recent disgraceful act.

I appeal to people who might know about that. Information will be a lot fresher in their minds. They should give some clue or indication as to what has happened to Lisa Dorrian.

**Lord Morrow:** A number of Members have said that this is the third time that we have had a debate in relation to those commonly known as the disappeared. Yes, we have to acknowledge that some movement has been realised on this vexed issue, but it continues to be part of what we would call the unfinished business of the past that this country and, indeed, we as a people have to deal with.

It has to be said, and it cannot be said much differently, that, in relation to this dreadful past that we are debating today, the spotlight is very much on one party, namely Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin has got to realise that things are moving on. It claims to be moving on, and I acknowledge that, in many regards, it has. However, this is the one issue that it seems to want to drag its feet on. It is going to have to step up to the plate and be counted if it is to be taken at face value here, because there is no doubt that Sinn Féin has a legacy here that has to be dealt with. I suspect that it feels that it has no part to play in it.

Jean McConville was mentioned. Jean McConville's body was, of course, found. However, that was done not by the actions of Sinn Féin but more by accident than design. I thought that Mitchel McLaughlin was going to go the second mile today, but he just backed away from it when it was expected that he was going to say something of great value, which those of us who feel strongly about this issue could have taken some heart from.

Most of us know the sad, sad story of the murder of Jean McConville, who was the mother of a large family and was abducted. I thought that Mr McLaughlin would have dealt with this when it was put to him by Mr Allister. In January 2005, the Sinn Féin party chairman, Mitchel McLaughlin, claimed that the killing of Jean McConville was not a criminal act given the context of the Troubles and the belief that she had been a British spy, which was, of course, totally untrue and unfounded and was just a fabrication to deflect attention at that time.

He then went on to make the statement that, in fact, the policy was wrong then and it is wrong again. When he was challenged by Mike Nesbitt on that, and I picked up strongly when he was challenged to see in just what direction he was

going to go, it was regrettable that he did not go the direct route and say, "Look, I am also speaking about what I said then about Jean McConville, and I am now saying something totally and completely different." I will give way to Mr McLaughlin if he wants to put the record straight here, once and for all, in relation to the death of Jean McConville and what he said at that time.

**Mr McLaughlin:** I do want to set the record straight, because you misrepresented me in your remarks. I said precisely then what I said today in this House about the issue of the disappeared. In that television debate that you are referring to, I appealed for those with information about the whereabouts of Jean McConville to make that available to the family. Indeed, I addressed the wider group of families seeking that information. So, my position has been consistent.

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

**Lord Morrow:** Thank you. I heard what Mr McLaughlin said, and he seems to be now saying something different. I think he still has to deal with the issue, but we will give him his time. He seems to need more space on this one. However, I appeal to him directly, and I can do no more than that, to please deal with the issue and put any ambivalence or ambiguity to rest on this one.

## 2.15 pm

A number of years ago, I was contacted by the family of one of the disappeared, namely the McVeigh family. That case has already been referred to. Columba McVeigh was a lad of 17 when he was abducted by the IRA in 1975. The late Mrs McVeigh came to discuss the issue with me, which I was happy to do. Right away, I could see etched across that elderly woman's face trauma, distress and agony. She was pleading for the return of the body of her son before she passed away. Unfortunately, Mrs McVeigh has passed away, and she was never to realise that longing in her heart to be reunited with the body of her son so that she could take him back and give him a Christian burial in the town he came from, Donaghmore.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Lord Morrow:** I appeal again to Sinn Féin, if it wants to listen, to take on board the agony that

many families — I think it is seven — are still going through, to address the issue and step up to the plate.

**Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat, cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo, nó ceapaim gur díospóireacht an-tábhachtach í. I welcome this debate, which is very important. One of the main reasons why I feel it is very timely is that, as Mitchel McLaughlin said, the commission has said that it will be doing its last dig unless further information becomes available. I reiterate the calls from all the different parties, because we owe it to families to refrain from party politicking on this issue. We want anybody who has information to bring it forward, no matter how trivial it may seem. There are mechanisms available, and I join with everybody else in urging people to bring forward that information.

As many people have said, we are a society coming out of conflict. Our society has suffered dreadfully, in all sections. I do not believe in a hierarchy of victims; all people need truth. Other victims' families will not mind me singling out the disappeared, because, as Mitchel McLaughlin and other Members stated, they have suffered in a particular way: they do not have their loved ones to bury, and that has been the case over such a protracted period.

I welcome the fact that the commission has stated publicly that it has received the full support of the IRA. That is very important for the families. I join everybody else — there is no ambiguity about this, although some Members chose to engage in party politicking a little bit — in calling on people to bring forward whatever information they have, because the families of the disappeared deserve to bury their loved ones and to be able to go to a grave. I join the House in trying to make sure that that happens.

**Mr Campbell:** I join others in commending those who brought the motion before the Chamber today. Mr Bradley outlined a series of names, and I was glad that the Alliance Member added the name of Lisa Dorrian, because her family suffers in exactly the same way as other families of the disappeared.

When talking about this issue, we can get sidetracked of the fact that 3,500 have died as a result of terror in Northern Ireland. All the families of those people have had the same anguish and shared the same pain as a result of their losses. However, this is a small group of

people that had the additional pain and anguish of not being able to bury their son, daughter, brother, sister, father or mother. As was outlined by the proposer of the motion, 17 or 18 people disappeared in total, and seven or eight remain unlocated. Those eight families still seek some form of information or knowledge. That needs to come from those who have it to the commission or whatever person in society they feel confident and comfortable going to. That information must be brought to bear so that a decent burial can conclude the matter and allow the families, in so far as it is possible, to move beyond the tragedy that they suffered.

The Jean McConville tragedy has been raised on a number of occasions. I join others in expressing regret that the Member for South Antrim Mitchel McLaughlin did not take the opportunity to withdraw his absolutely outrageous and scandalous comment that the perception was that Jean McConville was a British spy. Let us be clear: if all unsubstantiated allegations of being a British spy resulted in a death sentence, there would be more co-options to the Sinn Féin Benches than the replacement that we heard about today.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member acknowledge and recall the fact that, in her report on the murder of Jean McConville, the former Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan took the most unusual step of stating that Jean McConville was not an informer?

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

**Mr Campbell:** I thank the Member for that. Yes, I recall that. That view and position expressed by the former Police Ombudsman is shared right across the community. Unfortunately, it does not appear to be shared by the Member for South Antrim Mr McLaughlin.

Hopefully, we will pass this motion today. We will all be able to have our say and make our points, hopefully in a very forthright fashion that endeavours to bring some sort of closure to the debate. However, we need more than closure to the debate. We need closure for the families who want the bodies of their loved ones so that they can bring closure to their lives and move beyond what happened.

**Mr Hussey:** Ireland is supposedly a Christian country, and one of the most obvious rights of a Christian society is the right to a Christian

burial. Clearly, this simple act allows a family to remember their loved one and lay their soul to rest. Nobody has the right to withhold that sacrament from a family. Nobody has the right to put a family through that hell for any political or vindictive reason. Yet, here in the land of saints and scholars, families have been abandoned and ignored by republican terrorists who not only murdered their loved ones but retained the bodies and buried them in secret, unmarked, unconsecrated ground.

As far back as 1864, article 16 of the Geneva convention mandated that parties to the conflict should record the identity of the dead and wounded and transmit the information to the opposing party. I do not for one minute accept that the murder of anyone during the Troubles was under the terms of a legitimate war. The acts were of terrorism, but basic human rights should pertain. Even as far back as 1864, it was accepted that, where possible, opposing forces should identify those killed.

Anyone with any knowledge of the history of Ireland will know that a very large pot of whitewash has been used to cover up republican crimes by attempting to justify them in some form or another. However, no amount of whitewash will hide the stain. The IRA and other republican groups simply took people out. They spirited them away and murdered them and did not even have the common decency to return the bodies for a Christian burial.

Is it not bad enough for a family to suffer the loss of a loved one without the added horror of not being able to bury their dead? There are many recorded instances of war dead being buried during vicious campaigns and, at the end of the battle, bodies being returned and buried. Who do these people think they are that they would hold a family to ransom for years and years without allowing them to bury the mortal remains of their victims? Who gave them the right to be judge, jury, executioner and bodysnatcher? Believe me: that is what they are and were. The late Captain Robert Nairac was murdered by the IRA on 15 May 1977, probably somewhere in south Armagh. Three men have served a sentence for his murder, but his body has never been returned, possibly because it was so badly mutilated that his murderers did not want the world to know what they did to him.

Mrs Jean McConville was murdered, and I pay tribute to her family for their steadfast refusal to

give up, their determination to ensure that their mother was laid to rest and their determination to follow that through to the end. By their actions, they had her mortal remains returned for a Christian burial.

I am working for constituents whose brother, a serving soldier, was murdered in west Belfast. Two people who were on the periphery of that event disappeared and have still not been returned. The family of the murdered soldier want answers to their questions about how their brother died. It is clear that the two people who disappeared knew something, but the bigger picture is that a republican warlord wanted to ensure his own safety and removed them not only from their homes but from the face of the earth.

I sincerely hope and pray that the families who have lost loved ones will have the opportunity one day to bury their dead and have a place of sanctuary where they can bring their nightmare to an end. However, I honestly believe that we will not see the return of all the disappeared. Those who know the whereabouts of the remains are staying stubbornly quiet. Those who directed operations, wherever they currently sit, are staying stubbornly silent. Yet, every day, while their silence is allowed to go unchallenged, we hear cries that the RUC must answer for this, the British Army must answer for that, and we must know what happened here, there and everywhere.

Saying sorry for the loss of the disappeared is relatively easy, but explaining why those people were spirited away and why their bodies were taken is not so easy because it is not justifiable. There are 18 known cases of individuals who, it is suspected — I repeat the word “suspected” — were murdered and secretly buried. Why will the cowards who carried out those barbaric acts not even admit that they did so? Are they ashamed of what they did? They should be. If their conviction was so strong that they felt that they had the right to take the life of someone who may have been a comrade in arms, they should have the moral strength to stand up and at least admit what they did.

Some of the disappeared were simply removed because they knew too much about their colleagues, and fear of the truth emerging could have been the reason why they were taken out. We are supposed to be in a new dispensation. Even Jeffrey Donaldson says that the IRA army council has gone away. If that is the case, I urge

anyone who knows anything at all about these lost souls to clear their conscience and allow the mortal remains to be returned to families so that this bloody chapter of the history of the Province can be brought to a close.

The Ulster Unionist Party amendment was tabled in an attempt to move forward the process of locating the remains of the disappeared victims so that the families may have some comfort.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close.

**Mr Hussey:** If the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains can indicate what needs to be done and by whom, it could help to facilitate that. I support the amendment.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Patsy McGlone.

*The debate stood suspended.*

**2.30 pm**

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Environment

#### **Taxis: Licensing**

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the consultation on taxi operator licensing fees.  
(AQO 1693/11-15)

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** I thank the Member for his question. The series of questions on this issue today and at other times is timely, because, arguably, there is no area of road management in which there will be more new regulation and licensing than for taxi operators.

The consultation to which Mr Maskey referred is complete, but the response was very fragmented. Given the diverse interests of the taxi industry and the small, medium-sized and very large operators, diverse and fragmented views were expressed by the industry in all its parts, as you will have anticipated. The consequence of that is that, as of October this year, a new regime for taxi operator licences will be in place. In putting it into place, I tried to inform the process with principles that gave more protection to smaller operators and put a relatively higher financial burden on larger operators. At all times, I tried to make the process as simple and cost-effective as possible to ensure that operators, especially small and medium-sized operators, were able to continue their business in these times of economic need.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus a Aire. I thank the Minister for his response. I take on board his comment about there being diverse views out there, which I know through recent meetings with some of the taxi operators. He mentioned October. Is that the date for the implementation of the Act, or is it another process? If so, does he foresee any circumstances that could cause further delay?

**Mr Attwood:** First, I acknowledge the fact, as does Mr Maskey, that the taxi business is

fragmented. We reckon that there are some 10,000 taxi drivers in the North who can operate individually. There are also supersized firms, some of which have an affiliation of 500, 600 or even 700 taxis.

I confirm that the intention is that a taxi operator licensing system will be in place by 31 October. Unless something comes from left field, that part of the legislation will be in force and operational as of the end of October. Its purpose, given the scale of the taxi industry, is to regulate, protect consumers and, not least, ensure that tourists to our cities, towns and rural areas, when they get into a taxi cab, are certain about the character of the business that is being conducted. In an effort to recognise the fact that costs will be incurred by small, medium-sized and large taxi operators, I decided that the fee for those who register as taxi operators in the two months up to the end of October would be reduced from £140 to £40 to encourage registration and to minimise the costs, especially to small operators.

**Ms Lo:** I welcome the Minister's announcement that this will happen in October. It is long overdue. As well as lowering costs, will his proposed changes regarding a licence's duration changing from five years to one year and three years place further burdens on staff time in the Driver and Vehicle Agency? Will the system be self-financing? Will there be full cost recovery? Will there be a deficit for the DVA?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Chair of the Committee for her welcome for what I am doing. The proposal that I outlined today will not be self-financing, because I think that that would place an unfair burden on too many taxi drivers, especially the small operators. Consequently, in the first instance, there will continue to be a subsidy from central government to try to reduce the costs to the taxi industry of the regime that is being put in place.

Part of the regime that I am putting in place — this is different from what was proposed — is that taxi operators will be able to apply for an operating licence for one year, three years or five years. The purpose of that is, again, to reduce the costs. If a taxi operator applies in any one year for a taxi operating licence, it will cost £140 after this year, and it will cost £140 each and every year. However, if a small, medium or large taxi operator applies for a taxi operating licence for five years, there will only be a £140

upfront cost for that application. In that way, I am trying to protect the small and medium-sized operators. The owners of big taxi businesses can, I think, take care of themselves. The principle behind the costs and the process that I am outlining is to reduce the burden on and the upfront cost to the individual taxi driver.

**Mr Kinahan:** I welcome the help that the Minister is giving to small taxi companies. However, many people see the legislation as specifically creating a monopoly for one or two of the larger companies. What other actions is the Minister looking at to help the small or part-time companies, particularly after the legislation comes in, which is when many of the problems will start?

**Mr Attwood:** I appreciate the Member's welcome for what I am doing. I am very mindful of his point that we have passed legislation, we have consulted on the operational aspects of that legislation and we will not end up with supersized taxi firms — of which there are a number, including in the city of Belfast — as a consequence of the legislation having created a monopoly situation. The reason why I have not gone with the fees regime that was originally consulted on was that very point. The aim was to rebalance away from what I thought was legislation and implementation that inevitably favoured the large, if not the very large, to try to better favour the medium and the small so that everybody could be helped, particularly, the small single operator or the smaller taxi firm.

We will issue guidance to ensure that people know what is happening, and we will conduct roadshows to inform the very large taxi industry of the full outworking of the legislation. In particular, we will advertise and promote the initial phase of reduced costs to try to enable all those who want to continue to operate to do so at a lower cost base than might originally have been intended. In all those ways, as well as through carefully monitoring what we do, I hope that we have got the best balance possible at this stage.

## Planning Policy Statement 16

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the amendments to draft PPS 16 in regard to rural tourism. (AQO 1694/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. Given the year that is in it — 2012



— and given the weekend that we have just had, with the recognition of the Titanic, this is a timely question about where we are going with draft PPS 5. As Members know, the consultation on draft PPS 5 ended some time ago. However, I was not satisfied that the draft policy was sufficiently helpful to rural tourism in its original form to enable rural tourism to grow. Consequently, we have had further conversations with stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, to ensure that the policy is not too restrictive and is sufficiently supportive of rural tourist operations.

I will give you two examples. When the final policy comes out, subject to Executive approval, there will be further opportunity, in exceptional circumstances, for significant tourism opportunities to grow than might have originally been the case under the draft policy. We will be more flexible when it comes to the location of tourism opportunities outside rural settlements. In my view, the consequence will be a more flexible policy when it comes to bed-and-breakfast, hotel and self-catering opportunities. The draft policy, as amended, will be a pathway to a more flexible, less restrictive approach to rural tourism than was the case under the original draft.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin, agus tá ceist agam dó. Further to his reply, will the Minister tell me what key planning issues rural tourism providers have raised with his Department in relation to this planning policy statement? What are the key hurdles? Is he engaging directly with rural tourism providers, such as Todds Leap near Ballygawley and An Creagán Visitor Centre in mid Tyrone?

**Mr Speaker:** Members should make one enquiry to the Minister in their question.

**Mr Attwood:** I am sure that the local tourism industry will welcome that advertisement and rightly so. I am not protesting about that by any means. We all have an obligation to do all that we can to promote local tourism and rural opportunities, as the Member has just done.

I was inclined to broaden the scope and opportunities of the policy. Therefore, beyond the 69 consultation responses, we consulted the Environment Committee, the NITB, the Royal Town Planning Institute, NILGA and the holiday park industry in an effort to ensure that, when

the draft goes before the Executive, it will have the ambition that, I believe, it should.

Let me make it clear that, given what is happening in 2012 and 2013 and given that the built and natural heritage is, as I keep saying, at the core of tourism opportunity in the North and, therefore, at the core of economic opportunity and future jobs in the North, it is important that we are not restrictive when it comes to rural tourism opportunities. That is why, in the assessment of the draft and following the consultation, moving increasing opportunities beyond settlement limits seems to be the right principle to adopt. That will, as I indicated, increase opportunities for bed-and-breakfast, hotel and self-catering providers. That seems to me the right approach to take.

The overarching strategy, as reflected in the Runkerry decision, is that, where there are significant benefits for a rural tourism proposal, that can, at the end of the day, be critical in making the right call for individual applications.

**Mr Campbell:** In talking about how he is going to progress matters with the draft PPS, the Minister used two subjective terms. One was “significant” and the other was “flexibility”. Can he ensure at the outset that, when we reach the conclusion of his discussions, those two subjective terms and the explanation and onus behind them will be relayed to each of the district planning offices?

**Mr Attwood:** I welcome the endorsement for the approach that I am taking. The purpose in making, for example, the Runkerry decision was to send a very strong message, especially in areas where we have signature projects. As I keep saying, the Causeway signature project is arguably our single biggest tourism economic opportunity. That decision was made to send out a message consistent with planning policy. Although it may end up that those terms are viewed as subjective, they are, nonetheless, informed by various other criteria included in various planning policies, not just PPS 21 and this draft policy. The message has been sent out from my Department. That message is working through the planning system and going through training around, for example, renewables, which we will touch on later. Where there are opportunities and where there is significant benefit to the tourism industry or the economy generally, the principle should be

to favour that development. I hope that that position will prevail.

### 2.45 pm

**Mr Byrne:** Will the Minister outline what other functions his Department may have in supporting tourism development, particularly in rural parts and, indeed, some rural towns?

**Mr Attwood:** Without anticipating a later question, I will say that I have a simple view of the function of DOE. The function is, on one hand, to be the leading environment Ministry but, on the other, to be a leading economy Ministry. The twin-track purpose and function of the Department is to lead and be the leader in respect of environmental protection and, at the same time, to be a leading economy Department. That is the perspective that I try to bring. Therefore, to answer the question, when it comes to article 31 applications in respect of tourism or wider economic projects, it is the Department's role to demonstrate that it can assist the environment and the economy going forward. In my view, through the efficient deployment of the Department's planning policies, whether in respect of PPS 21, draft PPS 5, when it comes out, or the development of area plans — I hope to have an announcement in the near future on the long-awaited BMAP proposal for the city of Belfast — we can remodel opportunities for tourists and the economy, consistent with sustainable environmental standards.

### Armagh Jail

3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with Armagh City and District Council in relation to the regeneration of Armagh jail. (AQO 1695/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. I confirm that, beyond the role of other Departments in respect of Armagh jail, there have been ongoing discussions between the DOE and the council. There have been ongoing pre-application discussions (PAD) with the council in respect of any application for the development of the jail as a hotel with heritage potential, as well as the possibility of newbuild retail and residential apartments as part of the overall plan. I say this cautiously, but it is anticipated that, in the next number of months, an application in that regard will be received by the local planning office.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he ensure that the planning office recognises the importance of the development to Armagh city and that any application will have a speedy resolution, within the relevant guidelines?

**Mr Attwood:** Yes, I would like to give those reassurances, subject to the caveat that the planning system can process planning applications if it gets all relevant information from the applicant. In this case, given that an applicant might be Armagh council, I would presume that all necessary information will be provided. It is also necessary that all other relevant Departments and consultees live up to the standards of the memorandum of understanding in respect of the time frame for responses. So, subject to the caveats that all information is given up front and all responses come back from consultees in good time, you would like to think that this application would be processed in and around the six-month period. I have to lay down some caveats, but that would be the ambition. If those hurdles are jumped, the outcome should be forthcoming. That is why I encourage any council or any other developer of a significant application to engage with the local planning office in respect of the pre-application discussion. A fully fledged pre-application discussion is the key to ensuring that, when an application is received, it is processed in a timely fashion.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé. Can the Minister assure us that the pre-application discussions to which he referred have indeed been entered into by all parties to the regeneration of Armagh jail?

**Mr Attwood:** That is their purpose. I will not comment on this particular PAD, but I am concerned that some consultees do not show their full hand during pre-application discussions on the potential application with the planning system. They talk in the context of the PAD but do not give certainty on what their view might be on a future planning application. I urge the consultees to show their hand in the context of any PAD, including the one on the jail complex in Armagh, bearing in mind the importance of that building in heritage and historical terms and the importance of its regeneration. That will ensure that, when an application is received,

the process can be expedited and the six-month time frame can be lived up to.

## Wind Turbines

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for wind turbines have been submitted in the last year. (AQO 1696/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. In 2010-11, 639 planning applications for wind turbines were received: 620 for single wind turbines and 19 for wind farms. The figures for the last quarter have yet to be fully updated, but, in the nine months between April and December last year, there were 500 applications for single wind turbines and 29 for wind farms.

Those figures do not take into account other renewable energy-related applications for anaerobic digesters and other such opportunities. However, despite the English Government's indication in the papers yesterday, the scale of those figures in the preceding year and up to December of last year demonstrate, in my view, that renewable energy remains the biggest economic opportunity for this island and for the North.

**Mr Molloy:** Can the Minister tell the House how many of those multiple applications are based in the Sperrins region? Can he break it down that way?

**Mr Attwood:** I will be able to break it down like that but not right at this moment. I will come back to the Member.

Behind that question lies the point that the Sperrins has been the test bed for renewable wind applications in Northern Ireland. If you look at a map of wind farm and wind turbine applications, you will see that the greatest concentration of applications and approvals is in the Sperrins area. As opportunities for wind farms spread to the east and as opportunities for offshore begin to develop at the end of this calendar year, we need to learn from that experience in order to ensure that every reasonable opportunity is grasped in a way that local communities can live with, that does not compromise the natural beauty and that will see this opportunity rolled out to the people of the North.

Our Governments are beginning to grasp the fact that, when it comes to wind, wave and tide

— and geothermal, as we will learn in the near future — there are opportunities for this island to become self-sufficient in electricity supplies and to become a net exporter of electricity over the next 10 or 20 years. Our Governments need to grasp that idea more fully going forward.

**Mr Elliott:** Does the Minister accept that there has been a lack of preparation by the Department for the significant number of renewable energy applications, including wind turbines and anaerobic digesters?

**Mr Attwood:** I concur with the broad sentiment of the question. That is why, last autumn, I instructed the head of planning and our senior management team to conduct training at all divisional levels in the North to ensure that the spike in individual wind turbine applications was managed in an expedient fashion and that we had the capacity and knowledge in each development office to ensure that applications were dealt with in an expedient way. Given the surge in individual applications, I accept the point that there was a need to make up for some lost ground in the management of those applications and to have the skills and capacity in local offices to do that.

Similarly, as there are now over 70 applications for anaerobic digesters in the planning system, we have gathered together in the past number of weeks the major agents making applications on behalf of individual farmers and others to ensure that our planning system is better fit for the challenge of managing AD applications as they roll forward. The same will be true for offshore wind farm applications on the far side of the licensing round. The licensing round will conclude in the autumn, and we need to have the capacity to manage any forthcoming applications, not least because offshore wind is of better quality than onshore wind. However, I have to say to Members that, unless our national grid is sufficiently broad to connect renewable opportunities to the grid, we may have a situation in which planning applications are submitted and approved but opportunities to build do not arise because there is no connection to the national grid. Members will have read in the papers this morning that there may be some further developments this week in that regard.

**Mr Agnew:** Is the Minister aware of the research by the Fermanagh Trust into the community benefit from wind farms? Does he see a role

for Planning Service and, more broadly, his Department in ensuring that communities get benefit from wind farm developments in their area?

**Mr Attwood:** I am aware of the Fermanagh Trust's publication. Indeed, I have arranged to meet the trust to interrogate further its conclusions. Furthermore, I have met officials in the Department to assess how to optimise community benefit and opportunities from renewable applications. However, we may have a different context and environment from that which exists in, for example, Scotland, where there is a very advanced model of community benefit and where, as part of the planning process, opportunities, moneys or resources are allocated to local communities as a consequence or in parallel with a renewable application. The character of the rural community in Scotland is not the same as that in Northern Ireland. The rural community there tends to be concentrated in hamlets and villages, whereas the rural community here is much more dispersed, as Members know. Consequently, it may be the case at the moment that individual landowners, householders and farmers are entering into local arrangements for adjacent planning applications for renewables. I want to see greater cohesion around the principle of community benefit, and the Department and I are looking at that. However, we may end up with a different conclusion from that which prevails in Scotland.

## Social Development

### Rural Dwellings: Armagh

1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his strategy to deal with unfitnes of dwellings in rural areas, especially in the Armagh area. (AQO 1706/11-15)

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** Information on fitness levels of housing across Northern Ireland is taken from the house condition survey, and the latest information available is from the 2011 survey. Significant progress certainly has been made in tackling rural unfitnes in recent years.

In 1991, the figure stood at 17·2%, or 29,000 properties. Rural unfitnes now stands at just 4·1%, or 9,500 properties.

### 3.00 pm

The provision of new homes in rural areas is also a good way to increase not just the quality but the quantity of rural homes. In 2010-11 we started 302 new homes across the countryside, which was the largest number for over 10 years. We are clearly making good progress, although I accept that we still have more to do. In Armagh and Bann more specifically the results are even more encouraging, with the latest unfitnes levels assessed at 2·3%, or 1,800 properties, again representing a significant reduction from an unfitnes level of 11·6% for Armagh alone back in 1991.

Most unfit homes are in private ownership, with the worst unfitnes occurring in more isolated rural areas. In some circumstances, grants are available to help to tackle poor housing in the private sector, with renovation and replacement grants specifically targeted at tackling unfitnes. However, the approval of discretionary grant aid is dependent on the level of funding available to the Housing Executive.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's answer. He said that progress has been made, but will he review the strategy to address the issue of private housing that he mentioned? How much finance is available to address the issues that exist and the concerns of rural people?

**Mr McCausland:** There are two points there. First, in considering an approach, the Member will be aware that we are working on a housing strategy that will be multidimensional and multifaceted. It will cover all the different areas in housing, and the issue of rurality will, undoubtedly, feature in some way or another. As regards funding, the Member will also be aware of the amount of money that is in our budget. It can be spent on urban, rural, suburban or any other type of housing. There is no specific single amount set aside for rural housing; it is for the provision of social housing.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra. What is the Minister's overall assessment of the demand for social housing in rural areas in Northern Ireland?

**Mr McCausland:** The Member will be aware that a social housing development plan is brought forward each year, which is based on figures for demand in the different areas. On the basis of

that demand, amounts for housing are allocated for the different areas. That is indeed, therefore, a reflection of the need that exists in the different areas. It varies very much from place to place. I encourage the Member to study the figures carefully when we publish them in the near future. If he has further questions at that point, I will be happy to take them.

**Mr McQuillan:** I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What is he doing to raise standards in the private rented sector?

**Mr McCausland:** The private rented sector strategy, Building Sound Foundations, which was launched in March 2010, sets out a number of measures aimed at ensuring the provision of good-quality, well-managed accommodation in the private rented sector, supported by an appropriate regulatory framework. Measures already introduced include landlord awareness seminars, practical advice and guidance, and increased security of tenure with the extension of the notice-to-quit period.

Later this year, regulations will be laid before the Assembly for the introduction of landlord registration and tenancy deposit schemes. The introduction of mandatory landlord registration will provide councils with information that will allow them to work with private landlords to ensure compliance with the law, to raise standards and, where necessary, take enforcement action. The introduction of tenancy deposit schemes will safeguard tenancy deposits paid by tenants and will also allow any disputes between landlords and tenants to be dealt with speedily and independently.

As well as these measures and the planned improvements, it should be noted that, under the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, the landlord of a property built before 1 January 1945, where a private tenancy commenced after 1 April 2007, must have a fitness inspection conducted by a district council unless the property is exempt. In the absence of a certificate of fitness, the property is subject to rent control.

**Mr Copeland:** Will the Minister detail the method by which any property is adjudicated as being unfit and describe how, if at all, that process may have changed since the introduction of devolution?

**Mr McCausland:** There are a number of standards for housing in Northern Ireland.

Social housing operates to the decent homes plus standard. The Member will be aware that, if complaints are made, local authorities assess the houses to determine whether they are fit for habitation, and they do so regularly. There are certain basic standards, and whether those should be enhanced at some point is a matter that could be considered. As regards the way forward, all such things will be kept in mind in the strategy. One key point is that we need to ensure that we have a robust and very good private rented sector so that we are not entirely dependent on social housing. People should not see housing in the private rented sector as in some way second rate. It should be an area in which people are entitled to a decent standard, and we have that very much in mind.

## Business Improvement Districts

2. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the introduction of legislation to facilitate business improvement districts (BIDs). (AQO 1707/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** A draft Business Improvement Districts Bill has been received from the Office of the Legislative Counsel, and my officials are considering the finer detail of its provisions to ensure that it fully meets requirements. It is my intention, subject to Executive agreement, to introduce the Bill to the Assembly before the summer recess. Subject to the speed of the Bill's passage through the Assembly, I hope that it will receive Royal Assent by the end of the year. That will be followed next year by the necessary subordinate legislation and guidance from the Department, with the aim of having the statutory framework in place by the summer of 2013.

**Mr S Anderson:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Must businesses in towns such as Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown in my constituency and, indeed, other towns wait for legislation before developing their plans?

**Mr McCausland:** No, a lot of work can be done in advance. A lot of work is needed to develop a BID proposal, and that is not dependent on the legislation being in place. There is evidence from other jurisdictions that it takes between 18 months and two years to develop BID proposals. It involves, for example, canvassing businesses in the proposed BID area, working up a proposal for the services required and putting together a business case. I understand that some areas,

for example, Ballymena and Belfast, have already started work on developing their BID proposals. I encourage other areas that are contemplating a BID proposal to start work on that as soon as possible.

**Mr F McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I know that, in the past, the Minister has answered questions in the House on business improvement districts. Has he had any discussions with the private sector on how, if the resources existed, it would tap into them? What is the private sector's opinion on business improvement districts?

**Mr McCausland:** I have had a number of meetings with businesspeople in different areas of the Province. Belfast and Ballymena are quite advanced in that regard, and, in both cases, traders are very supportive. Keen for business improvement districts to happen as quickly as possible, they are making preparations. So far, any response that we have received has been very positive.

**Mr Beggs:** Business improvement districts involve raising rates to secure additional revenue for improving services. Will the Minister advise how struggling areas in my constituency, such as Carrickfergus town centre or Larne town centre, will benefit from such a scheme if they already struggle with the current level of rates?

**Mr McCausland:** The first thing to do is to point out the benefits of business improvement districts. A business improvement district offers a sustainable source of finance to fund an agreed package of additional services or projects required by the local business community. In simple terms, it is a pooling of resources to deliver an improvement plan that is business-led. That is fundamental to the success of any BIDs scheme, and it simply will not work if government is seen to be imposing it.

It is entirely under the control and direction of the local businesses, and it is for them to decide what additional things they want done, and their nature, extent and character. I am sure that, in making that decision, they will take account of the resources that are available from the traders in that area.

**Mr Byrne:** Is it the Minister's intention or hope that the business improvement scheme could enable towns such as Strabane to regenerate themselves? Will any extra resources be

earmarked by his Department for that in the future?

**Mr McCausland:** I am sure that the businesses and traders in Strabane could benefit from a business improvement district every bit as much as traders in Belfast, Ballymena, Banbridge or anywhere else in the Province. BIDs are generally recognised as very positive.

The Member asked about funding for the business improvement district process. No, we do not anticipate that happening. Additional funding will not come from central government, but we will continue to do what we have been doing. I am sure that the Member is well aware of the investment in town centre master plans and public realm schemes, a number of which were carried forward under my predecessors. We are continuing the good work that was done in that regard. It is one of the areas about which I can definitely say that.

### Housing: Foyle

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the adequacy of shared and smaller-type housing in the Foyle area to deal with the consequences of welfare reform. (AQO 1708/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I am hampered in answering the question because the Housing Executive does not hold the information in the format requested, not only for Foyle but for all of Northern Ireland. It has informed me that, in the surrounding city council area, it has 398 houses in multiple occupation. It does not hold information on single-room apartments.

The Housing Executive has identified 779 existing housing benefit cases in its three district offices covering the city council area that would be affected by the extension of the shared room rate to 25- to 34-year-olds. The precise effect of welfare reform on tenants more widely is not known, and my Department, along with the Housing Executive, is taking steps to identify what services and support need to be put in place to assist those who are impacted on by the changes. Those steps will include assessing the adequacy of shared and smaller homes, and the housing strategy will address that question further.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus go raibh maith agat don Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé. I thank the

Minister for his answer. Will he agree that little or no preparation has been done in the Foyle constituency on the provision of shared housing? What exactly will his Department do to prevent increased homelessness in the area?

**Mr McCausland:** In my initial answer, I said that 398 properties are in multiple occupation. What else can be done? We have spoken to the Housing Executive and the housing associations about the type of accommodation that they include in their social housing development plan so that the plan takes account of welfare reform rather than have them simply bring forward a plan based on the situation as it was before. I am awaiting the final outcome of that plan in the very near future.

A number of measures can be undertaken to help people in the interim period, one of which is the discretionary fund, and we are working in that regard. There is already some level of provision, but I have to emphasise the fact that detailed information on a number of issues is not available at present. When we were in London recently talking to officials in the Department for Work and Pensions, I found that, when asking about the exact implications of welfare reform on housing not here but in Great Britain, there was a higher level of uncertainty.

### 3.15 pm

**Mr Campbell:** I thank the Minister for his responses. When he was responding to the initial question, he referred to the shared-room rate. Perhaps the Minister could allude again — I know that he has done so in the past — to the origins of the welfare reform proposals that spawned, among other things, the shared-room rate; that is, the parity issues. He could perhaps outline what some others could do to oppose that by going into the House that they were elected to in order to stop it.

**Mr McCausland:** The Member makes two interesting points. The first is that, of course, all of that issue around housing benefit reform and the shared-accommodation rate for those aged 35 and under was introduced as part of the 2010 spending review changes and came into effect in January this year. It is clearly intended, and it was expected, that the change would help to contain housing benefit costs, which have risen exponentially over the past five years. The number of cases has risen by some 20%, with expenditure on housing benefit having increased by 40%. That is the background to all

of that. It is a matter of parity, and, therefore, it is something that we are required to follow. Secondly, if people wish to oppose it, as the Member has pointed out, the best place to have done so was when it was going through the House of Commons at Westminster.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Minister for his earlier answers. In one of the answers given to the original questioner, the Minister said that there is, to date, a lack of detailed information on the impact of welfare reform, particularly on housing. Is the Minister able to let the House know when that information might become available?

**Mr McCausland:** As I pointed out already, we met Iain Duncan Smith and others in the Department for Work and Pensions just a few weeks ago. They are obviously in advance of us, because they already have their legislation through and completed. We are at the preparatory stage at the moment, because we could not start until the legislation had gone through Westminster. There was some uncertainty there as to the exact implications. I was simply highlighting the fact that it is, therefore, not unexpected that there are some uncertainties as yet here in Northern Ireland.

We know that there will be an impact, but it would be impossible to predict the precise detail of it at this stage. However, we are now working on further information that has become available. The difficulty is that the focus up to now has been largely on working out implications in Great Britain. Now there is more focus on doing that work in Northern Ireland, and our officials are working on modelling schemes to try to get to the bottom of it. Even thus far, the impact that you might predict and the actual outcome at the end may not be exactly the same. At the early stage, we thought that there would be a lot more applications for the discretionary payments than there actually were. There were a lot fewer than we anticipated.

## Housing Strategy

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to develop a housing strategy. (AQO 1709/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The issues that I face in housing are stark, and I am particularly concerned about three things. First, the empty homes blighting many of our communities; secondly, the challenges of welfare reform in

relation to housing; and, thirdly, the drive and focus of social housing direction and spending. I, therefore, intend to publish a housing strategy for wider consultation later this spring. Key players within the housing sector have already contributed to the draft strategy that my officials are preparing.

The strategy will contain five themes, including how we ensure access to decent, affordable, sustainable homes across all tenures; how we meet housing needs and support the most vulnerable people in our communities; and how we drive regeneration and sustain communities through housing. We are also looking at how we develop housing services and initiatives to support people in these challenging times, taking account of the impacts of, for example, welfare reform; and, finally, how we get the housing structures right.

It will be an ambitious strategy, recognising that homes are at the heart of people's lives and that good housing contributes significantly to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society. In a time of constrained public finances, difficult decisions will have to be made, but we will have opportunities to make better use of what we have and to find better ways to do things differently.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank the Minister for his reply. I am very glad to hear him confirm his intention to publish a housing strategy for Northern Ireland, and particularly the emphasis on affordable housing. I am sure that the Minister is aware of several initiatives that were launched recently in Great Britain on affordable housing. Will he confirm whether his Department has any plans to roll out similar measures in Northern Ireland?

**Mr McCausland:** I understand that the housing Minister at Westminster, Grant Shapps, recently brought forward two initiatives: a new-buy guarantee scheme, and the Get Britain Building fund.

The new-buy guarantee scheme will potentially require smaller deposits from first-time buyers and may help them take that first step onto the housing ladder. We already have a similar affordable housing scheme here, which we fund through co-ownership. Last week, during a visit to a successful co-ownership applicant in Ballyclare, I was pleased to learn that four banks are now prepared to offer 100% mortgages under the co-ownership scheme. That is very welcome news. I hope that it will

encourage more people to take that first step onto the housing ladder at a time when house prices are so affordable compared to a few years ago.

I understand that the Get Britain Building initiative provides funding on a repayable loan basis to potentially help developers to build out what had been stalled developments. I am very interested in that sort of initiative, and I have started talks with the Finance Minister to see whether some form of Northern Ireland pilot can be established. I will be happy to update the Member on those discussions once they are concluded.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister assure the House that the housing strategy that he intends to bring forward will include and link with all aspects of housing, from housing associations, through social housing, to the private rented sector? Will it also take on board the fact that there are current reviews into the structure of the Housing Executive and housing associations? In other words, will the housing strategy be comprehensive and interlinked?

**Mr McCausland:** I assure the Member that it will indeed be comprehensive and coherent. All of the different elements need to fit together and complement each other, and the strategy will fit in closely with the work on the Housing Executive that is being taken forward by the Department. All of those aspects will be complementary.

**Mr Nesbitt:** In his original answer to Mr Hamilton, the Minister talked of his concern about empty housing. Does he intend to bring in powers to take possession of empty homes, similar to powers that I understand exist elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

**Mr McCausland:** If the Member looks down the list of questions for today, he will see that there is one specifically on the issue of empty homes. At the moment, we are operating two pilot schemes to see what, in the Northern Ireland context, is the best way of addressing that issue. There are areas in which we clearly see a concentration of empty homes. We need to know what the nature of that. What is the breakdown of ownership of those homes? Why are they lying empty and what can be done to get them back into use as quickly as possible? Once we have completed the pilot schemes —



the results should be known within weeks — we will be in a position to take this to the next stage.

**Mr Lyttle:** Will any housing strategy seek to establish the nature and extent of housing segregation in Northern Ireland and establish an action plan to facilitate the overriding preference to live in mixed neighbourhoods?

**Mr McCausland:** The figures regarding segregation are well known and the facts about it well rehearsed. There is a very high level of segregation, particularly in social housing. There is a very high level of segregation even in private housing. So it is not simply a matter of looking at how you deal with that in social housing; it is a matter that spreads right across the board. That reflects the fact that not only housing but many other things are segregated in Northern Ireland. All of these things are elements that make up a person's life. Where you live will be influenced by whether there is a school available for your children to go to and whether social and recreational facilities are available and accessible to you. Those are things that will encourage you to move into an area. It is much more complex than it may at first appear. Certainly, we are open to the issues, and I am sure that any proposals that people have will come forward during the consultation.

### Empty Homes Pilot Exercise

**Mr Douglas:** I will ask question 5, Mr Speaker, although the Minister may have answered it to some degree.

5. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the empty homes pilot exercise which will target homes in east Belfast. (AQO 1710/11-15)

7. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline how the two areas in north and east Belfast were chosen to take part in the empty homes pilot exercise. (AQO 1712/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I assure the Member that the Member for Strangford has not stolen his thunder. With the Speaker's permission, I will answer questions 5 and 7 together, as both relate to the empty homes pilot exercise in north and east Belfast. The empty homes pilot exercise, which I have asked the Housing Executive to carry out, is under way in the Fortwilliam and Upper Newtownards Road areas of Belfast. It will investigate the possibilities for

and test the merits and effectiveness of various interventions to bring empty homes back into use.

The two areas were selected because of their location, demographic, level of housing demand, the number of empty homes and the variance in condition of the empty properties. That will allow the full range of interventions to be assessed. In both areas, there is potential to make a measurable positive impact on empty properties, particularly in the private sector. There is also the potential to harness local community involvement and support, including through partnership with other statutory and community groups. The various interventions include publicity, advice and signposting; practical help, such as grants and loans; and the threat and use of enforcement action. Work will be carried out by the Housing Executive. Relevant interventions will be identified by the end of this month, and necessary actions will be planned.

The results from the pilots will inform a new empty homes action plan for Northern Ireland. I am determined to maximise all opportunities to meet social, and other, housing need and to reduce blight. That will be an integral part of the forthcoming housing strategy.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive answer. Will he inform the House of what happened to the first empty homes strategy?

**Mr McCausland:** I thank the Member for the question. It is worth reminding ourselves that an empty homes action plan has been ongoing since 2007. Although there has been limited progress on the management of Housing Executive and housing association empty homes, the same cannot be said for private sector empty properties. Progress in that sector has been very disappointing, not least because the Housing Executive has limited knowledge of or control over those who own the homes. The Housing Executive has done a lot of work since 2007 to identify and survey empty houses and to make contact with owners. However, the results of such action have so far been disappointing.

Since coming into office, I have been determined to maximise all opportunities to meet housing need, reduce blight and tackle antisocial behaviour. I tasked officials to work with their colleagues in the Housing Executive to learn from approaches that are used in other jurisdictions and to test those in two pilot areas.

As I said, I expect the results of phase 1, which will inform a revised action plan, by the end of this month.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that housing provision, with which he is grappling, is a very sensitive issue. Does he acknowledge that there is some concern about the selection of those two locations, given the long-established patterns of social stress and need elsewhere in Belfast?

**Mr McCausland:** The choice of the areas was determined largely by having, in a small concentrated area, the sort of mixture of issues for which we needed to get a very informative pilot scheme. As I said, those areas were chosen because of their location, the demographic, the level of housing demand, the number of empty homes they have and the variance in conditions of the empty properties. In the Fortwilliam pilot area, which is bounded by Fortwilliam Parade, Somerton Road and Skegoneill Avenue, there are 22 empty houses in a very small space. Three of those houses have transferred to Trinity Housing, ownership details are known for seven, the details are still unknown for a further seven properties, and the remaining five are up for sale or rent. So, it is about getting that mixture of properties that can be transferred to housing associations quickly; properties that we know the ownership of and that, therefore, you can work on; those of which you do not know the ownership, meaning that there is work to be done on how you find that out as quickly as possible; and finding out what the turnover in sale or rental is in that area. The figures for the Upper Newtownards Road pilot are not dissimilar. So, the decision was based on the nature of the vacancies rather than on the overall housing need in an area.

3.30 pm

## Private Members' Business

### Disappeared Victims

*Debate resumed on amendment to motion:*

*That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on anyone with information which might help in the location of the remains to share that information with the commission, through whatever means they choose, without further delay. — [Mr D Bradley]*

*Which amendment was:*

Leave out all after "waiting;" and insert

*"and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families." — [Mr Nesbitt]*

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

With regard to this issue, many of us rise to speak with a lot of sadness in our hearts as we discuss members of families whose remains cannot be obtained for a proper Christian burial. Those of us who have followed coffins of loved ones and seen their burials have seen the heartfelt sympathy and outpourings that take place as people do what is normal in the course of life. Indeed, in what we refer to as the majority of our religion, Christian patterns, the same as in other cultures, the burial and sanctity of human remains. It is in that context that I speak in this debate.

The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains was established in April 1999. Its objective was to locate the remains of those abducted, murdered and secretly buried by paramilitary groups during the previous 30 years. It is worthwhile stating, though some indeed may have the temerity to suggest otherwise, that the abductions and murders were the primary human rights violations in those cases. Denying the families the ability to

give their loved ones a Christian burial added insult to the original injury.

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

Others have shared time with families and listened to their emotions. I can reflect on Mrs McVeigh of Donaghmore and members of her family, who I have been with on a number of occasions. Her young son, Columba, was taken from her and abducted. Other members of the House will have shared the same emotions with her and been with her as that poor woman pined her way to her grave, thinking of her young son taken from her by the Provisional IRA.

Thirteen years later, nine bodies have been recovered. Those nine families have at least been able to bury the remains of their loved ones, but there are now 16 names on the commission's list of victims. When the commission was created, there were fewer names on the list, but the Provisional IRA has since remembered some more people whom it abducted, murdered and secretly buried. The attentions of the press aided the recovery of those particular memories. The Provisionals have now admitted responsibility for 13 of the 16 victims, but they are also prime candidates for responsibility in the unattributed cases.

The commission was created to allow information to be given confidentially which, it was hoped, would lead to the recovery of those victims' remains. It has been partially successful. With the help of the efforts of the families of victims and organisations such as the WAVE Trauma Centre, the locations of nine bodies have been identified and those remains recovered. However, the confidentiality which the commission guarantees also protects those who come forward to help locate the remains of victims. The information, and any evidence which is obtained as a result, can be inadmissible in criminal proceedings. Forensic investigation of that evidence is restricted, and the information can be used only to facilitate the location of the remains to which that information relates. Given those protections, granted by both the Irish and British Governments, it is perhaps surprising that more information has not been brought forward and that more victims' remains have not been located by now, giving release to their families and the dignity of a Christian burial to those remains.

However, the commission remains committed to its objective. The families of the victims whose

remains are still to be located cannot grieve properly until that is achieved.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close, please.

**Mr McGlone:** Anyone who has information that could lead to the location of those remains and does not bring it forward is responsible for those families' continued pain and suffering.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Your time is up.

**Mr McGlone:** Mar Éireannach, tacaím leis an mholadh.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I will begin by echoing the plea made by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in February of this year, when the commission made a presentation to the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, when he said:

*"I would voice a fervent appeal, on behalf of those whose loved ones have disappeared without trace, that those who can offer information about their fate and where bodies may lie should now do so. I realise that many of those in possession of such information may fear the risk of inculcating themselves, but I am sure cast-iron arrangements could be made, if necessary through trusted intermediaries, to report such information anonymously and in confidence. Many of the relatives have faced up long ago to the probability that a loved one has been killed, but it is one of the most fundamental of human instincts to seek certain knowledge of the fate of a husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister. Common humanity cries out for this modest act of mercy."*

Those words were, I think, spoken with sincerity and were reflected by the contributions of Members this afternoon. It is remarkable, given that there were so many commemorations over the weekend and today for the victims of a disaster some 100 years ago and memorials recently opened, that those people have yet to have the most basic of memorials granted to them; that is, a gravestone or headstone that will mark the spot where their loved one is buried.

I want to pick up on Mr Glone's plea about information and those comments of Mr Bloomfield, because the commission went on to talk about those who were responsible or who may have information. Some concern is voiced in some quarters about the work of Boston College, its interviews and the requirement that is now being made upon Boston College

for those tapes to be given to the PSNI. The commission made a commitment at that meeting, which states:

*“As our commissioners have stated, our activity is not currently time-limited. Once we have finished the active phase, the structure will remain in place ... The hot topic at the moment is the future security of Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains, ICLVR, records. I have no doubt that this has been brought about by the recent activity in connection with the Boston College archives. We want to make it crystal clear that the commission’s records will always be retained by the commission and will never be passed on to any other body or organisation. They are safe and secure for the future.”*

As Mr McGlone said, and, indeed, my colleague Mr Bradley said in his opening remarks —

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Member for giving way. Earlier in the debate, the Member will have heard contributions from Sinn Féin Members, when Ms Ruane said that there should be no hierarchy of victims. We all very much agree with that, given the contribution of Members in the debate earlier about Titanic. However, she and Mr McLaughlin also said that anyone with any information should pass it to the authorities. Indeed, Mr McLaughlin said that anyone who owned land and had any information should pass it to the authorities.

Is it not regrettable that that encouragement did not come from Sinn Féin all those years ago? Indeed, tragically, members of the general public who did have that information could not have passed it on because we know the inevitable consequences.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I was going to remark, Mr Humphrey, that, unfortunately, not only did families lose their loved one but their character was subsequently assassinated in the immediate aftermath. That still lingers. There was also a wider fear in the community for anyone seen to be associated with the families of some of the victims — a fear of retaliation. That remark and comment of yours is well made.

Unfortunately, I think Ms Ruane said earlier that there should be no political point-scoring and no ambiguity. I am not having any ambiguity on this matter. The crime of the disappeared stands above all the brutality of 35 years of the conflict whereby people have been denied their most basic rights. It is regarded in international law as a war crime. It is regrettable that in

our peace process, in order to move society forward, we have had to not quite turn a blind eye but make some allowances whereby some people who are responsible will not be brought to justice. One of the things that the families are quite clear on is that that is not their intent. Mr Bradley was quite clear in his contribution that today’s debate is about urging those people, particularly those who might have a conscience and might wish to make some level of peace with their maker before they face their own death, to assist the commission and the families in locating the remains of any of the remaining seven people who have disappeared.

There are those who talk about human rights, and it is quite noticeable that some of those people are from organisations that were the greatest abusers of human rights in the North over the past 40 years. I would have been very interested to hear a conversation that some might have had with Councillor Madame Liu Yandong, because she might have had a few questions to ask some of the people who were making remarks to her.

Nonetheless, today’s debate is about trying to find closure for the families who have yet to have their loved ones’ remains returned to them.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Bring your remarks to a close, please.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Therefore, I hope that all of those who have information are assured that they will not face a court and that they will assist the commission.

**Mr Allister:** There is nothing about terrorism and the implementation of terrorism that is anything but cruel. Yet, within all of that, the taking of someone, the cold-blooded murder of them and then, instead of leaving them by the side of the road, as was done in so many cases, secretly burying them, going through a process of denying involvement and giving no assistance to the search over decades for their bodies has to be one of the most cruel acts associated with the implementation of terrorism.

It is of those cruel acts that we speak today. Each one of them infamous, but perhaps the one with the greatest infamy was the murder of Jean McConville, which epitomises much of all of that. In this debate, we had an opportunity for some Members to put right wrongs of the past and do the decent thing in respect of past utterances.

We had Mr McLaughlin's attention drawn to the fact that in 2005 he shamefully said — shamefully said — that the murder of Jean McConville was not a criminal act. If it was not a criminal act, then it was, in Mr McLaughlin's view, a lawful act. It was one or the other. Patently, today, in his view, because of the refuge he has taken in obfuscating and avoiding the issue, it is still a lawful act. That speaks much, and in far greater volumes than I could ever speak, about the heart of those who sit on the Benches of Sinn Féin. To this day, they patently believe that the callous, cruel and vicious murder of Jean McConville was a justified and lawful act. Why would they think that? Because of who perpetrated it. Because in their twisted and perverse minds, the acts of the IRA were lawful acts, justified acts, acts of war or whatever perverse way in which they seek to describe them. That is the shame of this debate: there are Members in this House who, to this very day, hold to that perverse Provo mantra that what the IRA did was right and justified, because, in their eyes, it was the lawful authority. There was nothing right, there was nothing justified and there was nothing justifiable about the vile, vicious and cruel murder of Jean McConville. Maybe, of course, it is because that murder touches right at the heart of Sinn Féin, if we are to believe what appears to be in the Boston library, namely the utterances from the grave of Mr Hughes and Dolores — the lady whose name I have forgotten.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Kelly.

**Mr Allister:** Dolores Kelly — Dolores Price; sorry. She tells it as it is, it seems, and says that she drove Jean McConville to the place where she was murdered as a member of a unit presided over by the current president of Sinn Féin.

### 3.45 pm

**Lord Morrow:** Does the Member accept that it is worth noting that, when Jean McConville was murdered, 12 IRA people, both males and females, were dispatched and one single bullet was put through the back of her head?

**Mr Allister:** Yes indeed, and dispatched by whom? One of the questions that hangs over the House is this: who controlled the unit that decided that Jean McConville would die? Is that part of the reason why Mr McLaughlin cannot bring himself to say that it was a wrong act, an unlawful act, a criminal act, a terrorist act, a vile and cruel act, and why, to this day, he hugs

the IRA mantra that it was not a criminal act but a lawful act? That tells me all that I need to know of the party that sits on those Benches, and it is why, in my mind, they are still unfit for government.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank Members for their contributions today. In particular, I pay tribute to Mr Bradley and his SDLP colleagues for bringing forward the motion. I am pleased that they will accept our amendment, which we believe is helpful. As Mr Nesbitt outlined, it was tabled to move this on to another stage. I also applaud and pay tribute to the families of the disappeared. I sometimes struggle with the term "the disappeared". I often wonder whether there is not a better term that we could use. I am sure that others in the Chamber have thought about that too, but clearly we have not come up with anything. Those families have endured something in this lifetime that I do not think any of the rest of us have had to endure.

As I have said on many occasions, one of the most difficult jobs that I have had to do is to go to the home of a family of someone who has been murdered by terrorists and see the difficulty that they face in the following years. However, as Mr Bradley outlined, many of those people have not even had the opportunity to hold their wake and remember their loved ones. As my party colleague Mr Nesbitt pointed out, they have not even had the opportunity to go and stand at the graveside of their family member at Christmas, or at any other time.

Some words that have been said here today need to be reiterated: human decency, respect and compassion. I must say that that is far from the minds of the people who carried out these dastardly acts and those who still openly and bluntly refuse to give the information that may allow the remains of the people who were so brutally taken and murdered to be returned to their families. However, that would go against the grain of justification. Mr Allister outlined some of Mr McLaughlin's comments in years gone by. Down the years, many have attempted to justify not only the taking and murdering of these people, but the entire murderous campaign that was carried out over three or four decades. I do not believe that there can be any justification. It is far from the human decency, respect and compassion that my colleagues, particularly Ross Hussey, outlined. Where, in a country that is supposed to hold dear the Christian values that we all, or many of us, are

supposed to have, are those Christian values today? Where are the Christian values of those in the IRA who took people from their loved ones and murdered them? Is it not time to come forward and give information? Is it not time for the independent commission to speak, because I believe that it knows the identities of some who can help?

That is why we tabled the amendment. I know that Mr Lunn may not be happy with it, but we have discussed and raised those issues before. It is time to move to another level. If we are truly moving into a new phase of Northern Ireland and into a new political realm, it is time for the likes of Mr McLaughlin, who has obviously been put out front here today, to do the shoving for Sinn Féin, and, indeed, maybe the IRA. Is it not time for those people to come forward, tell the truth and give these people's remains back to their families?

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank everybody who contributed to the debate, and, in particular, I thank Mr Bradley for bringing the motion to the House. Although we have some reservations about the Ulster Unionists' amendment, we are prepared to accept it and will not divide the House on it. By dividing the House, one would take away from the substance of the motion.

The motion is a timely reminder to those who have information about the disappeared to divulge it to the commission, or to do so through an intermediary to the commission, because the pain that people suffered continues. It does not simply end, and, of course, the recovery of remains for other families of the disappeared adds to that pain because it creates a greater expectation that remains can be found, and that has to be borne in mind.

Therefore, the earnest plea from all Members of the House is for people to search their recollections and consciences and to provide information, no matter how little it might be, to give closure to those families who have suffered so much.

I cannot understand why the IRA did this. Why did they take away bodies? There is enough indignity and suffering in ordinary people finding their loved one shot and left as some sort of refuse on the side of a road. The taking away, concealing and burying of that body is an act of savagery and a gross violation of anybody's rights.

We heard condemnation from the Sinn Féin Benches. They said that it was terrible, but we heard no explanation of why it happened in the first place. We heard no condemnation of the murders, only of the fact that the remains were disappeared — and that was some violation of people's rights. However, there was no condemnation whatsoever of the act of murder.

**Mr Humphrey:** Those of us who have lost loved ones through natural causes know of the absolute loss that that brings to a family as they try to deal with it. However, consider the position of a family who have experienced the absolute loss of someone being murdered in a most heinous crime and not being able to deal with that, and then not being able to deal with it for decades afterwards and not knowing where, or if, that person is buried. That is an absolutely awful travesty. We hear others talking about the hierarchy of victimhood, but these people are placed at the top of victimhood in Northern Ireland, because they have not had the opportunity to gain closure and to provide a Christian burial for their loved one. That has to be an absolute indictment of those involved.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the Member for his intervention, and I agree with him.

Mr McLaughlin said that this was the policy or practice of the IRA and that that policy or practice was wrong. He left it at that; he did not give any further explanation. It was a policy. He said that it was a bad policy, but that they had abandoned it and, therefore, had, in some respects, set things right. That cannot be right.

In his intervention during Mr McLaughlin's contribution, Mr Jim Allister pointed out, again, the 2005 justification in relation to Jean McConville. That act cannot be justified. It was a criminal act by anybody's standards. It has been confirmed by Nuala O'Loan that Jean McConville was not an informant, a British spy or whatever you want to call it, but even if she was, how would that justify somebody putting a gun to the back of her head? She was the mother of young children. As a consequence of that act, that family was destroyed — individually and collectively. Shame on those who did it. The fact that up to a dozen people were involved in that act of brutality brings great shame on that community and organisation.

For a Member of the House to continue to insist that it was not a criminal act is reprehensible. I think that the Member should reflect very

carefully indeed on what he has restated in the House today, and his party should reflect very carefully on that. If he does not change his position, one hopes that the party, at least, will change its position. We are in an entirely new dispensation, and it is not right for those old habits and those old and bad values to continue. They are anti-human. They are anti everything we believe is civilised and just, and they should be abandoned. I call on Sinn Féin and Mr McLaughlin to reflect very carefully indeed.

It has been suggested in some way that the commission will wind up its activities in the near future. First, I do not believe that that will happen. It may slow down or retrench its activities, but I do not believe that its activities will end. It has a statutory mandate, here in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, to continue its work. The Assembly should make it very plain to the commission that that work should continue until the last possible bit of information is obtained in order to retrieve those who have been disappeared in such a callous fashion. As Mr Lunn said, this is a legacy of the past, and we all have to deal with it. By tabling the motion today, we reaffirm the fact that that legacy of the past must be completed.

#### **4.00 pm**

I believe that it was Mr Lunn who mentioned the case of Lisa Dorrian. It is important that we remind the public about Lisa Dorrian and express our sympathy and support for that family, who have also been cruelly treated.

There has been some unanimity in the House about the continuance of the commission's work. I believe that there is consensus about the noble objective of obtaining the remains of those who are still disappeared. I hope that such consensus continues and that the resources and the will continue until there is a successful conclusion to the recovery of the disappeared.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

#### **Resolved:**

*That this Assembly acknowledges the progress that has been made in locating the remains of disappeared victims; recognises the work of the families, the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains, WAVE Trauma Centre and others in achieving that progress; notes that some families are still waiting; and calls on the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to make clear what more can be done, and by whom, to bring the comfort of recovery to the remaining families.*

*Adjourned at 4.02 pm.*





# Written Ministerial Statement

**The content of these statements is as received  
at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the  
official reporting (Hansard) process.**

## Health, Social Services and Public Safety

### **Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgery Services**

*Published on Thursday 29 March, 2012*

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I wish to make a statement to the Assembly following notification from the HSC Board that it plans to carry out an external review of paediatric congenital cardiac Services.

I am advised by the HSC Board that it plans to commission an external review of the paediatric congenital cardiac service in Belfast. Paediatric congenital cardiac surgery is a highly complex specialist service which carries a significant risk. Congenital cardiac disease is a rare condition. Currently the service in Belfast is provided by a highly skilled and dedicated team including surgeons, cardiologists and nurses.

We recognise that such a highly complex specialist service is inherently vulnerable mainly because of the low activity levels. As a result there are significant challenges in attaining and sustaining quality against rising standards. Standards for this service are increasing across the UK with a move towards surgeons working in larger teams delivering higher volumes of activity. Available evidence and professional consensus is that larger teams deliver better outcomes. In light of these increasing standards we need to consider how we deliver the best service for children in Northern Ireland.

The external review to be commissioned by the Board will consider the current service provision, activity, outcomes and sustainability of the paediatric congenital cardiac service and will provide assurance on the quality of services for patients in Northern Ireland

It is important to recognise that in such a highly complex specialty, not all children will survive. Across the UK, there is a mechanism in place where surgical outcomes are reported to the Central Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD). This enables health professionals to continually measure and improve care by comparing their work to specific standards and national trends.

The CCAD report for the period 2007-2010 indicated a higher than expected mortality for one particular procedure, undertaken at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, on children suffering from a disorder known as Tetralogy of Fallot, which is a serious heart abnormality, The Trust took appropriate and proportionate action by suspending Tetralogy Repair when the CCAD data was made available in September 2011.

I understand that in the context of the CCAD report for 2007-2010 and following validation of the outcomes and an internal review, the Belfast Trust also plans to seek a more detailed review into the outcomes during that period. The Trust has confirmed that it will invite the Royal College of Surgeons to conduct a review of those outcomes as advised by the Society of Cardio Thoracic Surgeons and the British Congenital Cardiac Association. It is entirely appropriate that the Trust would wish to take a more in-depth look at the higher than expected mortality for that procedure during that period.

The Belfast Trust review will be carried forward in addition to the HSC Board's external review of the wider paediatric congenital cardiac service.

I am conscious parents of children suffering from congenital cardiac problems may be anxious about these reviews. It is important to remember that the CCAD report has highlighted one procedure out of over 30 cardiac surgical procedures carried out on children across the UK. This procedure is currently not being carried

out here and any children who need this surgery are being referred to other centres.

I wish to reassure families that the Board and the Trust are acting appropriately to ensure the provision of high quality, safe services for these children.

The Belfast Trust has established an advice line for any parent who is concerned. Free phone 0800 9178226. This advice line will be staffed from 5.00pm this afternoon (29th March) until 9.00pm this evening and again from 8.00am to 6.00pm tomorrow (30th March).

## **Interim Report on Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units**

*Published on Wednesday 4 April 2012*

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I wish to make a statement to the Assembly about the publication of the Interim Report of the Independent Review of Incidents of Pseudomonas aeruginosa Infection in Neonatal Units in Northern Ireland.

I will begin by expressing again my condolences to the families who suffered the loss of their baby.

I also want to thank the families who have contributed to this review so far. The death of a baby is devastating for their parents and the wider family circle. The suffering of a baby who has contracted a potentially life-threatening infection is heart-rending and the anguish of their families is unspeakable. To relive these events so others may never have to suffer the same must have been incredibly difficult but it was selfless and hugely courageous.

I want to acknowledge also that this has been a difficult time for the staff who have been involved.

On 31 January, I made a statement to the Assembly to update Members on the pseudomonas incidents in neonatal units. I said then that I had asked the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to facilitate an independent review of these incidents, and that I had asked for an interim report by end of March so that urgent actions could be taken.

Professor Pat Troop has led the review. On 30 March she presented the interim report to my Department.

The interim report focuses on the first two Terms of Reference of the review. These were: (1) to investigate the circumstances contributing to the occurrences of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units from 1 November 2011, and (2) to review the effectiveness of the Trusts' management of the occurrences of pseudomonas infection and colonisation within neonatal units.

The Interim Report is being published today, 4 April, on the RQIA's website: [www.rqia.org.uk](http://www.rqia.org.uk). The report is also being placed in the Assembly Library.

The report is concise and is written with the lay reader in mind. I would encourage Members to read the report fully and closely.

The Interim Report contains 15 recommendations (Annex A). A number of these can be implemented immediately, and will be. I have asked my Department to develop an action plan with a timetable for taking forward those recommendations that require a significant lead-in time or investment.

I want to thank Professor Troop and the review team for completing this phase of the review within the timeframe that I set, and for the clarity of their report.

The Review will now focus on the third and fourth Terms of Reference. These are: (3) to review the effectiveness of the governance arrangements across all five Health and Social Care Trusts with regard to the arrangements for the prevention and control of infection and all other relevant issues in the respective neonatal units, and (4) to review the effectiveness of the communication between the DHSSPS, the HSCB, the PHA and the five Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of all relevant information and communications on the pseudomonas bacterium. I have asked to receive the final report by 31 May 2012.

The Review team has made it clear that it is keen to hear from the families who have not yet accepted their invitation to engage with them.

I am grateful to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee for agreeing to meet during the Easter recess to hear directly from Professor Troop and the Review Team. They will be able to explain more fully the significance of their findings through response to the questions that Members will want to ask.

I want to underline that I am determined to ensure that the lessons from this Interim Report and the forthcoming Final Report are applied diligently and effectively across all relevant parts of the HSC which is clearly the only appropriate response to the tragic events that led to this Review. I will report further to the Assembly at that stage.

We must not forget that at the centre of this matter are families who have been bereaved through these tragic events, as well as many more families who have been through great anxiety. We owe it to these families to do

everything we can to prevent such tragedies and incidents from happening again.

#### **Annex A Recommendations**

1. The current interim guidance that sterile water should be used when washing all babies in neonatal care (Levels 1, 2 and 3) should be continued pending early consideration of the Department of Health (England) guidance issued on 30 March 2012.
2. Tap water should not be used in maternity and neonatal units during the process of defrosting frozen breast milk.
3. The current arrangements for testing water in neonatal units in Northern Ireland for pseudomonas should be continued pending early consideration of the Department of Health (England) guidance issued on 30 March 2012. This guidance sets out recommendations for water testing for all augmented care units including neonatal care.
4. The presentation of test results of water samples should be standardised across the laboratories which undertake this for HSC organisations.
5. The review team recommends that guidance on cleaning sinks should be reviewed so that practice is standardised across all clinical areas.
6. Regional guidance on the cleaning of incubators and other specialist equipment for neonatal care should be produced.
7. Independent validation of hand hygiene audits should be carried out on a regular basis, supported by robust action plans where issues of non-compliance are identified.
8. The intensive care accommodation in the neonatal unit at Antrim Area Hospital should be expanded to allow more circulation space around cots.
9. Pseudomonas aeruginosa should be identified as an alert organism for neonatal intensive and high dependency care. When identified from a sample from a baby, taps and sinks should be tested in rooms which had been occupied by that baby since birth.
10. Surveillance arrangements should be established for Pseudomonas aeruginosa for augmented care settings including neonatal care.

11. All relevant organisations should work to an agreed regional protocol for the declaration of outbreaks.
12. Arrangements for the typing of strains of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* should be established in Northern Ireland.
13. A regional neonatal network should be formally established in Northern Ireland.
14. The hours of availability for the regional transfer service for neonates should be expanded with plans put in place to move to a 24 hour service.
15. The development of the new Regional Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Royal Jubilee Maternity Service should be expedited as soon as possible. In the interim period, improved accommodation for the purposes of isolation and for the cleaning of equipment should be made available for the current unit. Steps to improve the space around each cot should be considered.





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