



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Overview Briefing on the Main Areas of
Responsibility and the Key Issues Facing
the Department of Justice**

22 April 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Lord Morrow (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Jonathan Bell
Mr Jeffrey Donaldson
Mr Tom Elliott
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr David McNarry
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
Mr John O'Dowd
Mr Alastair Ross

Witnesses:

Mr David Ford) The Minister of Justice
Mr Nick Perry) Department of Justice

The Chairperson (Lord Morrow):

Minister, I welcome you to your first and our first meeting of the Committee for Justice. I wish you well in your post. I suspect that you have an arduous task in front of you, but I also suspect that you are equal to that. As Chairman of the Committee, I wish you well for the future. I also welcome your permanent secretary, Mr Nick Perry. Mr Perry, we look forward to working

constructively with you and your staff.

I suspect that, on occasions, you will say and do things with which we differ, but such is life. Perhaps there will be occasions when we say and do things that lead you to differ with us, but I am sure that we will be tolerant with each other and will agree to disagree sometimes. Minister, you are welcome, and we look forward to receiving your report and your comments.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford):

Thank you, Chairman. From looking round the room, it seems to me as though the members of the Environment Committee have been recycled in slightly different guises. It is a great pleasure to be here, and I thank you for the invitation to attend the first meeting.

As I said in the Chamber on 12 April, I want a Justice Department that is accountable to the people of Northern Ireland, that works with other Departments and the Executive as a whole, and that builds a partnership, including on the responsibilities that lie with the Committee and with the Assembly altogether. My working relationship with the Committee will be crucial to the delivery of an effective justice system and to ensuring that we succeed in those goals.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 states that a Committee is appointed to “advise and assist” a Minister. I have no doubt that, at times, you will wish to go beyond advice and assistance, but that is the spirit in which I wish to approach the relationship. From sitting at the other end of these discussions in two other Committees over the years, I know that it is vital that we build on the possible working relationships in partnership. As the Chairperson said, it is not about always agreeing on everything but recognising that we are doing what is very much a joint task in serving the needs of the people of Northern Ireland.

I shall deal with some of the key issues as I have seen them to date at this early stage. It is clear that the first duty of any Government is to provide for the safety of its citizens and, obviously, that issue confronts us directly at the point of devolution of justice. There is no doubt that we face a significant challenge from a small number of dissident republicans, and there is a real issue to be faced on that as we seek to carry out the necessary reforms to the justice system at the same time.

Everyone in the community should be asking what those dissidents are fighting for and what

are they fighting against. Are they fighting against the cross-community power sharing that exists in the Assembly and the Executive? Are they fighting against the overwhelming wish of the people of Northern Ireland that we should be here working together? Are they fighting against the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which is broadly representative and is becoming even more representative of all our people from every section of the community? The clear message is that dissident republicans are seeking to succeed by making politics fail, and I am determined that politics will succeed and that they will fail.

There is no doubt that they are seeking already to make prisons something of an issue. We saw that at Easter, and a variety of issues have been dragged up that are being presented in an extremely dubious way but which, for some people, resonate with the past. There is no doubt that the Police Service is having success in putting some of those people behind bars, and that will continue to add to the number of dissidents who are in prison, which will give them a greater opportunity to seek to manufacture a cause. Whatever allegations may be made about the regime in Maghaberry prison, the dissidents are not the victims. The victims are the people who have suffered kneecappings, pipe bombings and other kinds of attacks, and they are the people who I want to be here to protect.

I have no doubt that the prison issue will take up a fair bit of the Committee's time. The Hillsborough agreement includes a specific commitment to what is described as:

“A review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons”.

I am planning to institute a rolling review of the operation of all the Prison Service estate. In those circumstances, it is inevitable that it should focus initially on Maghaberry prison and then move on to looking at the other prisons. I trust that you have a copy of the letter that I sent to the First Minister and deputy First Minister today explaining my intentions in that area. We are considering the terms of reference and have not yet identified any individuals who might be part of a review panel. We need to ensure that we get a range of expertise, including from outside this jurisdiction. That is a key way of carrying forward that aspect of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement.

A variety of other work is going on that extends beyond the immediate prison issue. We are examining major issues such as an offender management strategy, which will set out ways of

achieving a reduction in offending by those who have passed through the criminal justice system. There is no doubt that we have a severe difficulty with the recidivism rate.

Good work is being done at the moment, but there is not enough of it, for example, in areas such as mental health and skill deficits. I already met other Ministers to see where we can tie in the work of the Health Service and of further education, because that is part of the partnership emphasis that we need.

I want to see a more appropriate range of sentences being available to the courts. There are real issues on which we have been lagging behind, such as with fixed penalties, ensuring that we get the right alternatives for minor offences and the right sentencing policy for more major offences. One question is whether we should consider having a sentencing guidelines council. That was mentioned again in Hillsborough. There are a variety of views on that, which I discussed briefly with the Lord Chief Justice last week. We will need to come to the Committee with some specific proposals on how we move forward in that area.

A key issue for the Department of Justice (DOJ) is about playing its part in building a shared future for all our people. Even though we were included only at the point of devolution, we are already contributing to the overall Executive strategy on cohesion, sharing and integration. However, there are clearly issues about community tensions around interfaces where there is a major input for the Department of Justice and its agencies. We also need to work further on building shared space. We need to ensure that there is confidence and that the justice system is seen to work well. I shall ensure that the Department takes shared future considerations into every aspect of its work.

Having hinted at some of the points that are coming up, let me say a brief word on some of the issues that are being specifically considered at this stage for inclusion in a justice Bill, which we hope will be completed before the next Assembly elections. We have already completed a consultation on violence and intimidation around sporting events, which is the parallel of the Football (Offences) Act 1991 as it applies across the water. We are consulting on the needs of victims, including special measures for vulnerable victims and the concept of a fund for victims of crime. I presume that the Committee will either want to contribute directly to those consultations or hear about the responses.

There is a real need to move forward on crime reduction partnerships and to bring together the existing work of community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships (DPPs). There is a range of other issues about effectiveness and efficiency, and issues around legal aid are clearly key. I hope to go into detail with the Committee about that, and I will say a word in a minute as to how we deal with that. We need to continue the existing business being done in the Department on an action plan for victims and witnesses in general. Further issues were raised in the Hillsborough agreement about that.

We must ensure that we modernise the processes, business and estate of the Courts and Tribunals Service to ensure that it is modern and fit for purpose. Work is ongoing around that, and a key aspect of that particular work is around delays in the criminal justice system. We all know that it can take longer to get convictions in Northern Ireland than it does in other jurisdictions, and there is a real issue about justice delayed being justice denied. We need the agencies to work better together, and I met with the Criminal Justice Board last week to talk to its members about my concerns. I will be taking a close interest in the work of that board in bringing together the different agencies.

I mentioned the issue of legal aid. Although it was addressed through the Prime Minister's financial package, it offers only short-term relief. There are major issues that have to be addressed fairly speedily, and detailed proposals will be coming to the Committee on that problem.

I am determined that, under devolution in this jurisdiction, we will learn from the best practice elsewhere, whether that is on an east-west basis, a North/South basis or wherever there are lessons to be learned. I am also aware that there are good examples of work being done that can give lessons to other people. Our probation service, for example, is among the best in the United Kingdom.

I want the justice system to provide real delivery for all our people. The core issue for that is developing the partnership that I spoke about at the beginning. That has been underscored to me in the meetings that I have had over the past 10 days. There is a need for every Department to recognise that there are issues relating to justice; work with a range of non-governmental organisations; and for partnership between the Department and this Committee. Indeed, I suggest that the Committee may need to work with other Committees in parallel to the work that we are

doing with other Departments.

The fact that today's meeting has happened so early provides the scenario in which we can move towards a useful partnership and work together for the greater good of all the people who we represent. I am keen to see that extended, and arrangements are already being made for a range of meetings in which officials can go into greater detail. I will make one suggestion, and it is very much up to the Committee to decide how it wishes to respond. I am keen for there to be an informal meeting at the earliest possible time between my Department's board and the Committee, particularly as we work on the package that will potentially go into legislation. That will be an opportunity to look at the potential areas in which early agreement may make legislation likely in the first year and to highlight difficult areas that may require further work.

The practical reality is that, if we are to produce a Bill, it is likely to be with the Committee only in September, which will leave a relatively short timescale. However, I hope that, if the Committee has helped to shape the content of the Bill at an early stage, the draftsmen could do the work over the summer. That would benefit us all and, subsequently, make the Committee's work somewhat easier. That is an idea for the Committee to consider, and it can follow it up if it wishes. In the meantime, I will hand over to Nick, who will give you some detail on the structures and current operation of the Department. Thank you.

The Chairperson:

Thank you.

Mr Nick Perry (Department of Justice):

Thank you, Minister. It might be helpful for the Committee if I cover two issues quickly, the first of which is structure of the Department. A good deal of the detail is already in your briefing packs, so I will not spend too long on it. I will also say a word about the broad areas to which the Department's resources are currently devoted and highlight a few of the more significant efficiency initiatives that are being implemented, although the detail of some of those may vary as the Minister's priorities develop.

The DOJ consists of three core directorates; two large agencies, namely, those relating to courts and prisons; and three smaller agencies, namely, the Youth Justice Agency, Forensic Science and the Compensation Agency. It funds a range of arm's-length bodies, of which the

PSNI is by far the largest. However, there is also probation, the Legal Services Commission, the Policing Board, the Police Ombudsman and other bodies. It is important to note that it will not just be a Department of policing and criminal justice. Civil justice will be central to the new Department. Those functions are in the process of transferring to us, and we expect those to come to us in the course of May.

The three core directorates in the Department are justice policy, which deals with criminal and civil justice policy and sponsors the three smaller agencies and probation; justice delivery, which provides the central services of the Department and will take over responsibility for legal aid from the Court Service in due course; and policing and community safety, which leads on the resourcing, policy and legislative framework for policing and community safety.

The Department's staff is a little less than 4,500, which includes almost 1,900 prison officers. The budget is £1.4 billion, resource and capital. Ninety per cent of our staff work in the five agencies and deliver services to the public directly or indirectly. In addition, more than 60 staff in the core Department work in Access NI, the criminal records checking agency, and are, therefore, involved directly with service delivery. Ninety-five per cent of our budget goes to our arm's-length bodies, which is mainly the Police Service but also probation and the other agencies.

As he just indicated, the Minister has begun to set out his priorities about the way that our work is organised. To help implement those priorities, the Department is organising its work around five themes, each of which will be headed by a board level director. The themes are as follows: access to justice, which covers issues such as legal aid, civil justice and the modernisation of the Courts and Tribunals Service; reducing offending and dealing with its consequences; safer communities; justice in a shared future; and improving delivery. Like the Scottish Government, we are trying to move away from rigidly focusing on organisational structures to looking at issues on a strategic, cross-cutting basis.

The balance of investment in the DOJ's budget is as follows: £877 million for policing, either the PSNI or other policing-related bodies, which is 68% of the budget; £176 million for dealing with offenders, either in custody or the community, through the Prison Service, the Probation Board and the Youth Justice Agency, which is 14% of the budget; £143 million for access to justice, including legal aid and the Courts Service, which is 11% of the budget; and £94 million for policy and delivery work, including compensation and community safety, and other central

functions, which is 7% of the budget. We direct about £9 million of our money each year to voluntary organisations. A high proportion of the DOJ budget goes on people-related costs. For example, around 70% of each of the police, prisons and probation resource budgets are spent on staff costs. Justice is a man-power intensive business, which imposes a certain inflexibility on our budgets.

The DOJ has a number of efficiency initiatives. As the Minister said, much work needs to be done on reform and delivery. Central issues for the Department of Justice this year will be continuing the process of prisons reform, dealing with the problem of delay in the criminal justice system, reforming legal aid and setting a new strategy for civil justice. It is essential to find ways of reducing costs while maintaining or improving standards. Devolution offers opportunities for joint working to tackle issues on a system-wide basis such as reducing offending. We are already in touch with colleagues in other Departments on a range of issues, as is the Minister with his ministerial colleagues.

The Department has an overall efficiencies target of £125 million for the current spending review period, which ends in March 2011. As at December 2009, £89 million of efficiencies had been delivered by the Department and its arm's-length bodies, and we expect to meet that overall target by the end of this financial year. The business review team has been established to drive that work forward. As part of the efficiency agenda, the DOJ participates in the wider NICS shared services initiative. We are already part of HR Connect and the NICS central procurement system. We also have plans in place to integrate our training with that of the rest of the service. We have not yet joined Account NI, because of costs issues, but we are keen to do so, in principle. In the meantime, we are looking at streamlining our internal financial processes across the Department and its agencies. Progress has, therefore, been made in that regard.

The Minister previously highlighted the delays experienced in the criminal justice system as a whole. More positively, however, the latest phase of Causeway, which is the cross-criminal-justice IT system, is now up and running. To date, the operational elements of the programme have delivered benefits — although not all cash-releasing benefits — estimated at £30 million in savings, which have been recycled by the criminal justice organisations concerned. More generally, although a matter primarily for the police and the Policing Board, the Chief Constable's resource to risk strategy seems to be a model that the rest of the justice system can go on.

Finally, I will mention two specific areas: managing offenders and access to justice. First, the Prison Service's cost per prisoner place has reduced by nearly 13% since 2007, from just over £90,000 to less than £78,000. That means that the prison system still costs almost twice as much as its equivalent in England and Wales. However, given the much smaller scale in which our Prison Service operates, that represents credible progress over the past couple of years. In addition, 230 new prison places have been provided, and a further 140 are planned.

Secondly, as the Minister said, legal aid reform is a major priority for the Department. By next year, we need to have reduced costs by more than £15 million from where they were last year, and by 2014, we will need to have reduced costs by more than £20 million, while ensuring that funding continues to go those who need it most. That is a major priority for the Courts and Tribunals Service. As the Minister mentioned, Robin Masefield, the director of the Prison Service, and David Lavery, the head of the Courts and Tribunals Service, will brief the Committee on those issues in more detail. That is all that I want to say in my introduction.

The Chairperson:

Thank you both for that overview. I have no doubt that members will want to ask questions on what has been said.

Minister, copies of the letter that you sent to the First Minister and deputy First Minister about the Maghaberry review have been circulated to members. On the issue of the situation at Maghaberry, the letter states:

“We have not yet approached potential team members, but we have a mind a range of expertise, including someone with a prison background, and at least one person from outside our jurisdiction.”

What sort of expertise are you looking for? Will those who are involved be experienced solely in prison work?

The Minister of Justice:

As the letter says, the review is at an early stage of consideration. I imagine that the team is likely to be made up of about three people. It is fairly essential that there be someone from outside Northern Ireland to bring a wider background to it. I imagine that there would certainly

be at least one person with direct prison management experience. We need to ensure that others can bring the appropriate other perspectives.

I am not always convinced that lawyers necessarily make the best chairpersons of inquiries, but in this context, a lawyer or relevant academic may have the best overview. That is the range of issues that we are looking at, and we are seeking to do that in the context of having a team that is small enough to be manageable, rather than trying to tick every box and end up with an unwieldy and excessively large team that would be difficult to co-ordinate.

The Chairperson:

You are not envisaging a quango that would go on infinitely?

The Minister of Justice:

No. I hope that the Maghaberry review will be completed in a period of months so that we can then look forward to examining other institutions on the basis of the Maghaberry experience in light of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement.

Mr Donaldson:

I add my words of congratulation to the Minister on his appointment. I wish you and your Department well in the important responsibilities that you have undertaken.

Following from the Chairperson's question about the review at Maghaberry, can you advise whether there has been progress in appointing a new governor at the prison?

Secondly, there is clearly agitation at the moment in the separated regime. In your opening remarks and in your letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, you referred to the recent incidents that occurred at the prison. There have also been problems with the Prison Officers Association (POA), which has concerns. The dispute has thankfully been settled for the time being, but there are outstanding issues. You referred to the need for the POA to be involved, and said that its role was essential.

There is concern that any review of the separated regime may result in further concessions being made to prisoners who are linked to paramilitary organisations. One of their objectives in engaging in violence at the prison has been to secure those concessions. Will the Minister assure

us that, in initiating this review, the objective is not to appease those who would disrupt the working of the prison or would seek to have more control over their accommodation and what happens in that accommodation, but rather that it is about the effective and efficient management of the prison, and that means that all prisoners and not just the paramilitary ones?

The Minister of Justice:

You raised a number of points, Mr Donaldson. Thank you for your good wishes.

As I understand it, an acting governor is in post. I am not quite sure what the precise arrangements are. If Nick does not have anything else to add about the substantive appointment, we can write to the Committee if that would be helpful.

Mr Perry:

Last year, the Pearson review recommended that an external governor be appointed to Maghaberry. When the Pearson team came back this year, they noted that it might not be essential to have an external governor. They also noted that the acting governor was doing an extremely good job. That appointment is still under consideration by senior management in the Prison Service.

The Minister of Justice:

The review will be of the entire operation of the Prison Service, beginning with the whole of Maghaberry. It is not an issue of merely considering separation, although the separated regime is part of Maghaberry as a whole. The review will consider the wider issues as far as they relate to all prisoners. The issue of separation is a reserved matter in the Northern Ireland Office. The Department of Justice must manage what the NIO decides to implement and the Prison Service is managing it on that basis. The review is very much about seeing whether there are better ways of managing the prison. It is not a matter of saying that there will be concessions to other people.

The trouble at Easter was resolved in 36 hours as a result of resolute action being taken by Prison Service management with the support of prison staff, and that indicates that some positive work is being done. We can expect that certain people may choose to wind the situation up in different ways and at different times, but I am satisfied that the problems at Easter were dealt with as well as possible.

As I said, the review will examine the overall management and processes of Maghaberry in the interests of all prisoners and the wider public.

The Chairperson:

Do you not envisage the granting of concessions as a way to bring about reform?

The Minister of Justice:

I certainly do not envisage concessions being made. There may be changes in the management regime, but they will be carried out on the basis of what best serves the needs of prisoners, prison staff and the wider community, not on the basis of concessions.

Mr Donaldson:

On a point of clarity: I entirely accept that the principle of separation is a reserved matter for the Northern Ireland Office. However, does that limit the scope of the review in so far as it relates to the separated regime?

The Minister of Justice:

I do not believe that it does, and there has been no suggestion that it does, because we manage the regime, though we do not take the decisions on it. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate for a review of the prison management to be carried out by a review that reports to me.

Mr Perry:

Whether to continue with a separated regime is a decision for the Department and the Executive, but who goes into a separated regime is a matter for the Secretary of State. Therefore, a review of separated accommodation in the prison will not be constrained by that.

Mr McNarry:

You are both very welcome. My party did not support your appointment, David, and there is no change there. However, on a personal basis, I wish you well in what is a challenging job and assure you of my party's assistance and best wishes. The party will give you any help that it can and looks forward to working with you.

You mentioned a number of things in your introduction. Can you expand on what you said about your Department's work and interest in interfaces? What were you talking about?

You also talked about the modernisation of the estate, including the Court Service and the Prison Service. Is that an ongoing project that will be paid for from your current budget, or is it something that you want to develop in a future budget?

On the subject of budgets, are you comfortable with the budget that you have been given? You can correct me if I am wrong, but I do not believe that the Department's budget will be ring-fenced. After 6 May, all Departments have been placed on red alert to expect cuts. Are you expecting cuts to your budget as the other Departments are, or are you OK during for this term with the inheritance that you have accepted? I want to open up a matter, which I am sure the Committee will return to repeatedly. How do you intend to develop your budget needs in light of the punitive measures that we will all be subjected to over the next number of years?

The Minister of Justice:

Thank you for your good wishes. Indeed, good wishes were also conveyed by your party colleagues, the two Ministers, with whom I have already had meetings about partnership issues. It is important that we put the divisions of 12 April behind us, and I am grateful for the gracious way in which you said that.

Your first point concerned interfaces. The practical reality is that the DOJ is responsible for the management of so-called peace walls, for example. Obviously, there are partnership issues, and we will have to work with the people who work with the communities on either side. We will seek to reduce fear and tension in the hope that, at an appropriate stage in the future, we can look at what physical changes may happen. As far as I can see — indeed, we heard it from Mayor Bloomberg of New York last year — divided societies are not economically successful. Although we have to realistically consider the genuine fears that exist close to interfaces, we must move forward in that area.

Mr McNarry:

Do you have a mindset to bring peace walls down?

The Minister of Justice:

I have no mindset to bring them down and certainly no timetable. However, I believe that, if we are to become a normal, economically prosperous and successful society, it will be more a case of

changing the barriers that exist in individuals' minds about issues such as movement to work and opportunities for economic development. That is not an instant issue, but the physical peace walls are merely the manifestation of what occurs in people's minds, which has to be changed if we are to progress together as a society.

You asked about courts modernisation. A new courts estate strategy is under way. We must ensure that we have modern, fit-for-purpose and accessible courthouses. I am old enough to remember the days when petty sessions could sit in Cushendall or Plumbridge, but those days have long gone. To meet the needs of victims when they appear as witnesses in court, we must ensure that there are proper facilities and that vulnerable witnesses can be separated from offenders and their families in courthouses. That is relevant to an example that I saw in Laganside Courts yesterday, but it is simply not possible in most of our older courthouses.

If we are to have good courthouses, we will have a limited number of them. The Courts and Tribunal Service is looking at how we manage those estate issues. I imagine that that is an issue on which I will come back to the Committee as the strategy develops.

Mr McNarry:

Will you need money to do that?

The Minister of Justice:

That touches on another point that you made, which I was about to go into. Yes, of course we will need money to do it. However, there may be issues when capital release is tied in with capital spend. I am simply not up to date enough with how the strategy is developing, but we will certainly keep you informed as business goes forward.

You asked whether I was comfortable with the budget. I do not think that you could expect any answer but no from any Minister in this place or, indeed, elsewhere. We would all prefer a bigger budget, but we are aware that we have to live within the resources that are made available. I will ask Nick to go into the detail of the ring-fencing issue.

However, I agree entirely that there are real issues for the future beyond this year, which are dependent on the outcome of the Westminster parliamentary election. I suspect that every Department in each region of the UK is facing difficult issues. That is why I am so concerned

that we get matters such as legal aid in hand as soon as possible. We must ensure that the legal aid budget is used to ensure access to justice for those in real need. However, we must deal with the fact that it is significantly higher here than in any other region. Nick will talk about the precise issue of this year's finances.

Mr Perry:

I will pick up Mr McNarry's points. We are working on the assumption that the budget will be ring-fenced. However, that is a decision for the Executive and, as far as I know, it has not yet been confirmed. That is our working assumption, which is based on the discussions that led up to devolution. On the capital budget specifically —

Mr McNarry:

Do you mean that the budget will be ring-fenced until the end of the next financial year?

Mr Perry:

I mean until the end of 2010-11 — the end of the spending review period.

The Department's capital budget is £147 million. As the Minister said, we have quite ambitious plans for the modernisation of the Courts Service and the prisons estate, but a significant part of that would be an issue for the next spending review. There is some money available for the public services college — the police college — but again we will need some funding for that in the next spending review.

Mr McNarry:

I am sure that we will spend a lot of time over the next months talking about that.

Mr McCartney:

Congratulations on taking up your post, Minister. Go n-éirí an bóthar leat. May the road rise before you. I wish you well in the job.

I have a couple of questions about the review. The addendum to the Programme for Government, as referenced in the agreement at Hillsborough, states that there will be:

“A review of the conditions of detention, management and oversight of all prisons”.

Your letter states that you will initiate a review of the regime at Maghaberry. Will the review be as laid out at Hillsborough?

The Minister of Justice:

Yes; it will be as laid out in Hillsborough. The point that I was making about Maghaberry was that we believe it appropriate to do it on a rolling basis one prison at a time, and we believe that Maghaberry is where we should start. I do not know whether you have been given the full draft of the terms of reference at this stage. That document will certainly be given to the Committee when it is completed.

Mr McCartney:

Sometimes the word “regime” can mean the day-to-day running of a prison, whereas in Hillsborough, it was made very clear that the review should be of conditions of “detention, management and oversight”.

The Minister of Justice:

It is not my intention that the word “regime” means day-to-day running. It means the full encompassing of the Hillsborough agreement.

Mr McCartney:

Will the team be the same for the rolling review or will it change from prison to prison? Finally, when the reports are completed, how will they be presented? Will they become public documents or will they be for the Department and you to action?

The Minister of Justice:

To the best of my knowledge, all previous reports have been made public. Unless there are any particular security implications in it, my belief is that the report should be published in full as soon as possible. That issue will need to be examined when the report is completed, because there may be references to the security of the establishment.

There would be benefits if the team was the same for all three parts of the review. However, that is dependent on whether the people who agree to do the review are available to continue doing it on an ongoing basis.

Mrs D Kelly:

I have a number of points to pick up on, the first of which is about the financial envelope referred to in your letter. How much of the required financial envelope is dependent on the transfer and sale of former military sites? Is the budget sufficient to initially build Magilligan, for example?

Mr Perry referred to the cost of keeping prisoners being £78,000 a year. Has there been any initial analysis as to the differentials in costs and the reasons for the different cost of a prisoner in GB? Are there any quick wins that can be made on that?

I welcome the Minister's remarks about victims and community safety, because there are great expectations about the devolution of policing and justice, particularly about low-level crime, which affects a greater number of people. There were some thoughts in the NIO about the relationships with the DPPs and community safety partnerships, not all of which were shared by many of the political parties. Is that something that you are going to examine and are you going to take on board some of the concerns that were raised by elected representatives?

The Minister of Justice:

I will leave Nick to answer some of the difficult financial questions, but I will give you a first take on it. I welcome your welcome for my comments on victims. It is absolutely crucial that we ensure that victims and, in many cases witnesses, who are also victims, are better treated.

That is why I was pleased to see what was being done at Laganside Courts yesterday, although there is clearly much more to be done.

The member asked about community safety. A consultation paper was issued by the NIO, and the question of rationalisation of community safety partnerships and DPPs will obviously come back to us now. My initial take on it is, I accept, based largely on my experience as a district councillor, and it is that, in many small districts, similar groups of people can be found discussing similar issues at meetings of the two partnerships. There is a benefit to rationalisation, but, at the same time, it must be recognised that the DPP function of holding the police to account is distinct from the police working with councils and others as partners on the community safety side. However, I believe that that can be addressed, and there are some suggestions in the consultation paper. It is up to anybody who responds to the consultation to say whether they feel the proposals

cover the historic aspects of both community safety partnership work and district policing partnership work.

The member asked about the budget for the replacement prison at Magilligan. My understanding today is that, although a budget case was prepared some time ago and went from the NIO to the Treasury, DFP has slightly different procedures for dealing with business cases. Therefore, that is being looked at again.

I shall duck the issue of the cost per prisoner place and capital costs and leave that to Nick.

Mr Perry:

There is no direct link between the replacement of Magilligan prison and the sale of military sites, but Mrs Kelly is absolutely right that the devolution deal made clear that some military sites could be disposed of and the proceeds used to meet some departmental pressures, particularly those relating to equal play claims in the DOJ family. The devolution settlement did not give large amounts of cash to the Department. What it did was fix some otherwise unmanageable pressures that we would have had to face, such as police pensions. The military sites were part of that arrangement.

There has been detailed analysis of the difference between cost per prisoner place here and in England and Wales, and we could certainly provide the Committee with that, if it would be of any help. The problem is that the system here is very small, so it is difficult for the Prison Service to generate economies of scale. To get a step change in cost reductions in the Prison Service would require significant investment in infrastructure and, perhaps, staff structuring.

Mrs D Kelly:

It would be useful to have that analysis at an early stage.

Ms Ní Chuilín:

I am looking at some of the priorities listed in the papers to the Committee. I turn first to the PPS and the lessons that can be learnt there. I am thinking in particular of my constituency and the Thomas Devlin case. How will lessons be fed into the process, and how will the Committee hear about finding a better way of ensuring that people feel a sense of justice? How can the system be made more transparent and accountable? In many people's view, the system is neither.

I would also like the Minister to comment on whether there is an all-island approach to the management of sex offenders. That is certainly an issue in north and south Belfast, where there is a high concentration of sex offenders.

A line in the Minister's letter on the review of the regime at Maghaberry prison jumped out at me, perhaps because of my previous experience. It relates to the incident at the prison over the Easter weekend. The letter states:

"I believe that it was effectively handled by the Prison Service, but there have been subsequent incidents, albeit to date relatively minor in character."

What is the Minister's understanding of something being handled effectively by the Prison Service? Was anybody hurt or injured when that incident was being handled effectively?

The Minister of Justice:

My understanding — this may be before I had any formal responsibilities — was that, at Easter, a small group of prisoners in Roe House barricaded themselves in the recreation room, remained there for approximately 36 hours and left without there being any serious injury to either prisoner or prison staff and without any major damage being caused, other than a certain amount of damage to the recreation room, which, I understand, is being fixed at the moment. Compared to some things that we have seen in the past, that incident can be seen as having been effectively handled. We can debate whether or not it was perfectly handled, but it was certainly effectively handled in that the stand-off ceased on the second day without any major injury to anybody concerned.

The issue of sex offenders was raised, although not in any great detail, when I met Dermot Ahern and his team last week. The difficulty is, in large measure, with the authorities across the border passing information in this direction. It ties in with legislative issues that they have, and I believe that that is under consideration at that end. My understanding is that there is no difficulty with the information available on sex offenders moving south and being passed from us to the Garda Síochána or other relevant authorities. The authorities there are looking at that issue, and we will talk to them about it in future. Because it was an initial meeting, the issue was discussed without going into great detail. Nonetheless, that example shows that there is reasonable co-operation between North and South but that certain difficulties can crop up. In this case, the difficulty is on their side, not ours.

The member mentioned the PPS. The PPS is, of course, a Department without Minister. It is not accountable to the Department of Justice at all, except in so far as it relates to the Criminal Justice Board on some of the initiatives on speedier business that we are involved in. Having met the parents of Thomas Devlin, I, too, could express my personal opinion, but, as a Minister who has no responsibility in that area, it is not appropriate that I should. There is a real issue that is part of the wider point that I emphasised about how victims are treated, and it sometimes goes beyond simply providing information on how cases are proceeding. That matter can be raised with the PPS informally. However, just as the Chief Constable has operational independence, so it is the PPS's responsibility to decide how it makes decisions.

Mr O'Dowd:

Carál touched on an issue that I want to raise; delivery of justice and how the community relates to the justice system. Minister, I know that you cannot discuss individual cases, but families in my constituency have been waiting three decades for inquests into the deaths of their loved ones. When families look at the justice system as part of that spectrum, they lose faith. I hope that, as we move forward on this journey together, we can improve on those timescales.

A lot of today's discussion has focused on prisons, and rightly so. I note that the Minister said that he met other Ministers. We can develop a justice system that concentrates on locking people up or we can develop a justice system that minimises crime and the effects of crime. I hope that we take the latter approach. Those who commit crimes against society certainly deserve to be punished, and, when the circumstances are right, they deserve to go to jail. However, we must also reflect on how we as a society minimise the causes of crime. People from a socially deprived background are more likely to suffer the effects of crime and are more likely to end up in jail. We must direct resources at that problem.

A high percentage of prisoners suffer from mental health problems to some degree. In some instances, their crime against society is linked directly to their mental health problems, yet they are locked up in jail. Various reports have shown that support for prisoners with mental health problems is far from good. In the early stage of your tenure, do you have any plans to look at how we support people with mental health problems in jail? Will you look at alternatives to locking up people who suffer from mental health problems that can clearly be linked to their crime?

The Minister of Justice:

You mentioned delivery and 30-year waits for inquests. Unfortunately, large elements of the justice system are caught up in the issue of how much resource is devoted to dealing with legacy matters and how much is devoted to current and future needs. There is no easy resolution. I take entirely the point about lengthy delays in inquests, which raises real issues in a number of areas.

Your point about trying to stop people going into the criminal justice system in the first place is absolutely valid. Before Jonathan Bell declares my background as a social worker, I will say that social workers say that all the time. The real issue comes back to the point about partnership that I made earlier: we have seen successes from organisations such as Sure Start and from the early intervention work that has been done by some organisations, including the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO), members of which I met this morning. However, a lot of that initial work does not relate directly to the Department of Justice; it relates to what is being done by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Education or even the Department for Employment and Learning as part of work to help parents to have a more stable life so that they can guide young people as they grow up.

The aim is to get fully joined-up partnership government to address some of those problems. You are absolutely right; justice that picks up the problems only when people get involved in crime will not be an adequate deterrent, nor will it result in any major change. We must establish linkages to ensure that those at risk of taking the criminal path are diverted from it as early as possible. I am keen to work with others on that.

There are other issues into which those Departments have inputs. For example, I had a discussion with Reg Empey about how the work of the Department for Employment and Learning relates to the provision of education for prisoners. Many prisoners in young offenders' centres are severely educationally behind at the ages of 15, 16, 17 and 18. There are real issues around how we ensure that we make up for their educational lag while seeking to divert others from ending up in the same position.

In a sense, that is similar to the point that was made about mental health concerns. A vast number of prisoners have personality disorders or mental health issues. The prison regime has improved somewhat through the work that is being done by the South Eastern Health and Social

Care Trust to provide healthcare in prisons. However, I understand — although I will check with the permanent secretary — that we are currently reviewing the first 18 months of that provision. I have no doubt that the review will show that, although there have been improvements, a lot more remains to be done.

Mr Perry:

That is absolutely right. On the more general point of mental health, DOJ is contributing to the review of mental health legislation being undertaken by DHSSPS. The recent Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) report on mental health and the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland was exceptionally good. It included messages and recommendations on every element of the criminal justice system, and the Minister referred to the ongoing initiative for safer custody in prisons as well as work on the health side. Special measures are also proposed for the giving of evidence in court by people suffering from mental disability, and they will come to the Committee in due course. Thus, there are a number of initiatives, but it is a central issue.

Mr Elliott:

I thank the Minister and Nick Perry for their presentation. Minister, I congratulate you on your appointment and wish you well. Your opening statement referred to the ongoing threat from dissidents. Having heard you pose some questions to those dissidents, I will pose one to you now. I know that you are limited in what you can say about the ongoing issue, but have you any strategic proposals to make to the Committee about how to deal with that threat?

My second question relates to the Policing Board's boundaries and responsibilities: where do they end and those of the Department of Justice begin? I am not a member of the Policing Board, so can the Minister enlighten me as to where those boundaries are and whether there will be any friction in the future?

Finally, will you clarify the position on the appointment of the Attorney General?

The Minister of Justice:

The simple answer to the final question is that the appointment of the Attorney General is the responsibility of OFMDFM.

The Policing Board/Department of Justice boundaries should be no different to those between

the Policing Board and an NIO Minister. There is a tripartite relationship of Chief Constable, Policing Board and Minister. The board holds the Chief Constable to account, and the Minister sets the wider strategic level budgetary approach. However, the precise details of operational policing are with the Chief Constable, and the intermediate layer, the policing plan, is entirely the responsibility of the Policing Board. I certainly do not intend to interfere with the Policing Board's role in that. Therefore, I do not see that there should be any difficulty. I have already met the acting chairperson and the vice-chairperson of the Policing Board, and I think that we will have a reasonably profitable and good ongoing relationship.

Mr Elliott:

You say that you have responsibility for the budget. Would it be fair to say that budgetary matters may be one of the biggest issues?

The Minister of Justice:

Yes. The Department will take part in the overall budget discussions with the Executive, and presumably fight the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Department then has responsibility for allocating the budget between different work aspects. The Police Service is the largest spending element of Department of Justice work by some margin. Two thirds of the Department's money will go to policing. We have also been supportive in the previous NIO guise, and that will continue when it comes to seeking the additional resources that were granted to deal with the dissident threat last year. If there is a further call on that basis, the Department will again be supportive in ensuring that the police get the resources that they need.

You asked about strategic proposals; you are almost tempting me to stray into the Chief Constable's area of responsibility. Having just said that he has certain responsibilities, I certainly shall not do that. However, there is an issue around ensuring that we get the widest possible co-operation so that we can show that the institutions are working and delivering. My duties are then to see that the Chief Constable has the resources for his specific task and that other agencies that can work together do work together. For example, the Organised Crime Task Force, the Serious Organised Crime Agency and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) all have a role to play in striking at the potential for financing some of those activities. There is a wider co-ordination role for the Department. We need to be clear, however, that the operational role rests with the PSNI.

Mr Bell:

I also offer the Minister my good wishes. We share the same professional background, and it is

good to see a friend achieve ministerial office.

We have seen police officers risking life and limb throughout Northern Ireland over the years. Most recently, we saw Constable Carroll losing his life and Constable Heffron losing a limb. This is an opportune time to pay tribute to all those police officers, members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and others who gave their lives, and to remember the sacrifice that they made and which their families continue to make.

I should declare that I am on a career break from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. We touched on the issue of mental health and the review of the provision of prison healthcare by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. Are there proposals in that review to look at providing joined-up mental health services, both at the point of admission to prison and post-admission, to ensure that there is a seamless transfer?

Secondly, there is major concern in the community about child abuse, an area in which I worked for the past 21 years. If you fill out your tax form wrongly, you can go to jail. If you sell underweight coal, you will, going by past examples, be fined more heavily than those who sexually abused children and walked away from our courts with suspended sentences. That major anomaly is raised in my constituency surgeries and in major cases that I am aware of through my professional background.

I want to return to an issue that was touched on earlier. A lot of people are going to prison for very short periods, sometimes for only four days. That can happen as a result of fine default. I understand that it can also happen when people coming out of psychiatric institutions find that they are unable to pay for their television licence. For example, a single mother who is fined but then volunteers to pay the licence fee will be asked to pay the fee plus an additional £600 in costs because the case has already gone to court. There is no way that someone in that situation could pay that. The cost to society of placing people in prison for four days must be seriously considered against a more restorative model of justice whereby people can pay the fine and also pay back society for what they have done. There is no serious argument that a four-day period in prison, costing x number of thousands of pounds, is the most successful model for tackling the problem.

It has been mentioned that people have been waiting a number of years for inquests.

However, I want to put it on record that there are thousands of families of murdered policemen who have never seen anybody brought to justice, never had any hope of an inquest and never had millions of pounds spent on an inquiry. Meanwhile, the terrorist perpetrators boast about having a code of honour that prevents them from giving those families the justice that they deserve.

The Minister of Justice:

Thank you for your good wishes, Mr Bell. The string of issues that you then threw up almost distracted me from that.

You mentioned the risks faced by PSNI officers and by RUC officers and others in uniform before them. I have no difficulty in paying tribute to the work that is being done, and, in particular, to my constituent Peadar Heffron, whom you mentioned. I am fully aware of the issues. Through its work with the RUC GC Foundation memorial fund, the Department is involved in work that recognises that aspect of the past.

You asked whether there was the potential for certain issues to be addressed in the review of the contribution from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. The potential for that is there, and I will make sure not only that it is there but that it is realised.

You mentioned child abuse and sentencing, and perhaps I should have got all my defences in first. I mentioned the independence of the PPS and the Chief Constable, and we should also remember the independence of the judiciary. I made the point that there is a possibility of establishing a sentencing guidelines council or of doing some work in that area. It is an issue that needs to be considered and one which, as I said, I have raised with the Lord Chief Justice. However, it is not an issue that is easily resolved, and the anomalies that you highlighted are the reason that there is so much public concern.

I am delighted that you managed to establish your liberal credentials on the inappropriate use of prison sentences. You may be held to that in the future. The point that you make is absolutely valid. Sending people to prison for four days or a week creates wider difficulties, particularly in a case similar to that which you cited, where family life is disrupted and vulnerable children are involved. I am not in a position to tell independent judges what to do. However, the Committee and the Department are in a position to look together at what suitable alternative sentences might be, including attachment of earnings or benefits and community restorative activity. As opposed

to short-term prison sentences, which add further disruption to what is probably an already chaotic family life, all those measures will make it much more likely that people will learn the lessons of what they have done and pay something back to society. That is one issue for which we are considering potential legislation, and we are very happy to discuss that with the Committee in more detail.

Mr A Maginness:

Minister, your undue emphasis on the separated regime in Maghaberry is a political error, and I hope that you resile from that position. There is a very important need for reform of the prison service, and Maghaberry is as good a place to start as any. However, if it is your intention to start with the separated regime, which I feel that you are emphasising, that would be a grave political error at this time. I hope that you can resile from that position.

The sentencing issue is very important to Assembly Members and to the public generally. What is your view on the position now whereby the PPS will have the authority to refer a case to the Court of Appeal? Surely it is not proper for the PPS, in some instances, to almost be a judge in its own cause in determining whether a case should be referred to the Court of Appeal? Do you have any plans to amend the legislation to permit the Attorney General to make such a reference?

Another important issue is victims. The criminal injuries compensation scheme that was imposed on the people of Northern Ireland by the direct rule regime is clearly inadequate and quite unfair in many instances. Do you have any view on that, and do you plan to review that position? Will you be instituting a review of the criminal injuries compensation scheme?

Finally, do you have any plans to refer outstanding consultations to the Committee so that you can obtain its views and the views of Assembly Members? One that is of particular significance is the review of the County Court and High Court jurisdictions. That is an important issue for everyone in the community.

The Minister of Justice:

Your first point suggested that I was placing an undue emphasis on the separated regime. I certainly do not think that that is the case. I acknowledge that the separated regime was part of Maghaberry, but I thought that I made it clear in my initial comments, and certainly in response

to Mr Donaldson, that the review of Maghaberry will be done as a whole, of which the separated regime is clearly a part, but that it will not concentrate on the separated regime.

You asked about the PPS having the authority to refer to the Court of Appeal with regard to sentencing. Until 11 April, that matter resided with the Attorney General. We now have legislation that states that it resides with the PPS. The matter can be looked at again to consider what the appropriate locus is. I must confess that one of the few things that has not been thrown at me so far in the Department is the basis of the criminal injuries system as it currently applies. However, if the Committee wishes to refer that to the Department and request that it be investigated, I will be happy to look at it and consider what would be the appropriate way to take it forward.

If the Committee does not already have a list of all the outstanding consultations, I can ensure that it gets one. A number of consultations have been initiated by the NIO in recent weeks and months. It is up to the Committee to decide whether it wishes to respond as a Committee or merely comment on the basis of being given access to the consultation responses after the process is over. I am happy to work with the Committee in whichever way it wishes, whether it be on the court jurisdiction issue or some of the other issues. I am thinking in particular of the two consultations on victims issues that were launched relatively recently; one on a specific victims of crime fund and the other on special measures for vulnerable witnesses and victims. I would be happy for officials to brief the Committee at any point and to take whatever view the Committee wishes to give whenever it wishes to give it.

The Chairperson:

I am sure that the Committee will want to consider that. We thank you for making yourself so amenable on that matter, and we will certainly get back to you.

Mr Ross:

I, too, welcome the Minister. I congratulate him on his appointment and wish him well in what will be a challenging role.

I would like some clarification on the regime in Maghaberry. I was a bit confused about the answer to Mr Donaldson's question. The Minister said that separation, segregation and integration were matters for the Secretary of State, yet the permanent secretary seemed to suggest

that they would be decided by the Department, although it would be for the Secretary of State to decide who was eligible.

Mr Perry:

It is for the devolved Administration and the Department to decide whether to have a separated regime. If there is one, however, who gets into it?

Mr Ross:

So, who gets into it would be a matter for the Secretary of State. To pick up on Tom's point, Committee members will, I think, all have difficulty at times in distinguishing between what we have to do and what the Policing Board has to do. It will take us a while to get our heads round that. What role does the Secretary of State still have that has not been devolved? What issues might the Committee come across over which the Secretary of State still has jurisdiction?

The Minister of Justice:

The key issue is those matters relating to national security, which can fall into different areas. That clearly relates to handling intelligence and maybe some North/South relationships. It may also relate to some prisoners, although not, to the best of my knowledge, at present. The Northern Ireland Prison Service may be managing certain prisoners on behalf of the Secretary of State, and there may be implications there. However, that is the broad point, and it is a reasonable working assumption that anything not related to that relates to the Department of Justice. However, we will have to see how those matters work through as we handle that aspect of devolution.

Mr Ross:

You spoke about the challenges of legal aid. A significant piece of work will probably have to be done on that, perhaps as part of the first justice Bill. What ideas does the Minister have about reforming legal aid, and what changes may be proposed?

The Minister of Justice:

The member is tempting me to go rather further than I want to at the moment, but I will try to be reasonable. There is a fundamental issue about justice in society, and the Hillsborough Agreement specifically mentions ensuring fair access to justice for all, especially the most needy and, to some extent, with regard to the relatively low-level cases, where there would be some

efforts elsewhere to cut them out of the system. On the other hand, there are cases that have been certified as being particularly complex. If a case is, or is expected to be, in court in Northern Ireland for 25 days, it is regarded as complex and higher fees are therefore paid, whereas the equivalent time period in England and Wales is, I believe, 40 days.

Many more cases in Northern Ireland are certified to have both senior and junior counsel than is the case in England and Wales. That raises issues about how that can be maintained in the light of a budget that is under severe pressure and if we are to ensure that those in most need of basic access to justice can receive it. We will see plenty more detail on that, but those are just a few of the points that are floating around at the moment.

Mr Donaldson:

I want to pick up on the point about the responsibilities of the Minister and the Department in the context of what the Secretary of State previously undertook. There were, historically, prisoners who were detained at the Secretary of State's pleasure. There are also prisoners who were released under the terms of the Belfast Agreement after the two-year period had elapsed who have been re-incarcerated as a result of committing offences or presenting a danger to the public. Do any of those responsibilities now fall to the Minister, or do they remain with the Secretary of State?

The Minister of Justice:

In general, the issue of prisoners offending when on licence now falls to the Department of Justice and to me. Nothing has been raised with me about whether there is an issue with those who received early release under the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Perry:

If any former prisoner commits a further offence, the issue of their being recalled would fall to the Minister. My understanding is that, if an issue arose about a prisoner who is out on licence where the information is purely intelligence-based and relates to national security measures, it would be an issue for the Secretary of State. The case would have to be made to the parole commissioners or the sentence review commissioners, whichever is the relevant body. In 99% of cases, it would be a matter for the Minister.

Mr Donaldson:

I appreciate that it is early days for the Minister.

The Minister of Justice:

We will get clarification, Chairman, if that is helpful.

Mr Donaldson:

Perhaps we could have written clarification of where the lines are with regard to the role of the Minister and the role of the Secretary of State. Thank you.

The Chairperson:

All members who indicated that they wanted to ask questions have had an opportunity to do so.

Minister, as Chairman of the Committee, I want to say to you that there is a perception abroad that violence pays. Unfortunately, that is the way that it has been over the past 35 to 40 years. Those who were engaged in violence were held up as statesmen and stateswomen. Victims were simply unfortunate statistics in all of that.

I hope that, during your ministry, you will stamp on that and be on the side of the victim, so that our society will no longer have to tolerate what it has had to tolerate for the past 35 years; an ineffective and inefficient security policy, which left thousands of people dead throughout our Province.

Many people still cry out for justice. Many people were taken away and their bodies have disappeared. Their families have never, ever been given the opportunity to have a Christian burial. Today, they mourn in the hope that, one day, the consciences of the perpetrators of those dreadful deeds will be pricked to such an extent that they will feel that they can assist those families. I hope that, in your ministry, you will demonstrate clearly that you are very much on the side of the victim, not the perpetrator. Unfortunately, in the society that we have all lived through, that message has not come out loud and clear.

I would be failing in my duty as Chairperson of the Committee for Justice if I did not say that to you today. Quite rightly, members of our society have been sickened to the very pit of their stomachs by what has gone on here as normality. I hope that when your ministry comes to an

end, whether it be long or short, it will said of David Ford that he was on the side of the victim and that he was the man who tried to restore law and order to our society.

In our society, people have planted bombs with impunity and walked away while others are left to pick up the pieces. Government just did not seem to care. That is the perception that is abroad. Unfortunately, in many cases, that perception is true. I hope that you will bring a fresh start in the Department of Justice, in which justice will be done, and, much more importantly, will be seen to be done, so that the next generation will never have to live through that.

I wish you well in your ministry. You have an important post. The whole of society will look to you in the future and to how you deal with issues that come before you. I hope that you will put your stamp on it and say that David Ford and his team are on the side of law and order, not on the side of the breakers of law and order. Thank you for coming here today. Have you anything further to say?

The Minister of Justice:

Thank you, Chairman, for those good wishes. I am fully conscious that probably the most substantial element of paragraph 7 of the Hillsborough Castle Agreement refers to the needs of victims. I have referred to the needs of victims several times this afternoon. Indeed, some of those aspects of the agreement originated in my party's comments at the Hillsborough discussions. I am fully conscious of that as we move forward. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much.