



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**Committee for Agriculture and Rural
Development**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Programme for Government: DARD
Position**

28 February 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Programme for Government: DARD Position

28 February 2012

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Frew (Chairperson)
Mrs Dolores Kelly (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Michaela Boyle
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Willie Clarke
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson
Mr William Irwin
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Oliver McMullan
Mr Robin Swann

Witnesses:

Mr Owen Denny	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mr Paul Donnelly	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mrs Pauline Keegan	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mr Keith Morrison	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mr Graeme Wilkinson	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

The Chairperson: I welcome Pauline Keegan, Paul Donnelly, Owen Denny, Graeme Wilkinson and Keith Morrison. You are very welcome to the Committee. I will give you a moment to get settled in. We have so many officials here today, which shows the importance of the Programme for Government to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and to overall government. Without further ado, who is going to lead off?

Mr Graeme Wilkinson (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): Thank you for the opportunity to come along today to talk to you about the Department's input to the Programme for Government. As you will be aware, the Minister came along on 14 February to provide some briefing on our input to the Programme for Government. We also talked about the various issues that are impacting on the Department over the same period. At that session, the Minister offered officials to come along and provide further detail around the various commitments in the Programme for Government. That is why we are here today: to provide that additional briefing.

To recap, there are 76 commitments in the Programme for Government, and DARD has responsibility for delivering on four. I will outline those again to the Committee. They are: to bring forward a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty and isolation across the three years; to eradicate brucellosis by March 2014; to develop a strategic plan for the agrifood sector, in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI); and to advance the relocation of the headquarters of the Department by 2015.

As the research officer just outlined, the consultation on the Programme for Government has now closed, and we are working with Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) officials considering the various responses to that consultation process and developing our delivery agreements, which will include key milestones. Those will be published at the start of April and will be available on the departmental website.

Having looked at the various consultation responses, the Department has taken the opportunity to revise the wording of two of the commitments. In relation to the rural poverty programme, the commitment now reads:

"a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation in the next three years."

That reflects the wide programme that we are now introducing. Pauline will talk about that later.

In relation to the relocation of our headquarters, we have also amended the wording of that commitment slightly. It now says:

"We will begin construction and refurbishment of the future DARD headquarters in a rural area by 2015."

Those two commitments will have to go through a process of approval by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), OFMDFM and, ultimately, the Executive, before they are published. Otherwise, the commitments remain unchanged.

The Committee has been provided with a short brief on each of the commitments. My colleagues and I are happy to provide a little more detail around each of those. Keith Morrison will provide some information around the agrifood strategy, Owen Denny will provide some more detail around the brucellosis target, and Pauline and Paul will deal with the anti-poverty commitment.

As the HQ relocation falls within my area of responsibility, I will provide the Committee with a brief update as to where we are in relation to that project. The Minister mentioned in her presentation that we have now received approval for the strategic outline case from DFP. That allows us to start the process of completing an outline business case (OBC). The Committee will be aware that that is a much more detailed process and will take considerably more time. There is a lot of analysis to be gone into on that. However, our intention is to have that outline business case approved by the end of the 2012-13 financial year.

We are very mindful that there are a lot of intricacies involved in that, so we have developed fairly comprehensive governance arrangements to ensure that we make an informed decision around that project. We have established a programme board to oversee the project, chaired by the senior director of finance in the Department, which has representation from all areas of the Department. We also have input from our colleagues in the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and DFP that will ultimately assist in the process of completing the OBC.

We have established a consultative forum within the Department, chaired by a non-executive director. We also have a Whitley committee to ensure that the views of staff are considered throughout the process. Once the OBC has been completed, we will move into the procurement phase, which is likely to be in the 2013-14 financial year. We will ultimately seek to start any refurbishment or construction in the 2014-15 financial year.

Hopefully, that gives the Committee a bit of a flavour of where we are on that project. If you are content, I will pass over to Keith, who will provide the Committee with a bit more detail on the strategy.

Mr Keith Morrison (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): Briefly, I have responsibility for the agrifood strategy. I should stress at the outset that it is a joint responsibility with DETI and Invest NI. It is one of the only Programme for Government targets that cuts across Departments, which is important. We are very pleased that it is in the Programme for Government. It is a crucial piece of work. We are also very pleased that the economic strategy recognises the importance and potential of the sector. It is important for us to ensure that it stays there.

The job in hand is to develop the current 'Focus on Food' strategy into a longer-term strategic vision with harder-edged growth targets. Whether those are sales, production or value-added, those are the sorts of things that will come in, as it is an industry-led process. The ambition behind having a new strategic approach is to set specific targets and then work out we get to those targets.

As I said, it is very much a joint effort, not just with DETI and Invest NI but with industry. The Minister stressed when she was here a couple of weeks ago that it is an industry-led approach. You will have seen that we are putting in place the building blocks for that. Tony O'Neill of Moy Park was recently announced as the independent chair of the new agrifood strategy board. I hope that, in the next couple of days, you will see adverts in the press to recruit the members of that board with a view to getting the whole thing operational in April.

As I said, the job in hand is to develop the existing strategy, then operational plans for how we will deliver that strategy. The role of the board is to provide that strategic advice to the Agriculture and Enterprise Ministers, taking account of the wide range of sectors and stakeholders. There is clearly a lot of critically important work to be done. There will be opportunities to come back to brief and update the Committee as that work progresses. I am very happy to take questions on any of that, probably as part of the broader discussion.

Mr Owen Denny (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): As you have heard, the target is to eradicate brucellosis by March 2014. What that means in practice is that our last confirmed brucellosis breakdown must be no later than March 2013. The target was constructed and proposed at the end of 2010, when the level was 1.08% and increasing. Therefore, it was quite a challenging target. I am happy to report that we have made excellent progress against it. We are currently at 0.02%, which is over a year ahead of target.

The brucellosis control programme team operates a very tight scheme. We talked a bit in a previous session about the fact that it is approved by the EU. When the EU inspectors came last December, they commented that they thought that it was the tightest programme in Europe, if not the world. We are pretty pleased. We have not had a confirmed brucellosis breakdown since last July. Having said that, it would be a lot to hope for that we will not get any more breakdowns. However, we are doing extremely well, and we are very happy. I am happy to take any questions that you have.

Mrs Pauline Keegan (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): I will recap very briefly on the programme. The Minister said in her presentation to you on 14 February that her commitment was to introduce a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation and that she is building on the very successful work that was done under the previous Programme for Government, when we delivered a £10 million package of support. She outlined the key element of the package: a partnership with other stakeholders and agencies to deliver very positive outcomes for people in the rural community. She also indicated to you that she intended to have a formal launch of the package; that happened in Cookstown on 22 February. The intention now is to hold individual launches for the various measures, some in the coming months and the year ahead. The Minister also talked about the opportunities in the package to lever in funds from other Departments. That was a key element of the previous package — the £10 million package — and it will continue to be an important aspect of this one.

The work that we are doing now and intend to do over the next few years is set out in an action plan. We describe it that way, because we indicate timescales and the potential for funds to be allocated over the period against the various measures. All our actions require business plans and demonstrate

need and value for money. We want the plan to be a living document that is capable of responding to emerging needs and issues over the next couple of years, and it has that flexibility in it.

Paul Donnelly is the measure manager for this package of measures, as he was for the last one. Now or later, perhaps, he can give you a brief flavour of each measure; there are about a dozen. He can do that quickly, because we have set it out for you in a summary.

The Chairperson: We will do that later, because we are stuck for time. Some of this may be teased out during questioning, because I expect members to go through it pretty thoroughly.

Mrs D Kelly: It might be helpful, if we do not get to hear Paul in detail, to invite him back to another meeting. I certainly want a close scrutiny and examination of where the money has been spent.

Mrs Keegan: I was going to suggest that we could come back again.

The Chairperson: I am sure that we will also receive something in written form. That will be a work in progress for the Committee.

I will open the session up without further ado, because we are struggling for time. The previous Programme for Government was arranged in a very different way, with the detail of the Department's public service agreements and the raft of targets that were set after that, whereas here we have four broad commitments. The relocation of the DARD headquarters is just that; there is no real measurement of that, because it is either done or it is not. The strategic plan for the agrifood sector is something that I welcome, and we can see that the agrifood sector is vital to the Programme for Government. That is critical, and I support it. However, this is a strategic plan, so there has to be more meat on the bones. The £13 million funding package is the meat on the bones that is available today, which is good. The eradication of brucellosis, again, is just that; it is either done or it is not. The commitments are either broad-brush or they are goals that can either be met or not met. When can we expect to see action plans for all of that, and something that can be recorded and targeted?

The omission, from DARD's perspective, is forestry. Where does that come in? More serious than that, although no less important, is the fact that we have a strategic goal for the eradication of brucellosis but none whatsoever for the eradication of, or even a reduction in, TB. That is an omission; it should be in the Programme for Government. You talked about a consultation period and the consultations on which you are working with OFMDFM. You have come across a couple of minor adjustments to your four priorities or targets. Have you had any thoughts about the need to increase your targets in the Programme for Government? Is there something that needs to be included that is not already there? Is that coming out in the consultation documents?

Mr Wilkinson: There are a number of points there.

The Chairperson: Just say it was one question if you can, because the members will pick up on that.

Mrs D Kelly: We will do that.

Mr Swann: There are no other questions left.

Mrs D Kelly: I have a few.

Mr Wilkinson: I will try to answer the one question that you have. The approach to the Programme for Government was an attempt to be strategic about setting out that context. The previous Programme for Government, as you will be aware, contained a plethora of actions, and it was quite unwieldy. We are moving to much more strategic targets that are SMART and can be measured. You are quite right; they are either done or they are not. I think there was some difficulties in trying to measure the targets previously, and we have learned from that. That is why our targets are SMART; they are measurable and are done or not done.

You also mentioned action plans, and, as part of the process, we will certainly have key milestones in our delivery agreements. The delivery agreements will be published at the start of April and will have key milestones to make sure that those action plans are done. That will allow the Department to monitor the progress against those various targets in each of the financial years. The Department also has its own business plan, which will come to the Committee for consideration. You mentioned the woodland targets: there are targets in that business plan.

Lots of different things are going on within the Department that are very important to us but that did not find their way into the Programme for Government. We put forward other suggestions that were not taken, but it will be important to the Committee that we monitor progress against our business plan targets over the next three years. In that business plan, we have included the Programme for Government targets, the targets in the economic strategy and other key ones like forestry, rivers and other parts of the Department.

Mrs D Kelly: Did the Department put forward a target for the reduction of TB?

Mr Wilkinson: Not that I am aware of.

The Chairperson: I was going to come on to that. Did the Department put forward priorities or goals to be included in the Programme for Government? Can we have sight of those?

Mr Wilkinson: Yes; there is no difficulty in doing that. The Minister, at the last session, outlined some of those. We are happy to share the commitments that were not taken forward with the Committee.

You also mentioned TB and the fact that there was no target for it. We put in a target for brucellosis as we were fairly confident that we could deliver on eradication —

Mrs D Kelly: That is SMART.

Mr Wilkinson: We knew that it was not possible to eradicate TB or find a target that we could commit to. We are taking the eradication of TB very seriously. As mentioned, we have an eradication plan that is certified by the EU. A research programme is in train, in which we are investing £4 million, and we are also consulting widely with the industry to try to understand how to take that work forward. Those are the factors that we have taken into consideration and the reasons why we do not have a specific SMART target in there.

The Chairperson: I want to press you on the issue of TB. I can understand why you cannot put a target in for eradication over the period of the Programme for Government. The Minister was very clear, when I questioned her a number of weeks ago, that she was not confident that it could be eradicated in that time frame. However, it should certainly be the aspiration of the Department to reduce it. I understand that TB is a very complicated disease and that there are all sorts of issues. However, if we cannot be confident of reducing TB, surely we can have a target in the Programme for Government that will, stage by stage, implement an eradication programme. Although it might not be directed towards the actual

disease, an implementation plan could be targeted or stage-posted to reduce or eradicate that disease. Do you understand what I mean?

Mr Wilkinson: In our business plan, we have a target to work towards an accredited programme. The action plan is in our business plan. However, we could not come up with a target that we could achieve, deliver or aspire to. That is why it was not put forward as a SMART target.

Mr Swann: Who put it into the last PFG then? I am trying to understand the mindset in the Department. We had:

"Reducing ... by 27% the annual herd incidence of Tuberculosis"

in the previous Programme for Government. What changed in the Department's mindset so that, all of a sudden, you cannot deliver or set a target?

Mr Wilkinson: I was not there, so I am not sure what the background to that was.

Mr Denny: I was not there either. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Swann: There we go. "Not my fault". Were you there, Keith?

Mr Morrison: I was there, but I do not deal with TB.

Mrs Keegan: It is the same for me.

Mr Denny: What I can say is that I think that there has been an appreciation that, while we cannot have a specific target for TB, one of the most important things is to have a programme that is internationally recognised and that allows us to draw down EU funding and keep our export markets open for the cattle population in Northern Ireland. That is priority number one, and that is why we have gone for that. People generally accept that. We are working on what progress we can make in the future to reduce that disease.

Mr Swann: I fully accept that, Owen, but I cannot understand how it can be a target in one PFG and then you can tell us that it cannot be measured and cannot be in the next one. If the simple explanation is that you changed staff so that you can work your PFG accordingly —

Mr Wilkinson: We will be happy to come back with a response to the Committee on that.

Mr Swann: If you find the boy who was there who put it in the last one.

Mrs D Kelly: If the rationale for putting commitments into a Programme for Government is that they are achievable and realisable, one has to question why, in the last Programme for Government, less than 40% of the targets were met overall. Why have a Programme for Government in the first instance? It is outrageous, and I do not know about Mrs Dobson, but I certainly did not come up the Bann in any bubble —

Mrs Dobson: Neither did I.

Mrs D Kelly: It is outrageous that TB is not a target in some format after what we have heard and after the consultation exercise that the Department has just gone through in relation to the compensation cap and given what farmers are clearly saying about the failure of the Department to deliver on a strategy in relation to the eradication of TB. It seems mind-boggling that that is not a target. There is no mention of the single farm payment and no mention of the countryside management scheme. There is no mention of Europe, other than in terms of some of the European targets that have to be met. On deregulation, less than 4% of the 25% target was reached in the previous Programme for Government. That is an abysmal performance by anyone's standards. The targets that have been set are not SMART in the true sense of the word. Many of the targets that were met in the previous Programme for Government — for example, the £13 million to be invested in the rural poverty initiative — are, surely, delivered by community groups and local authorities, who, as well as the Department, get the money out onto the ground.

Will the business case for the new HQ be done in-house or led by external consultants at some stage? Why do we not already have an agrifood strategy? We should be looking at an action plan for delivery. Where is the action plan in the Programme for Government? What is the budget? Where is the finance? How will it be measured and monitored? I accept that the business plan may well have a lot more detail in it, but I really do not think that this is in any way innovative or challenging, given the challenges that are being faced down the track — the lifting of the milk quota, for example, in 2013, or the impact of CAP reform. What are the targets in relation to the pensionable age for farmers or the definition around active farmers? I know that those are, and are supposed to be, overarching, big strategic objectives, but I do not know what is big and strategic about the relocation of DARD headquarters, a building. On your business case for the DARD HQ, how many jobs is it going to create in the locality that it is going to? What consultation exercises will there be with trade unions, for example?

How will the £13 million for rural poverty recognise the TSN targets, and how will those resources be specifically targeted? A lot of areas were not targeted in the previous four years. I hope that we will talk about the inflexibility of the Department on single farm payments further today. On the research element, you talked about the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and the £4 million in the food strategy. What opportunities will there be for others outside of AFBI to bid or tender for some of that work?

The Chairperson: Is that you finished?

Mrs D Kelly: Not really, I am just getting started.

The Chairperson: There was a raft of high-level questions there, so do your best.

Mr Wilkinson: I will do my best, Chair.

Mrs D Kelly: To try not to answer them. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wilkinson: You can bring me back if I do not answer your questions.

There are four targets in there for DARD. Agrifood is a big one for us, and a big one for all of us actually, to make sure that that happens and that we have a strategy.

Mrs D Kelly: But sure we are behind the game in that. The South of Ireland has already published its 2020 strategy. We are way behind the game — way behind.

Mr Morrison: On the agrifood stuff, this is to get us back in the game. I agree with you that although the target is high-level and strategic and says that we need a strategic vision, it is challenging to do that. One of the most challenging aspects of it is to get the industry to agree to go in one direction and set targets for dairy, poultry, beef and some of the other sectors. That is where your action plan flows out of it, once we get those targets set.

It is industry that has to work with us to set that. There is little value in my setting a growth target for industry if they have to deliver on it. Once we get those targets set, however, we come in behind and say: "What takes us to there?" That is the action plan.

With regard to the finance for the agrifood strategy, the biggest tool at our disposal is the rural development programme, coming towards the end of the current programme and putting in place stuff for the new one that will deliver on that. The agrifood target is not easily achievable. It is an enormous challenge, but we intend to work it through from targets to actions to delivery.

Mrs D Kelly: I know that it goes across two Departments, but I have heard that one of the biggest challenges is to get Invest NI to take it seriously.

Mr Morrison: I disagree with that. We are working very closely —

Mrs D Kelly: That comment has been passed to me in recent weeks.

Mr Morrison: The Enterprise Minister is signed up to this; it is very much a joint approach. She is pushing, as is our Minister, to get this delivered. She is pushing DETI and Invest NI. The team that we are setting up to support the new structures is a joint team with staff from DARD and colleagues from Invest NI. We have been working very closely on all this, so I do not agree with that.

Mrs D Kelly: I mentioned at a stakeholder event last week a soft loan option for the rural development programme. Some businesses started out quite small. Island Salads, in my constituency, started out quite small and now exports. Given the tight financial climate, will that be factored into your action plan?

Mr Morrison: I would be surprised if the whole area of access to finance and making better use of finance does not come out as a barrier to growth. That begs the question of what we can do, such as the option that you mentioned or other schemes to address those sorts of issues.

Mr Wilkinson: I want to make two other points. I think there is a bit of frustration in that we are not seeing the framework around this. The delivery agreements will be completed before the start of the next financial year. That will provide a lot more detail about when the action plans will be completed. Hopefully, you will have a bit more confidence about the delivery and making sure that it will happen when you see those.

The other point is about the 2012-13 business plan. I am keen to bring that to the Committee to give you an opportunity to make the sorts of points that you are making. They are all very valid points and we would value your input into that process to make sure that the targets for the Department are the right ones. So, you will have an opportunity to influence that process.

Mrs D Kelly: Is the business plan consultant-led or in-house?

Mr Wilkinson: That is an option that we are considering. There is a very small team looking at that. Only two individuals are in the team, so it will be very difficult for them to do it on their own. It is a difficult and time-consuming piece of work, so we are considering whether we need external support to complete that.

Mrs Keegan: I do not know whether you want me to pick up on the anti-poverty programme.

The Chairperson: Sorry. Go on ahead, Pauline.

Mrs Keegan: The anti-poverty programme is a strategic and innovative piece of work for the Programme for Government. It was £10 million and is now £13 million. We have progressed that and turned it into an action plan. I have a summary that shows you what we are talking about, our targets, how we will deliver them and how some will be looking at TSN. Some targets will be delivered by community groups but others are very much interdepartmental working with Power NI and various others.

Perhaps we can talk in detail the next time we see you, which will maybe be easier. However, we have the action plan and we have more information on the website. There is a lot of information there. We can leave this summary with you, which may help for next time. We do target TSN and perhaps we can talk about that in more detail next time.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much, Pauline.

Mrs Dobson: I will start by concurring with the comments of the Deputy Chair. Like her, I did not come up the Bann in a bubble either. First, I have an observation that was maybe unfairly directed towards Mark Allen earlier. I find the lack of ambition and drive in the PFG incredible when agri is on the up, and DARD has so little in the way of targets. I am interested to know how DARD's targets compare with those of other Stormont Departments; it would be very useful to see that comparison.

You say that the new headquarters is expected to cost in the region of £26 million. Could it be more? You also said that it will help share wealth across the economy. Would adding the £26 million to the existing schemes to tackle rural poverty not be a much better way to spend the money? Have you scoped existing Civil Service premises that may be suitable? When are we likely to hear your plans?

Mr Wilkinson: Part of developing the business case is considering those various options. The current accommodation at Dundonald House is failing, and there are serious financial consequences to even refurbishing that. So, doing nothing is not an option. We need some accommodation that is fit for purpose, and part of our policy is to create jobs and opportunities in rural areas. This provides us with the opportunity to do that. You mentioned looking at other bits of the Government estate, and that will certainly be considered as part of the business case. The Strategic Investment Board sits on our programme board, and it is able to provide some input into other existing public sector accommodation that might be available to us. So, yes, your comments are quite correct, and those are the types of observations that we will be looking to test in the business case and make sure that they are fully explored.

Mrs Dobson: I had questions on TB, but my colleague has covered it fairly well.

Mr W Clarke: I have a couple of quick points. I welcome this summary; it sets out in good detail some exciting projects. You say that you will be able to lever in other amounts of money. Do you have any

idea of the sums, and is that coming from other Departments in government? My other point is about the target to eradicate brucellosis. Would it be fair to say that it is reliant on the reduction in compensation — the issue that we were discussing earlier? How long do we have to be without a reactor before we get the brucellosis-free status?

Mrs Keegan: I will say something on the leverage, Willie, and let Paul come in as well. We are working with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to try to connect some very isolated and elevated rural households to water, and the way to do that is through the water boreholes. We are levering in over £3 million from DRD. We will deliver that scheme for DRD, and that money is coming into the pot, so to speak, to help us with that.

Mr Paul Donnelly (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): In general, there are a range of different initiatives at various stages of development. Pauline is correct: some of the work we are doing on tackling rural unemployment among youth will be done with money from the Department for Employment and Learning and from Europe. The transport project is the same. Whilst we are funding a project with DRD, it is still providing the back-office costs and stuff like that. There are elements of that across the board, and we will keep a record of that and will be able to report back to you on the money that is coming in.

Mr Denny: You asked about the brucellosis-free status. The way it works is that we have recognition from Europe that the region is officially brucellosis free (OBF), and it sets down two criteria, one of which is that the percentage of our herds that are OBF must be greater than 99.8% for five years. The second criterion is that we must have had no confirmed brucellosis for three years. We have met the first criterion for 2009, 2010 and 2011, and it should not be a limiting factor. The second issue is when our last confirmed brucellosis case was, and that was in July of last year. So, theoretically, three years from then, we could be asking for freedom. However, that would be very optimistic. That has exceeded our expectations, and I could be told this afternoon that we have another confirmed outbreak of brucellosis. So, it might be a bit much to hope that we have already started that.

In terms of compensation, since we are down to such low levels, one outbreak can cause a problem. If we were to get an outbreak this July, it would set things back a year. You are talking about £10 million to £20 million to the economy. It would be a bit of a disaster. Where compensation links into that is if it dissuades the small number of people who might be tempted to behave fraudulently, or encourages a lot of farmers to be careful and vigilant with their biosecurity and we avoid that breakdown, you can see the tremendous advantage that it would have in closing the door finally on the compensation thing.

A comment was made earlier about the targets being achievable. When we made the brucellosis target, the disease had been increasing for six to eight months, so it was by no means a soft target when we set it.

Mr W Clarke: Can you outline for the Committee the benefits of having brucellosis-free status and the benefits to the rural community.

Mr Denny: If we get brucellosis-free status, we will effectively dismantle the brucellosis scheme. This is a funny sort of situation, because our objective is to make ourselves redundant. If we get free status, we will start to remove pre-movement testing and put manual testing out to two years. Instead of testing every animal over 12 months, we will increase it to 18 months or 24 months. Because we do not have disease, there will not be all of the risk testing. There would, therefore, be a big benefit; there would be a monkey off the farmer's back with regard to testing and hassle. It would be a tremendous benefit overall.

Mr W Clarke: Is there an estimate of what the savings to the Department would be? I know that you do not have it now. Could the savings to the Department be ploughed back into tackling TB, for instance?

Mr Denny: Our staff, vets and live staff would be freed up, and they could focus more on other diseases, including TB. We would save a considerable amount of money. I think the figure we talked about earlier was £7 million, if I remember what Colette said. It would be a tremendous advantage, if we could achieve that. It is tantalisingly close, and we must avoid having one or two breakdowns that set the whole thing back for years.

Mr Swann: I have a couple of questions. What happens to the targets in the previous Programme for Government that were not met?

Mr Wilkinson: I am trying to remember which ones they were.

Mr Swann: I can give you one. There was a target to reduce administration by 15% by 2011. You actually achieved 4.3%.

Mr Wilkinson: We are continuing with that as part of the business plan for 2012-13. A number of them will continue. They are still important to us, regardless of whether they are still in the PFG. You will see that when you see the 2012-13 business plan.

Mr Swann: I think that is one of the questions.

Mr Wilkinson: We are not forgetting about it.

Mr Swann: Why is it not worthy of PFG this time? Is it because it is too hard a target for you to make?

Mr Wilkinson: No. That was part of the discussion around the Executive table as to which ones they wanted to put in there. I think they wanted to reduce a number of targets; they wanted to have a very clear focus on that. It is about that focus and having SMART targets. It was not about not doing those things in the future. As I said earlier, we have put forward targets that we want to continue with that were not taken. You will see those in the 2012-13 business plan. Hopefully, they will be comprehensive, and everything that the Committee wants to see being done will be included.

Mr Swann: So there will be continuing monitoring of the admin that will be as clear and identifiable as it was in the PFG?

Mr Wilkinson: Yes.

Mr Swann: My last point relates to the four points that we have here. You are well down the path of delivering a number of the things that are in the draft Programme for Government, before the Programme for Government is finalised. I am not criticising you for doing that, but it seems that you are almost putting the cart before the horse: you know what is going to be in there, so you have started to work towards it. How many consultation responses have you received? What cognisance will you take of them? Can we expect to see a dramatic change in any of those four points?

Mr Wilkinson: We have had around 30 responses to the consultation process. It was led by OFMDFM, so it is providing us with the various responses. We are working through those; in fact, we have been

getting them this week. We are providing responses to OFMDFM, and they will go to the Executive for consideration. Strangely for a consultation process, a lot of the responses that I have seen so far are quite complimentary, particularly on the agrifood strategy. There is a consensus that this is vitally important for the economic future of Northern Ireland. From what I have heard at the Committee today, there seems to be a consensus on that.

In other responses, groups have particular interests in the scheme but, although it is not in the Programme for Government, it is in our business plan and it is something that we want to continue to monitor. To answer your question, we are responding to OFMDFM with our particular bits of the consultation process.

Mr Swann: Had you a chance to put in an additional target, what would it have been?

Mrs Keegan: We would have to consult the Department on that one.

Mr Wilkinson: I would have to ask the Minister about that.

The Chairperson: We are going to get a list of the aspirational targets, are we not? You have already committed to giving us —

Mr Wilkinson: The targets that we had put forward? Yes, we will do that. We are keen to get the business plan to you as soon as possible as well. I hope that it will allay any fears that you have that we are not doing particular things or have stopped doing other things. Clearly, we are not, and the 2012-13 business plan is comprehensive.

The Chairperson: I have one further question on this. It is very important, and I direct it to you, Graeme. It is about tying this to the Budget and the four targets that are there at present. What financial resources are being allocated to each priority? How much of that is DARD money and how much is EU funding coming down? If you add the four together, what does it amount to overall as regards the Budget?

Mr Wilkinson: I will take each of the commitments in turn and try to deal with the funding allocated to it. The original allocation to the anti-poverty scheme was £16 million. We are now one year into that funding, so we now have £13 million over the next three years that has been allocated to that particular project. As Pauline has said, that is a good piece of work and it levers in moneys from other Departments; it is working particularly well.

As to the relocation of DARD HQ, as members are aware, there is £13 million allocated in year 3 or 4 of this Budget period.

For the other two, no moneys have yet been set aside or identified because it is early in the process. Obviously, we will want to look at that, particularly with regard to the agrifood strategy. Once we see what that looks like and where the money is needed, we can have a look at our funding and our finances at that stage.

The Chairperson: Are you suggesting that the Department will then have to bid for additional resources to cover those priorities? That is not necessarily a bad thing.

Mr Wilkinson: DETI is obviously involved, and we are working in partnership with it. It may have funding that it can put to it as well. We will also look at our existing resources, the schemes that are available

to us and our programmes to see whether we can put money to it in that way. This is really about getting an early draft of the strategy and getting a feel for where the funding will want to go to at that stage.

Mr McCarthy: About the £13 million: can you guarantee that that will be used? I think that last time you were here, Pauline, you said that a number of applications were coming in which, for one reason or another, could not be processed and the money had to be sent back. Can that situation be avoided as we go forward? Can we make sure that the money will be spent?

Mrs Keegan: I am not sure whether that was the rural development programme, Mr McCarthy. I cannot quite remember. Certainly, this is public expenditure money, not European money. So this is money that is within the Budget. Over the three years, we have £4 million, £4 million and £5 million. Because of the type of work that we are doing, we are pretty confident that we will be able to get the money spent and out there, because of the type of schemes that we have and the stage that they are at. The Deputy Chairperson has talked about how we are working with community groups and other Departments. We have done a lot of work, we have drawn up the business plans. That is already done. We are already starting to progress them, so we are fairly confident on that.

Mr McCarthy: I hope so.

Mrs Keegan: I hope that I am able to say that the next time we come to see you.

The Chairperson: There are no further questions on this. We are exactly one hour behind time. Thank you very much for your presentation and your answers. I am sure that we will see a lot you in the weeks and months ahead. We look forward to working with you on the implementation of these priorities. We have asked for the consultation responses, or if we have not done so yet, we are going to. Please let us have sight of them. They would be very useful.

Thank you very much.