



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY
FIRST MINISTER**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Draft Programme for Cohesion,
Integration and Sharing**

24 March 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)
Mrs Naomi Long (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Jim Shannon
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mrs Linsey Farrell)
Mr Colin Jack) Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson (Mr Kennedy):

Good afternoon, Colin Jack and Linsey Farrell. You are very welcome. You are here today to give us a preliminary briefing on the draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration, which you forwarded to us. This session will be covered by Hansard. Please give us an overview and then leave yourselves available for questions.

Mr Colin Jack (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to brief the Committee on the draft programme for cohesion sharing and integration. I am glad that Linsey Farrell from the community relations unit is with me today. As you mentioned, this is very much a first opportunity for the Committee to see the document and to input to the process.

The document is still a work in progress, and it would be fair to describe it as the philosophical core of the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. However, a number of gaps remain. The main gap relates to what the whole range of Departments will have to contribute to tackling sectarianism and racism through their actions and programmes. More material about the delivery mechanisms for the programme also needs to be put into the document.

The programme sets out a vision for a new era, where Ministers envisage everybody here working together to build a shared and better future, and where fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect are acknowledged and accepted by all. Ministers felt that it was extremely important that the Committee be given early sight of the document, and they are keen to keep the Committee fully involved at various stages throughout the process.

As far as the further development of the document is concerned, we will require input from all Departments, because cohesion, sharing and integration cut across many areas of departmental responsibility. We are commencing a round of bilateral meetings with officials from all Departments to help to complete that departmental input.

Those meetings will be valuable in identifying current departmental actions, programmes and initiatives that contribute to achieving positive good relations outcomes, new areas in which departmental actions could contribute to achieving such outcomes, current joined-up working across Departments and agencies and potential new opportunities for enhanced joined-up working.

The draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration seeks to enable as much cross-cutting alignment of effort and focus as possible. Departments working together in a more coherent strategic way will be a key aspect of the work of the programme. We want to use those bilateral meetings to decide how best to set meaningful and robust targets that can be measured

effectively. That will be vital in guaranteeing effective delivery and implementation of the programme's objectives.

We will also meet a range of other key stakeholders over the next two to three weeks, including the Community Relations Council, the Equality Commission and the PSNI. All those discussions, in addition to any contribution that the Committee may want to make at this stage, will be important in producing a final text for public consultation that is meaningful and robust.

The programme has a number of key aims through which it will strive to make a difference to people and places across Northern Ireland. Those aims include: promoting fairness, equality, rights responsibilities and respect; emphasising inclusion, interdependence, acceptance and understanding; embracing and supporting minority ethnic communities arriving in this society; and creating practical and open networks across communities and ethnic groups, North/South and east-west, for the benefit of all. The programme will support changes in places, so that we will all have shared and safe spaces for working, shopping, socialising and playing; greater sharing, respect and understanding of the expression of cultural diversity; cohesive and integrated communities; and sharing in education and integrated workplaces.

We have asked Departments to provide their input to the document by Friday 16 April 2010. At that point, we will redraft the text to include those departmental contributions. As I said, the bilateral meetings will take place between now and then. Once those contributions have been added to the text, we will bring the document back to the Committee for further comment before it goes to the Executive and is then put out for formal public consultation. Because of the subject matter, which is central to the way in which people here live their lives and relate to each other, it is crucial that the consultation exercise is extensive and meaningful. It is vital that we hear views from all sections of society; therefore, we will adopt a broad but focused approach to consultation.

As part of the broader public consultation, there will be discussions on a number of tailored sector-specific aspects. We will make every effort to ensure that our communication methods meet the information needs of as wide an audience as possible. We intend to formally begin the public consultation in June 2010 and run it until early to mid-October 2010 to allow for the summer break and to ensure that everyone has ample opportunity to respond.

I hope that it is useful for the Committee to see the document as it is now. I emphasise again that there is still work to do on it. We would value the Committee's input at this stage so that we can get the document ready for public consultation. I am happy to take questions or clarify issues.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your overview. I have just a couple of initial points to make. No one will fault the desire to implement the shared future concept so that everyone is treated fairly and properly.

There is reference to the ministerial panel. Are you able to provide any more detail on what form that will take? Obviously, it will involve Ministers from the Executive, but not exclusively so; other experts or agencies will be asked to provide expertise.

Will there be both carrot and stick measures from OFMDFM, as the lead Department, so that all of the other Departments work to the ultimate and agreed agenda of cohesion and integration. That is the age-old issue that the Committee always raises. How will that be managed?

Mr Jack:

There is some information in the document about the membership of the ministerial panel. We expect the membership to include private sector and trade union representatives as well as representatives from a range of public sector interests. We would expect the other Departments to be represented, and we would expect the panel to be chaired by OFMDFM Ministers.

You asked about carrot-and-stick measures. We will be thinking carefully about that, and, in the process of gathering departmental input, we will discuss with Departments how we will monitor progress. There is a range of ways of doing that. Across OFMDFM's areas of responsibility, we have a range of strategies and action plans.

We also have central responsibility for co-ordination and development of the Programme for Government and, along with DFP, the public service agreements. As Committee members know, they are monitored rigorously and regularly. The thinking at this stage is that we should use the framework of the Programme for Government and the public service agreements. We will be developing a new Programme for Government and new public service agreements during the next

financial year. Using that type of mechanism would be a productive approach, but we are open to views on that.

Mrs Long:

First, I welcome the fact that we have the document in front of us. I have been moaning a lot about not having that document, so I want to acknowledge that we do now have it. It is good to have a timetable laid out in front of us to show where we go from here.

Having had a chance to read over the document since Monday, I have a few questions that I want to ask you. The vision is reasonably good. There are a few areas of it that I want to probe in later questions, but it is generally good, although slightly light on action.

You said that the document is going out to Departments and that you are looking for input from them. The shared future document originally came in two parts; a vision statement and then an action plan. Is it anticipated that there will be similar model for this strategy, or will an amalgam of both go out to public consultation so that there is both detailed action and vision in the same document?

Paragraph 3.3 states that the racial equality strategy still stands in the same place. That strategy expires in 2010. Does that mean that a new racial equality strategy will be developed for 2011-15? How will that be dealt with? Other parts of the document seem to say that the racial equality strategy will be drawn into this document, and I am not clear whether there will still be a separate racial equality strategy or whether race relations will be dealt with under the document. There have been concerns from within some ethnic minority groupings that losing the racial equality strategy will result in a loss of impact and a lack of detailed action plans.

Generally speaking, the document's language is reasonably good. However, I am worried that some references, such as those to traditional communities and community rights, will bog the document down in an internal clash, given that paragraph 6.3, for example, refers to "sections of our community". We should recognise that there is a single community with different aspects but allow for more complex overlaps than are suggested by the term "traditional communities". I would like someone to have a look at that issue to ensure that the language is coherent.

I think that the content concerning our community and society, and the diversity within them,

is one of the document's stronger elements. There is recognition of "traditional communities" and "new arrivals", which are the phrases used in the document, but there is a lack of recognition of the well-established minority communities, and that has created issues. Well-established minority communities have been key to the integration of new minority groups and breaking down barriers between existing communities. Some of that language needs to be tightened up.

I wish to speak about the role of good relations in dispute resolution. At the beginning, the document acknowledges that section 75(1) and (2) do not compete with one another. However, there is a lack of recognition of the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration as a good relations strategy, if I can put it that way, and, indeed, the importance of good relations in dispute resolution. That comes through in the reference to the Hillsborough agreement and, in particular, parades. The document makes no specific mention of the impact of good relations at that point, but it is a good relations policy rather than an equality policy. Having established that the two facets of section 75 are not in competition, the good relations element should be reflected.

The last issue that I want to raise concerns delivery; I thank the Chairman for his patience. The ministerial delivery panel that you talked about is potentially a strong concept in that it starts to mainstream good relations and community relations in the Executive's functions. That panel is the only delivery mechanism that is outlined. The document that I received is unfinished because there is no chapter 11. However, paragraph 9.12 refers to the:

"regional support and co-ordination function being provided by funding arrangements set out in Chapter 11."

I am a bit unclear about the regional co-ordination function, for example. That function is currently undertaken by the Community Relations Council, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities and a number of other agencies. Is there a proposal to restructure that arrangement? Is it accepted that the existing mechanisms might simply be rejigged slightly to continue that function? Chapter 11 is a bit of a black hole at the minute. It would be helpful to have a wee bit of clarity on it. Apologies, Chairman.

The Chairperson:

There was quite a bit of detail there. Thank you.

Mr Jack:

I will answer the last question first. We expect that chapter 11, which deals with delivery

mechanisms, will be contained in the next draft of the document. The Committee will see that at the same time as we incorporate the departmental inputs. I expect chapter 11 to set out a range of delivery options.

The Chairperson:

Presumably, we will see that some time in April.

Mr Jack:

Yes.

Mrs Long's first point concerned whether there will be a strategy and an action plan or just one document. The key is that what is published sets out actions that will make a difference. We do not want to merely set out a collection of actions that Departments take anyway, the reporting of which creates bureaucracy. My expectation is that the approach will be more along the lines of a single document that has everything in it and that we will seek to use the Programme for Government and the PSA mechanisms to monitor and report. That is the thinking at this stage, but we are open to people's views on the matter.

The racial equality strategy that is currently in place covers the period 2005-2010. In one sense, the context for it has changed, but Ministers feel that its principles are still valid. There is a complexity to how we move forward with it. As the strategy's principles are still valid and extant, we will revisit the six shared aims, but we do not expect to depart from them significantly. We will consult the minority ethnic groups in the wider community. In the past six months, we have restarted meetings of the Racial Equality Forum. We are committed to moving forward on a partnership basis, as envisaged originally when the six shared aims were agreed.

We will take a definite view on whether we need a new racial equality strategy that is separate from this document in light of the consultation responses. However, the intention is to have this as a strategy for tackling both sectarianism and racism. The race relations element is encapsulated in the document. Race relations and racial equality go hand in hand in many ways. We want to see the programme doing as much of both as possible.

Mrs Long:

Can I just check that the other issues that I raised will be taken account of?

Mr Jack:

We will reflect on all of those.

Mr Elliott:

I thank the witnesses for the presentation.

I feel, as Naomi does, that the background and the thought process are good but that the action is limited. I notice the figure of £28.7 million. How does OFMDFM plan to use that money? Most of what we have talked about involves changing mindsets. That is not something that you can pump money into to resolve. The wording is great:

“Promoting a society based on fairness, equality, rights, responsibilities and respect”.

However, the issue is how we get there.

Mr Jack:

The £28.7 million is the allocation for good relations that came as a part of the 2007 comprehensive spending review. That was for the period 2008-2011. We envisage an evolution from the model that we have at present where we have both regional and local funds. The clear indication is that we continue to see a central role for local councils, whether in the current 26-council structure or in the new 11-council structure. We see that kind of local plan as a very important aspect of moving forward. With issues that are so much about relationships among people, we look for leadership at a local level by politicians and others whom people come into contact with on a day-to-day basis. However, we will also have regional-level funding and delivery. That is currently undertaken through the Community Relations Council.

We have also to bear in mind that there is a range of other funding sources. The strategy does not seek to influence only our own funding; we have significant funds under the Peace III programme, for example, which amount to around £50 million over the six years of the programme. It is important to remember that. We must, therefore, use what levers we can to influence the use of that money to ensure that we make the most of it as well. It very much tackles the same issues. It is an evolution from the type of activity that is supported at present.

Mr Spratt:

I want to raise an issue that I have raised previously with the police and others. In fact, I believe

that I raised it most recently at the Policing Board. The issue is the terminology that is used with regard to hate crime. As it stands at present, if anyone in the room is targeted by antisocial behaviour, the police are called, and, if the person who records the incident perceives it to be a hate crime or racist attack, the police have to deal with it and classify it on that basis.

Let me give you an example: after the incident involving the Romanians took place, which we all utterly deplored, Northern Ireland, and Belfast in particular, was portrayed, basically, as the hate capital of Europe; not once, but twice, within two or three days. Media reports did immeasurable damage. In the incident that occurred at the City Church, where, thankfully, some of the Romanian folk had been housed overnight, the church hall was attacked and its windows were broken. That was carried out by a couple of thugs who were involved in antisocial behaviour and criminal damage. Because the pastor perceived that the attack probably happened because the Romanians were there, it was portrayed as a hate crime. For the second time that week, Northern Ireland, and, in particular, Belfast, was portrayed as the hate capital of Europe.

Therefore, we need to be careful about the language that is used in those documents. Perhaps this document presents an opportunity to redefine hate crime. I am not sure how that would be done. The issue would have to be discussed. Perhaps it is a job for the justice Committee and the Minister of Justice, when that person is appointed, to try to redefine that. It is a big issue. When such terminology is used about certain incidents, it can do immeasurable damage to Northern Ireland. We must, therefore, be careful.

Hate crime is mentioned, page after page, throughout the document. Even a hate crime group is mentioned. What do you see as a hate crime group? How will it be comprised? Is there an opportunity to redefine that type of crime? I must say that, in some circumstances, people use hate crime as an opportunity to get rehoused, for example.

Mr Jack:

Obviously, we will go to the ten other Departments — as the Executive currently stand — to develop the document further. We are conscious that by the time that we have asked for departmental responses to be returned, devolution of policing and justice will, in fact, have taken place. Therefore, I want to take the opportunity that is presented by the question to emphasise that we will also engage with officials who are currently in NIO and who will then be Department of Justice staff. We will also meet police to seek their input. The strategy will be joined up in the

sense that the policing and justice system will be part of its delivery. That is an important contextual change. It is part of the context out of which the document has come.

As regards your point about hate crime and the Roma incident that occurred in 2009 —

Mr Spratt:

I do not dispute that such hate crimes take place. I am saying that some incidents can be overstated from the point of view of how they then have to be dealt with by the police.

Mr Jack:

We have looked at figures for Northern Ireland's level of hate crime, particularly that which is racially motivated, compared with that of other parts of these islands. It is not any higher. However, there has been a levelling off, and probably a gradual reduction in, sectarian hate crimes but an increase in racially motivated hate crimes. As a result of that and the way in which the media can pick up on such issues, a very negative image of Northern Ireland was projected. I do not want to go into too much detail on the specific incidents, but we cannot be complacent about hate crime issues. Nevertheless, we must guard against the perception that the situation here is worse than anywhere else. We must minimise the level of any type of hate crime.

The Chairperson:

As I understand it, Mr Spratt's point is that a more clearly defined naming of the crime is required. It is almost like the term "joyriding" that was used for many years. The offence referred to did not result in joy; it resulted in death. We are discussing giving a proper and more accurate label and description to the term "hate crime".

Mr Spratt:

The crime committed in the incident that I used as an example happens in the Holylands area of south Belfast night after night. However, there are other examples.

Mr Jack:

We have a set of good relations indicators that we use at the moment. Some of those are to do with attacks motivated by sectarianism, racism and so on. Those are alternative terms that we use for hate crimes.

Mr Spratt:

I am asking whether there is an opportunity to more closely define the crime.

Mrs Long:

I have a specific concern that, in the account of the incident, the perception was created that the pastor of the church had interpreted it in a particular way, which is incorrect.

Mr Spratt:

That is what the police told —

Mrs Long:

Sorry, if I may finish: having met with the pastor on the morning after that attack, I can say that he was very clear that it may have been random but that he was concerned that it may have been linked to the families' presence. That was his position.

What actually happened was that there was an incredible amount of media speculation about the motive for the attack, and it took on legs of its own. I am slightly concerned because I know that the church was cautious. Given that the Committee session is being recorded, I am uncomfortable with those sorts of comments being put on the record when the individuals alleged to have said or not said something are not here, nor is the person who told Mr Spratt. We must be cautious.

The Chairperson:

I want to move away from discussing specific incidents such as that.

Mr Spratt:

I used it as an example, Chairperson, and it is an example that has been raised at the Policing Board. The police admitted that there was a problem and, furthermore, that there was a problem in how they handled the media in relation to the incident. The perception was that it was reported by the individual and then recorded as a hate crime. That is on the record in another place.

Ms Anderson:

I thank Colin for his presentation. I went through the document earlier today, and I welcome points such as the inclusion of stakeholders in various decision-making roles. It is good to have

that at that level and that the new ministerial panel will be led by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. That shows commitment at the very top of the Executive to taking the programme forward.

Will you elaborate on the use of the phrase “a reinvigorated Racial Equality Forum” in the draft programme? I may not have picked that up properly, but my party and I would welcome the recognition of the need for a new delivery body to administrate its funds. Given that this is a work in progress, there should be an option to look at creating a new delivery body that is not a quango. I do not have any firm proposals for that, but it is worth discussing.

The diagram on page 16 of the draft consultation document shows how the “North Belfast/ Interfaces Group” and the ministerial panel for cohesion, sharing and integration are linked. I am sure that other members could give examples of such groups with which they deal in their community. There are issues around the Bishop Street and Fountain areas in my constituency. Is that feed-in process confined to north Belfast or is there an opportunity to open it up?

Reference is made to hate-crime groups throughout the document. I understand to an extent the targeting of that programme at sectarianism and racism, but there needs to be more explicit reference in the document to tackling homophobia. Policing Board members receive hate-crime statistics. When all that is unpacked, we have to deal with those areas, and the PSNI has requested that we formulate a programme to help it to deal with the issue.

Naomi will not be surprised that I do not agree totally with what she said about good relations, although I appreciate what she said about good relations and equality. However, there is an obligation under section 75(2) that states that one cannot prejudice the obligation of section 75(1), so that was clearly and properly located and documented throughout the report.

The racial equality forum will feed into the ministerial panel, as will interface groups, although that may be confined only to north Belfast. It was very good to see young people included because many MLAs have to use what are almost diversionary measures around parades, for example, and develop other activities for their areas. It is good to have the views of young people included, not just in respect of those issues but in general. What relationship will councils have with the ministerial panel?

Mr Jack:

The options on delivery mechanisms will be in the next version of the document that the Committee will see. We have reconstituted the racial equality forum. Under direct rule, it was chaired at official level and met regularly, but it had not met since the restoration of devolution until November of last year. Ministers took the view that it was desirable to reinvigorate the forum and that it would be appropriate for Ministers to chair it.

It was a very large grouping and will continue to be so. However, when getting business done, Ministers have established a smaller —

Ms Anderson:

I am sorry to cut across you: are you talking about the First Minister and the deputy First Minister?

Mr Jack:

Yes. They have established a smaller racial equality panel, which is intended to be representative of the minority ethnic sector and which will drive forward a programme of work for the forum. Subgroups have been established, and, if it would be helpful, I can provide details of them. The forum has met and will continue to meet every six months with the subgroups meeting regularly in between to deal with immigration and issues associated with it, such as people who have no recourse to public funds.

Mr Attwood:

Thank you for the presentation. I want to confirm and clarify a number of things. Given that you will be consulting until early to mid-October, that suggests, would it not, that it will be next year before the Executive sign off on a final CSI strategy? Given that you will receive responses up until the middle of October and that you will have to process those, getting the Executive to sign off on a strategy before Christmas may seem optimistic and subject to correction. What do you understand the indicative timeframe to be for formal sign-off by the Executive? That is a simple question.

The Chairperson:

That is not like you.

Mr Jack:

That is a reasonable question and observation. The consultation period ends in mid-October, and it will take some weeks to analyse the responses, make any necessary amendments, negotiate them with other Departments and get them agreed by the Executive. The turn of the year will probably be an elastic target, but one would expect the document to come fully into effect for the following financial year.

Mr Attwood:

Your answer is more forthcoming than I had anticipated.

Mr Jack:

I am not sure that I could be held to that, mind you.

The Chairperson:

Do not worry; we will hold you to it. You are on Hansard.

Mr Attwood:

It would be good to have a CSI strategy in the lifetime of this mandate, and, the way that you are talking, it might not be in the lifetime of this mandate.

Mr Jack:

I do not think that there is any lack of intention —

The Chairperson:

To be fair, Mr Jack did not say that it would not be in the lifetime of the mandate. You thought that he would.

Mr Attwood:

If there is an early election, it will not have been in the current mandate.

The Chairperson:

He surprised you. Let us see if you can surprise us.

Mr Attwood:

My second point is critical. It was honest of the OFMDFM officials to flag up the second paragraph of their covering letter in bold that the draft cannot be considered in any way complete. It is one thing to say that the draft cannot be considered to be complete, but the use of “in any way complete” is quite strident.

The more interesting point is this: you told the Committee that you hope that Departments will respond to the draft strategy by the middle of April. Therefore, by the middle of April, Departments are to put to OFMDFM the policies, programmes and actions that they intend to take forward to deliver the key aims of the programme. Given that it is a cross-departmental programme and given that it is not complete without the input of Departments, they have four weeks to come up with their intended policies, programmes and actions.

My concern is obvious. Given that you have given Departments a four-week window, they will come back saying what they do, not what they might do, to deliver the key aims of the programme. Is it not a reasonable conclusion that the timeframe is so tight that you will get that type of response rather than something that adds to what government is doing?

Mr Jack:

This will not be the first time that Departments have thought about the contribution that they can make to this type of agenda. We also know that, in recent months, some Departments have been working actively in this area; therefore a four-week timescale is not out of line with my experience of interdepartmental consultations. We will not simply be sitting back and waiting for Departments to get back to us; we will have issues that we want to press with them and probe them on. We will have expectations about what we think they will come forward with, but we will also have issues that we will want to suggest to them that they might not have considered.

I am conscious that the Assembly will be in recess for the next two weeks and that we have asked Departments to come back to us the week after recess. The Committee could suggest issues with which it would like Departments to come forward, and if those suggestions came in at the same time or slightly before Departments give their input, we could highlight the Committee’s views to Departments.

Mr Attwood:

We appreciate the offer and we need to decide whether it is something that we want to do. People might be surprised by arrangements that give Departments a four-week turnaround time. Did OFMDFM task each Department with identifying measures that they might take forward should OFMDFM agree a CSI strategy?

Mr Jack:

The Departments received the draft consultation document a week or two before the Committee, so they have had a little more time to reflect on it.

Mr Attwood:

Apart from the document, were they given a heads-up to look into the matter?

Mr Jack:

They have been aware for some time that the document has been in development.

Mrs Long:

As have we all.

Mr Attwood:

We look forward to seeing all those Departments coming back with wonderful input within four weeks.

I agree with Martina that the ministerial panel is an interesting concept that could be very useful. I have two questions. The panel will not necessarily be led personally by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister; it will be led by OFMDFM Ministers. However, rather than leaving it up to those Ministers to appoint officials and in order to beef the panel up with their personal participation, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister should sit at least occasionally on the panel, not necessarily at every meeting, but certainly on a rolling basis. That would create discipline and ensure that the Departments that have been working up those brave plans over the past two weeks can deliver on them.

Mr Jack:

That is a useful point for us to reflect on.

The Chairperson:

It was not a question; it was more of a suggestion.

Mr Shannon:

The draft consultation document contains a section on respecting cultures. It is clear that some people respect cultures and some do not; that is demonstrated by attacks on Orange halls. Paragraph 6.5 states:

“Attacks on Orange Halls more than doubled from 35 in 2005 to 71 in 2007 but has since decreased to 58 in 2008.”

The level of attacks on Orange halls far surpasses that on other halls and GAA halls, which I also condemn. The document refers to:

“This Programme’s greater intercultural understanding and respect”

Those are high aims, but many people do not agree with them; they think that there is no closed season on attacking Orange halls and the culture that they represent. What emphasis will you be giving to that issue? You state that:

“We will monitor progress through the Good Relations Indicators and will continue to work with the PSNI in tackling this type of hate crime.”

That sounds OK, but, given the level of attacks, do you need to do more? It is an important matter for the unionist community that I represent, so I would like to hear your ideas about what you intend to do.

Mr Jack:

We would expect action plans that are developed in the localities to which those issues are particularly pertinent to address them. Statistics vary significantly from year to year; nonetheless, prejudice and antisocial behaviour must be tackled, and much of the regional and local mainstream work that we fund is aimed at addressing such issues. Attacks on Orange halls are another issue with which the ministerial panel will engage, and we will be looking for evidence of what works to reduce those types of behaviour.

Mr Shannon:

You said that the programme promotes a culture of understanding and respect. Does it include contact with areas where attacks on Orange halls are taking place? Some Orange halls have been attacked regularly, and I find that difficult to understand; perhaps, therefore, you need to focus on

some areas more than others.

Mr Jack:

Much of the work that is supported by the good relations funding, which comes from OFMDFM via councils and other channels, and from programmes such as Peace III and the International Fund for Ireland, aims at tackling such issues, promoting dialogue where it has been lacking and increasing the understanding of interventions that divert young people — although it may not be reasonable to assume that it is young people — from engaging in such attacks. After the devolution of policing and justice, we will have bilateral discussions on those issues with Department of Justice officials and the PSNI and will raise those issues with them.

Mr Shannon:

Could attacks on Orange halls be better addressed by the Department of Justice than through this policy?

Mr Jack:

As I said, the strategy, in its current context, is for the whole Executive. The contribution of the Department of Justice and the PSNI will be part of the strategy's actions just as all other Departments' actions will be.

Mr McElduff:

I welcome receipt of the draft policy. Alex is concerned about whether we can achieve sign-off during this mandate. It might be worth remembering that the previous Executive did not even get as far as creating a draft policy.

Paragraph 4.12 refers to the duty on district councils and local government to work towards eliminating unlawful racial discrimination. Will you outline the detail on that? How will councils change?

Mr Jack:

That is a reference to the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which places a statutory duty on councils to make appropriate arrangements to ensure that they carry out their various functions with due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. Therefore

we will use the document to remind councils of their responsibilities under that legislation.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for providing an overview and for answering questions. We will, undoubtedly, continue to monitor progress and provide input and will reflect on today's discussion and submit an initial response. We look forward to seeing the next sections of the document as they become available.