



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister
and deputy First Minister

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Child Poverty Annual Report: OFMDFM
Briefing

24 April 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Child Poverty Annual Report: OFMDFM Briefing

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Leslie Cree
Mr Colum Eastwood
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Alex Maskey
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr Frank Duffy	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mrs Janis Scallon	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Joe Reynolds	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson: We welcome Frank Duffy, Joe Reynolds and Janis Scallon, who is doing the PowerPoint presentation.

Mr Frank Duffy (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): First of all, I am grateful for the opportunity to brief the Committee on the second annual report on the child poverty strategy. To provide the Committee with greater clarity on the current position, Joe, who is the policy lead on poverty and disability, is here with me and, as you have noted, Janis Scallon, who is the principal statistician, will do a brief presentation on the detail of the poverty statistics. Before that, I would like to offer a few words by way of background.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires the Executive to publish a strategy for tackling this critically important issue. The first, and, indeed, this current strategy, was published in March 2011, and it is the basis for the report that you have before you today. The Act also requires that Departments report annually on their success in delivering the strategy measured against four statutory measures: relative poverty; absolute poverty; persistent poverty; and the mixed or combined measure of relative poverty and material deprivation.

In the report, which Ministers laid before the Assembly at the end of March, you will see that we focused on relative and absolute poverty. Those are the key indicators that most commentators use

to measure progress. For its part, the Department for Work and Pensions in London has consulted on alternative measures that focus on a range of issues, mostly around social mobility.

The Executive remain committed to measuring against income measures assessed against the UK norms. We believe that that offers the optimum guide to whether children here are experiencing circumstances comparable to children across the UK. In one sense, that puts us at a disadvantage, as the Northern Ireland mean income has always been lower than the UK mean income. Nevertheless, that is the standard against which we can compare on the basis of parity across these islands.

The target of eradicating child poverty by 2020 is UK-wide, and our efforts locally can only ever contribute towards it. However, in making that contribution, our work in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has focused on developing the child poverty outcomes model, which Celine mentioned earlier. We are optimistic that the fruits of that work will begin to be seen in this financial year, as indicators play a stronger role in directing Departments' actions.

In the annex, you will see that Departments are already focusing their efforts towards actions that make a difference more closely related to poverty outcomes. We believe that that will become more effective over time, as the outcomes model begins to take root.

Overall, the picture is one of relative stability. In the current economic circumstances, despite the expectations of a worsening situation, poverty rates have remained relatively constant year on year. Janis will take us through more of the detail of that. However, the report also recognises that some challenges are imminent, among them the impact of welfare reform and the need for economic recovery. Importantly, from an Executive point of view, welfare reform and taxation policies reflect the importance of what is happening in Whitehall and its consequent impact on poverty rates here. However, the Executive are significantly constrained in the extent to which they can address those issues under the terms of the devolution settlement. Chairman, if you are content, I will ask Janis to make a short presentation, and I will be happy to take any questions that you might have.

Mrs Janis Scallon (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Thank you, Frank. If nobody minds, I will stand up, because I want to point things out on the screen. My name is Janis Scallon. I am a principal statistician in the equality research branch in OFMDFM; I work for the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. I want to take you through what is, in my view, the interesting bit, although in some people's minds it may be the boring bit — the numbers.

The first couple of slides are about the key headline measures in child poverty. This slide shows relative child poverty before housing costs, which is the headline measure in the Child Poverty Act. Along the bottom, we have the years, from 2002 to the most recent year for measurement, 2010-11. The bars represent the number of children in poverty, and the line represents the percentage of children in poverty. The numbers and the percentage of children in poverty are at their lowest: in 2010-11, it was lower than it has ever been. There was a slight peak in the year before, but it is coming down dramatically. At present, it sits at about 21%, which is the equivalent of 93,000 children.

Unlike the relative measure, which measures against 60% of the median income at that time, absolute child poverty measures against a 1998 median income level for the UK and then adjusts that each year for inflation. Therefore, absolute child poverty tends to fall at much lower figures and much lower percentages in the UK and in Northern Ireland. It has been relatively volatile over time, but it now sits at about 13% for children in Northern Ireland.

Those are the headline measures, and that is what we are bound to measure against, according to the Child Poverty Act. We do, however, have figures from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) that provide us with localised measures of child poverty. At present, the Child Poverty Act measures just cover the Northern Ireland level. To get a more localised picture, we have obtained other figures from HMRC, which are publicly available. The latest figures are for 2010-11. The map shows it broken down by Northern Ireland Assembly areas; the darker areas are where child poverty is highest and the paler areas are where child poverty is lowest. It ranges from 13% to 43%. The figures in Foyle and West Belfast are sitting at about 43%, by Assembly area.

The Chairperson: Where is Strangford lough?

Mrs Scallon: I am sorry. We have a new mapping system. I will show you on the next slide. Strangford lough does exist and is there; it is not in our current Arc mapping system, but we have recently updated it.

Mr Spratt: Disgraceful. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Scallon: It is there; I promise. In some of the maps, no loughs are available.

That slide shows that there is a more localised picture. We say that 21% of children in Northern Ireland are in poverty, but once you break it down to a more local area, you will see that that is not necessarily the case. We need to look at a community level in order to understand the prevalence of child poverty in areas.

The next map shows the change, again using HMRC figures, between 2009 and 2010. The positive message here is that, for some areas — anywhere that is not in red — there has been a decrease in child poverty. We need to look as well at what is going on in communities, year on year. The biggest decrease was in North Belfast, where child poverty decreased by 4.7%. There is movement over the years.

I have broken it down now to an even more local level. Our Assembly areas have about 100,000 people in them. The next map shows super output areas — not a great name — which is statistical geography for Northern Ireland and what we measure deprivation on. Census results and most administrative data from across Departments are available at that level. Each area has about 2,000 people. That will give you an idea when I tell you what the percentage is. For example, in areas of West Belfast such as Whiterock, 72% of children are in child poverty. The darker areas show the same sort of thing: Glenderg, Castlederg, Crossmaglen, around Derry, parts of Limavady and Coleraine, and North and West Belfast. We can see major areas with high concentrations of child poverty. That was in 2010. Again, just to show you the changes, this is a positive map and it shows that most of the areas are around the yellow/orange-red colour, which means that there has been a reduction in child poverty. The next level shows the increases. I have just pointed out a view of Strangford lough. Kircubbin has seen an improvement, as there has been a reduction in child poverty. Strand in Derry has also seen a reduction, as have Brookeborough and Springhill.

I will zoom into the Belfast area, because it is very hard to see on the large map. We have seen improvements in Orangefield, Botanic, Whiterock, Ladybrook and many other areas. To tie in with what Celine was saying earlier about the Colin area, we have seen slight increases in child poverty in Poleglass and Twinbrook, but in the other areas comprising the Colin area, as it would be deemed — Derriaghy, Kilwee and Colin Glen — we have seen reductions in child poverty. Things are happening at a local level, and it is very important to look at the local community level to try to understand what is going on around child poverty.

Hopefully, I have not bombarded you with too many numbers. That completes my presentation. Please feel free to ask questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.

Frank and Joe, I would like to go through annex A in some detail. There was criticism last year that the report was a list of outputs rather than outcomes. Has that been addressed this year?

Mr Duffy: As you will appreciate, annex A reports from individual Departments; therefore, it is very difficult to comment in detail. I was not here last year and was not familiar with that area, but I think that we have tried to make strides to give better information and to begin to focus on outcomes, which is what we all intend to do, recognising by its nature that it is a long-term, complex process involving a whole range of Departments. We have tried to capture that. We are trying to make improvements with regard to the utilisation of the Delivering Social Change framework to make sure that Departments come together and recognise that no one Department will be able to tackle the issue. It is multivariate, and because it is multivariate, it required lots and lots of different inputs from departmental level and from the voluntary and community sector and the business sector. It is a range of issues.

The Chairperson: We heard very positive comments on Delivering Social Change from Celine. As practitioners in the system, can you comment on how it has changed how you work? Does it make life easier?

Mr Duffy: I have had experience in government in the past where we talked about the need for joined-up government; it is a mantra that has been around for quite a few years. I have seen it used from Targeting Social Need to neighbourhood renewal and now Delivering Social Change. With Delivering Social Change, we see a significant move where junior Ministers are bringing together senior officials from each Department, and there is a very real sense that they are working to one agenda: what difference are we going to make? It is not just about telling me about the policies that you have always been engaged in in any particular Department; it is about what you are doing now that is different and about showing some additionality that is making a difference on the ground. It is a work in progress. I am not saying that it is perfect; I do not think that anyone is saying that. As with anything like this, we are trying to get joined-up government across the 12 Departments and across a very large and complex organisation such as the Civil Service and, indeed, other public sector organisations. It will be a mammoth task to bring that on board. However, it is making progress.

The Chairperson: It is a mammoth task, but it is also a huge opportunity.

Mr Duffy: Absolutely. When I worked on the Victims' Commission, I found that when we went to a Department that was not our sponsor Department, which was OFMDFM, the response was always measured against the Programme for Government targets of that Department rather than the merits of the proposition. If you can bring in an overarching concept such as Delivering Social Change, you could open doors.

Mr Joe Reynolds (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): In response to both your questions, we would like to see more information in the results column of the chart at annex A. There is certainly more information in this year's report than last year's. Our work on the outcomes model, in conjunction with the National Children's Bureau (NCB), gives the basis on which all Departments will be better informed. Therefore, next year's report should take that forward again.

The Chairperson: That is fine. I will take the mood of the group. I understand that much of this is outputs and results from other Departments and that you are simply reporting on what they have reported to you. However, a few members would like to come in with more overarching questions.

Mr Eastwood: Thanks very much for the report; it is very useful to see the statistics. Unfortunately, if you come from Derry, it is not that helpful. We are at the wrong end of another league table again, but that is how it is. In the report, you talk about a steady downward trend. That may be the case. However, it is attached to the UK median wage, which has gone down in the past number of years. Are people less poor or are we measuring against a dropping indicator?

Even if it is dropping, we are still looking at 93,000 children in poverty. We have a commitment to try to eradicate child poverty by 2020. You say that you remain realistic, which does not strike me as very optimistic. Have you any optimism at all about getting that figure down to anywhere near eradicating child poverty by 2020?

Mr Reynolds: As far as an area such as Derry is concerned, it is important, when drilling into the detail of the figures that Janis referred to, to acknowledge that in areas where disadvantage was at its greatest, improvement was at its most marked. One of the reasons why there is relative stability in the figures is that areas that previously saw the greatest levels of disadvantage have also seen the greatest levels of improvement, while areas that previously had a relative level of affluence have seen some reduction and disimprovement in their figures. There is something positive in that for the areas that, historically, have suffered the greatest disadvantage.

As for whether we use the UK median or move to some other measurement, those are requirements that are provided for in the Act: under statute, we are obliged to report in those terms. It probably makes sense to do so because it provides consistency over a longer period. We can, therefore, see the progress that is being made.

In the report, we state that we are realistic about the challenges ahead. In his opening remarks, Frank said that we can see the projections that other people are making about the impact of the economic downturn, welfare reform or other issues. However, it is the impact of the issues for which the Executive have responsibility that is causing the changes in a positive direction in those areas. The more we target areas of social disadvantage and see impacts, the more you can be optimistic about the potential to continue that progress through those actions.

Mr Eastwood: Thanks very much, Joe. I understand why you use that measurement, but it is important to set the context that it is a changing measurement. The figures are very useful in showing the areas that need the most intervention. I take it that the Executive will be doing work around that, whether through trying to create employment or other interventions. Will there be specific, focused intervention in those areas to try to eradicate child poverty?

Mr Duffy: I think there is already. With issues such as, for example, neighbourhood renewal or the social investment fund, we have seen that they are specifically targeted and geared towards the Northern Ireland neighbourhood information service (NINIS) areas, where there is statistically proven to be high levels of deprivation. It is no accident that some areas with the highest levels of child poverty also relate to high levels of unemployment.

In the current economic climate, Executive Ministers are clearly, as we have seen in recent times, out drumming around, looking for opportunities for foreign direct investment and new and innovative ways to bring investment and opportunities to Northern Ireland. We have also seen, with the recent signature projects, that a lot of the focus has been on interventions that support, for example, teachers in schools with issues of literacy and numeracy, family support hubs and social enterprise hubs: a clear focus on those areas that are going to make a major difference. We all know that the major difference, in relation to child poverty, is about employment. That is the key thing that will make a difference to future outcomes.

The Chairperson: Those hubs are part of the six signature projects.

Mr Duffy: That is correct.

The Chairperson: But those are not up and running yet.

Mr Duffy: I do not know in detail. I would rather not mislead the Committee.

The Chairperson: Annex A certainly gives the impression that there has been no impact on the ground as yet. Presumably Ministers have high expectations of the —

Mr Duffy: As we acknowledged, if we are going for an outcomes-based model it is, by its nature, a long-term approach.

Ms Fearon: Thanks for your presentation. My question is two-fold and relates to joined-up government and things needing to be tied together. First, what is being done in the Department to ensure that all the different policies relating to children and young people are consistent and are working alongside one other as opposed to against one another — the 10-year strategy for children and young people, the childcare strategy, dare I say it, and even the Child Poverty Act, Delivering Social Change and the UNCRC? How are they all being tied together to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people?

Mr Duffy: Each Department has its own children's champion. We recognise that it is every Department's responsibility — and I think that one of the speakers acknowledged it earlier — to ensure that we contribute to that area. As acknowledged by Mr Eastwood, we are trying to tackle a UK-wide target to eradicate child poverty. We are optimistic that we are making progress, but, because it is a UK-wide target, Northern Ireland could still suffer aspects of child poverty while the overall rate could be coming down. You have to recognise that there is a differential approach.

In relation to actually co-ordinating that, Delivering Social Change is a key step in that process. It is about bringing the senior officials in those Departments around a table, focused on the key areas of Delivering Social Change. Child poverty is one of the key indicators that we are trying to tackle with Delivering Social Change. It is the focus of ministerial attention. The children's strategy was originally devised at a time when there was a different economic climate. We are reviewing some of the actions in that strategy, but part of the early actions identified in Delivering Social Change are to address some of the concerns that we know are current. They are things such as educational attainment, support for families, social enterprise and trying to ensure employment in areas that have traditionally suffered very high levels of deprivation.

Ms Fearon: I recognise that every Department has a responsibility, and that brings me to my second point. I know that, under the Child Poverty Act, there is a duty on every Department to do what it can to tackle child poverty.

I wrote to every Department recently, asking what action they had taken in relation to this. I have to say that every response that I got was less than satisfactory. It was almost a case of, "OFMDFM is doing this, and we tie in with what it is doing." Can anything be done by the Department to join up the work of all Departments — even having a task force to ensure that things are being done? Almost every answer directed me back to OFMDFM.

Mr Duffy: I think that that is because OFMDFM holds the policy in relation to children and young people, and certainly in relation to child poverty. We offer advice and guidance to Departments and try to co-ordinate some of the activities. The fact that the junior Ministers are chairing the Delivering Social Change framework, and that the framework has a key focus on children indicates, I think, that there is an impetus to make a difference.

You are probably finding that if you ask a Department what it has been doing in relation to children, or children and young people, it will traditionally list all the various levels of expenditure that it has been engaged in, and it will point to how that impacts on children.

Take the Department for Regional Development and roads as one example. It would be very difficult to say what contribution roads make to eradicating child poverty. However, access to transport, industry and schools clearly makes a direct difference. To try and indicate which particular elements are making a difference is extraordinarily difficult. That is why we are trying to move towards an outcomes-based model. We are trying to show what things we think will make a key difference in the longer term, and to do that will mean Departments will have to think differently about how they actually channel their expenditure; but that is part of the work in progress.

Ms Fearon: All right. Thank you.

Mr Reynolds: If I may, I will supplement that answer because in fairness to the Departments that have given their responses, they also provided us with the information. In a sense, our role is to collate the information that comes from those Departments. What you see in annex A to the report are lists of the actions and an improvement this year on last on the measurements of an outcome-based approach. On the basis of the work that we will be finishing from the National Children's Bureau, I hope that we will see a further improvement next year.

Mr Spratt: Thank you for the presentation. First, I welcome the improvement in the figures. We saw that lapse a short time ago. There are many child poverty issues in parts of my South Belfast constituency such as Taughmonagh, which is totally surrounded by affluent areas. We hear that such areas are disadvantaged in funding terms. How disadvantaged do your statistics show them to be? Does that affect your colour code for them? I frankly suspect that were that area to be subject to the process it would be red.

Mrs Scallon: The advantage of using "super output area" geography is that Taughmonagh sits in the Upper Malone electoral ward, which breaks down into three super output areas. We can see that Taughmonagh lies in one of those areas where there has been an improvement of 2.9%. So, we can actually see the changes right down to the local level, not by using the Child Poverty Act statistics but by using the HMRC administrative data. Therefore, we can drill down to quite a local area, and Taughmonagh is one of those areas — it is a pocket that sits within a very non-deprived electoral ward but these figures allow us to see beyond that.

Mr Duffy: I am very familiar with the area and live not too far from it. When I was in the Belfast Regeneration Office, we focused on areas such as Taughmonagh or Erinvale that are surrounded by relatively affluent areas but have their own difficulties of social disadvantage. Using the concept of areas at risk, we tried to link those areas to ensure that they were able to tap into support and that efforts were made on the ground to tackle issues such as antisocial behaviour or providing facilities for young people and diversionary activities at certain times of year. We recognised that there was a danger that very small areas in an overall affluent setting could slip through the net. As Janis indicated, the beauty of the NINIS statistics is that you can drill down at that very localised level.

Mr Spratt: That is very helpful.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you for your presentation. How will you measure the contribution of the six signature projects to reducing child poverty further?

Mr Duffy: May I take it that this is today's easy question? It is early stages. We had the announcement of the six signature projects and the announcement that we want extra support for teachers, social hubs and enterprise hubs. Establishing what difference they will make on the ground is part and parcel of the evaluation process. Part and parcel of a business case that you put together is that you decide what you are going to do and you then monitor and evaluate the actual outcomes. That will be part of the process. It is far too early to say just what the outcomes have been, but establishing that is inherent to any funding activity in which we engage. I do not know whether that answers your question, because it is too early to say what the outcomes are. Measuring the outcomes is inherent in the process of awarding the money.

Mr Lyttle: So, work is ongoing to identify those outcomes, and there is a plan in place for monitoring them.

Mr Duffy: It is not an area of work that I am specifically dealing with. We can certainly provide that level of detail to you. I know from my experience of dealing with business cases that part and parcel of it is ensuring that you have a valuation of what it is that you are going to deliver.

Mr Lyttle: It would be helpful to get some more detail around that. How exactly has the social investment fund been integrated into the Executive approach to addressing child poverty?

Mr Duffy: The social investment fund is, effectively, a subset of the Delivering Social Change framework. The social investment fund is about giving a voice to local priorities. It is about identifying areas where the variety of stakeholders that are reflective of that community — whether people from the community and voluntary sector or councillors or people from the private sector — can have a say about the priorities that they want tackled in those areas and then seek to draw down the centralised funding set aside for that purpose. It is integrated within the Delivering Social Change framework. It recognises that the type of problems that we are trying to tackle cannot be tackled by one Department operating in isolation. It needs a joined-up approach, and it is about enshrining that joined-up approach, not only at government level but recognising that, as you get into local areas, the voluntary, community and private sectors have huge contributions to make to those issues on the ground, and, indeed, are already doing so.

Mr Lyttle: Will a similar evaluation, monitoring and measuring system be in place for outcomes from the social investment fund?

Mr Duffy: I understand that there are, but, again, I am sorry, it is not the area that I am specifically focused on. I know from talking to my senior management colleagues that that is indeed the case.

Mr Lyttle: I keep forgetting to declare an interest on the social investment fund. I am on the east Belfast area steering group. Apologies; I always forget that.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. On the back of Megan's point about writing to the various Departments, in particular the Department for Regional Development, which deals with roads and infrastructure; if the A5 had been started, it would have gone a massive way to creating and sustaining jobs from Derry to the Ballygawley roundabout. Maybe some Departments need to think outside the box.

The economic inactivity report gives a number of categories, one of which is rural areas. I find it interesting that most child poverty is concentrated in urban areas, as opposed to rural areas. That report states that economic inactivity is concentrated in rural areas. I flag that up in case you are not aware of it. I sit on Dungannon neighbourhood renewal partnership. Have the figures on child poverty gone down in that area, because, again, that does not seem to be featured in your stats?

Mrs Scallon: All of the figures for a local area are available online. I can arrange for a link to those figures to be sent to you, if you want. Is there any particular area in Dungannon that you are interested in?

Ms McGahan: There is a Dungannon neighbourhood renewal area, so —

Mrs Scallon: The neighbourhood renewal areas contain around 1,000 people, as far as I remember.

Ms McGahan: Yes, that is right.

Mrs Scallon: The one in Dungannon is around Coalisland.

Ms McGahan: It is Dungannon and Coalisland.

Mrs Scallon: There certainly have been reductions. I can go through a few of them if you want. There have been reductions around Aughnacloy, Ballygawley, Ballysaggart, Caledon, Castlecaulfield, Clogher, North, Newmills, Coolhill, Donaghmore, Fivemiletown, Killyman and Moy.

Ms McGahan: It is interesting, because some of those areas — Fivemiletown, Moy and Donaghmore — do not fall into the neighbourhood renewal area. Ballysaggart obviously does, and that is the key area.

Mrs Scallon: I just went through the Dungannon council area.

Ms McGahan: That is OK. It was just a comment.

Mrs Scallon: There will be changes at the margins at the very small area level. I can write to you with the figures for the neighbourhood renewal area.

Mr Duffy: DSD keeps a very clear focus on those areas. It is about recognising that neighbourhood renewal areas are not hermetically sealed. There is leakage in and out: if you do a programme of activity for young people, they do not have to come specifically from the neighbourhood renewal area. It is not as clear-cut as that.

Ms McGahan: They have to have links.

Mr Duffy: Yes, they might go to school in the area or have friends there or socialise there. So, it is not clear-cut when it comes to who is in and who is out.

Mr G Robinson: Thanks very much for your presentation. It was very interesting and helpful. As usual, my question is parochial. What are the statistics for Limavady? Have the rates of child poverty increased? Limavady contains wards with the some of the highest rates of deprivation in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Scallon: I can go through some of the areas in Limavady where there has been an improvement, if that helps. There has been an improvement in Ballykelly, Coolessan, Dungiven, Enagh II — not Enagh I — Greysteele I, Greystone, Roeside, Highlands and Glenshane. So, when we split Limavady, there has been an improvement in around half of the wards and an increase in child poverty in the other half.

Mr G Robinson: So, there is still further work to be done.

Mr Cree: The report is well written, in the best traditions of Sir Humphrey. Perhaps, you could decode some of it. When you say that the Executive remain realistic about the prospect, does that mean that you are not going to meet the target? If so, what is your best estimate?

Mr Duffy: First, it is an acknowledgement that the target is a UK one and that our contribution can only be a contribution. Therefore, I cannot offer you a guarantee —

Mr Cree: It is a Programme for Government target.

Mr Duffy: It is, but it is still recognised as being a UK Government commitment. Therefore, it is all of our commitments, if you like. Our contribution is only a contribution. Therefore, it is impossible to say to you, particularly in the current economic climate, with uncertainty around what will happen to the

euro zone or to international investment. I would be picking lottery numbers if I was able to be that predictive.

Mr Cree: You mention that 21% of children are living in relative poverty. The 2003 figure was mentioned. What was the figure in 2003?

Mrs Scallon: It was 25%, which equates to 108,000 children.

Mr Cree: That was in a period of comparative affluence, being before 2008. So, we have gone from 25% to 21% over 10 years.

Another thing that concerns me, and I do not think you touch on it, is the effect of and size of food banks over the country. Have you any handle on the kind of work that they are doing? In my area, the contribution of food banks is significant, and it is regarded as one of the more affluent areas. Has there been any work done on that?

Mr Duffy: No, it would not be possible to go down to that level of granularity. To know the impact of food banks on child poverty, we would need to know the number of people accessing them and their nature, background and income. There are a whole range of issues. Whether or not it would impact at this level, I could not say. I do not have that information.

Mr Cree: Would it be worth trying to find out?

Mr Duffy: I do not have the information.

Mr Reynolds: The vast majority of those food banks are run by local charities or church organisations. Those are not public service organisations, so they are not under any obligation to provide information to us on the background of those who use their services.

Mr Cree: They are perfectly willing to provide that information. So, some organisations should be teeing into this to get a handle on it. That is very important.

Ms Fearon: What actions are there in the report to help children with disabilities? Is enough being done in that area?

Mr Duffy: I defer to Joe, because he is our policy expert on disability.

Mr Reynolds: Alongside the child poverty strategy, the Executive recently launched a new disability strategy. We are doing significant work on that and have a delivery framework. That may well be a presentation for another day, Chairman. We are very happy to come and talk to you about the detail of that, not least because I understand that the Committee has been invited to participate in the Department's disability conference, which takes place a week tomorrow. We have invited representatives from a range of Departments, who will come along and provide workshops for delegates to explain the various projects in which the Department is engaged with the aim of delivering improvements in services to people with disabilities. That will impact on people of all ages with disabilities and in different scenarios, including whether they have an adequate standard of living. The cross-referencing between those issues will impact on our work on poverty in general and child poverty specifically.

The Chairperson: I have a couple of final questions, Frank. We have four measures: relative, absolute, child poverty and fuel poverty. Is it too complicated?

Mr Duffy: It is certainly a complex area. The four measures and the fact that statistics are regularly bandied around in the media about whether child poverty is increasing or decreasing mean that, by its nature, it is an inherently difficult issue. It is also difficult in the sense that most people recognise that poverty, by its nature, is relative — I do not mean relative poverty as in the measure. What may be considered poverty in Belfast terms could, in another country, be considered affluence. There are all sorts of issues involved, and it is a hugely complex area. When you get into the area of child poverty, it becomes increasingly difficult. Celine, in her earlier presentation, mentioned that simply throwing money at it — simply giving a parent or parents extra money — will not necessarily translate into extra support, benefit or well-being for the child or children. It is a very, very complex area. I am not sure

that it is possible to come up with some distilled or global measure that hits all aspects of poverty. There is poverty of aspiration and poverty of opportunity as well as income poverty.

The Chairperson: We acknowledge that the headline figures are getting better and that this report is better than last year's. No doubt, you hope to report improvements in both areas next year.

Annex A to your paper details the reports from Departments. Did you interrogate those or simply cut and paste them to your document?

Mr Reynolds: I am not sure that I understand. In what way would you want —

The Chairperson: A Department says: "Here is our response to the question on what we are doing about child poverty." Do you just take that response and put it in annex A, or do you ask that Department why it thinks its response relevant?

Mr Reynolds: If you go through some of the contributions made, you will see that they do relate to the other work that we have been leading on the child poverty outcomes model. All Departments send representatives to the workshops that the National Children's Bureau has been organising on the development of that outcomes model.

About two years ago, we started with a list of all the actions that Departments proposed to us would have an impact on child poverty. Since then, Departments have narrowed their proposed actions to those for which they, whether or not they yet have the data, have identified a correlation with potential outcomes measured in child poverty terms.

One of the exercises that the outcomes model exercise has been charged with is to identify areas for which Departments do not have but could gather data. In undertaking that process to fill the gaps, we hope that, over time, those actions will relate not just to outputs, which is what we had in the past, but specifically to outcomes.

The Chairperson: Let me ask you about one specific action, which appears twice in annex A. Indeed, quite often, there is a doubling up in the report. Under the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is the action:

"Provision of concessionary angling licences".

I do not get the impact of a concessionary angling licence on child poverty.

Mr Reynolds: Sorry, which one of the action areas are we looking at?

Mr Duffy: There are priority action areas, Chairman. Does it have a number?

The Chairperson: It is priority action area 14. How does that impact on child poverty?

Mr Duffy: If you go back to the strategic priorities, you will see that one of those is:

"Ensure the child's environment supports them to thrive."

That is the headline measure, so we then ask Departments what they are doing in that area. In the past, we acknowledged that asking Departments to say how much they will expend and what will contribute to a priority leads to issues: for example, a Department may say that it has installed new swings in a playground or introduced new forms of activity. Although I cannot speak for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, it states that it has provided concessionary licences to encourage children to take up fishing. You might think that a very small issue, but it is one of many that contribute to the headline measure.

The Chairperson: It is a wee bit of a "kitchen sink" report.

Mr Duffy: We are trying to recognise that, in the past, if I had gone round all the Departments and asked them what they were doing to address child poverty, I would probably have been able to fill the

table with responses detailing all of their expenditure and all the possibilities of how that would impact on child poverty.

I was not being facetious by referring to roads, which I used as an illustrative example. It is clear that roads, hospitals and all sorts of activities contribute to the economy, and those can be shown to have causal links to addressing child poverty. We are trying to get smarter in how we do that. We are trying to identify the key issues that need to be tackled to make a real difference to a child's well-being and what it is that makes a difference to child poverty — and start honing in on those areas. First, we take our advice and the advice that we get from the likes of the NCB, the University of Ulster and UNESCO. Then, we find out what will make a difference and, finally, channel government expenditure to make that difference. That is work in progress, and child poverty is still with us. This Administration and others in the past have not got it right, and there is still more work to be done.

The Chairperson: I am not picking out DCAL for special focus, but one item in the outputs/results column states:

"Provision of free learning opportunities in 70% of libraries."

That may be welcome, but it would probably be more welcome if we knew where that 70% of libraries were and whether they were in the super output areas, which they may be.

Mr Reynolds: Your final point is very fair. However, this report is on the delivery of the strategy and, to understand more clearly what is being reported on, we need to refer back to the strategy. Let us look at the strategic framework that was signed up to and agreed, and the delivery of which we have been working on for two years. You will see that there are clear areas in which we are trying to improve not only services to children but issues in their environment, the employability of their parents and the potential for family incomes to rise. To deliver on that, we detailed a series of priority action areas in the strategic document. Departments are now reporting on their contribution towards the detail of that priority action area. So, as Frank suggested, when looking at improving the environment or the play and leisure opportunities available to children, each Department is asked to demonstrate to us the contributions that they have made to underpin efforts being made in that field.

It is reasonable for you to pick out any one of them, and that happens to be one of the contributions that DCAL is making. What we may not have in this year's report, which falls out of the report that we hope will come out of the further work that we are doing on the outcomes model, is how we correlate that with more than just the input and output, which is a cheaper angling licence. We want to correlate that with the outcome, which is whether children who participate in leisure and social activities and enjoy the environment then enjoy further benefits. We correlate those with better health outcomes because of improved physical activity or education outcomes because children have developed better skills and concentration and are, therefore, able to achieve better in school.

We know that there is a direct correlation between academic qualifications and income in later life. We know that there is a correlation between physical activity and other leisure pursuits and attendance at school. When we correlate all those elements, there is an outcome, which is that children who live in families with a higher income are less likely to live in poverty.

The Chairperson: I accept that. However, there is no evidence of whether children in poverty are availing themselves of the concessionary licences or the 70% of free library provision. I do not want to be seen to be picking on DCAL. In Annex A's reference to the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), there is a fantastic statistic:

"99.8% of children whose parents engaged fully with the two-stage process received the offer of a funded preschool place."

That is fantastic — 99.8%. However, if you think about it a bit more, what are they actually saying? First, it applies to parents who engaged fully. Secondly, it states not that their child has a preschool place but that he or she has "received the offer" of one. People have come to my constituency office in Ards to say that their nearest offer was of a place in Twinbrook, which they could not take up on practical grounds. So that statistic certainly does tell the full story. Again, that is not your Department, and you are simply stating what you got from DEL/DE. I want to make the point that it is our duty to scrutinise, drill down and, perhaps, suggest that, next time, there may be a way of interrogating the information given to you rather than cutting and pasting it into the annex of your report.

Mr Reynolds: Your point is very well made, and it is well taken. We are in a process of layering information over a period. It is a long-term strategy, and, as Frank said, it is a matter of finding the information. In the past, we did not have the information. Now, we have at least progressed to a situation in which we are beginning to interrogate the information that we have. Next year, we can do better than that and have better answers, and we can then ask questions about the way in which that is targeted. I am sure that that is where we will go with it in future years.

Mr Duffy: That is the case, Chairman. Your comments are very well made and very useful. That would take us from "blank page-itis" to being given information that could be interrogated, refined and made better. We acknowledge that.

Ms McGahan: The Chairman referred to angling licences, and such activities would go some way to keeping our children and young people out of the criminal justice system, particularly those from disadvantaged areas. Is that a fair assessment? As a former member of a district policing partnership, a key factor was keeping young people out of the criminal justice system. We do not want them to go down that road.

Mr Duffy: It is very difficult to provide detailed statistics. However, intuitively, we recognise that children who are engaged in an activity or learning, often with an adult, how to fish or something similar begin to feel involved and develop a different outlook on life. They begin to structure the different aspects of their life. They start to think about and discuss follow-up activities. So the action has a very valuable role, but it is difficult to measure its impact in detail.

The Chairperson: That is my point: there is no measure, just an input. Janis, Joe and Frank, thank you all very much indeed.