



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Together — Building a United Community:
Ministerial Briefing

22 May 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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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
Mrs Brenda Hale
Mr Alex Maskey
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr Jonathan Bell	Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ms Jennifer McCann	Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Miss Donna Blaney	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dr Denis McMahon	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson: Our first briefing this afternoon is from junior Minister Jonathan Bell and junior Minister Jennifer McCann on the new good relations strategy titled 'Together: Building a United Community'. We welcome them and officials Donna Blaney and Denis McMahon. I presume that you want to make some opening remarks.

Mr Jonathan Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Thank you, Chair, for the invitation to be with the Committee today. As members know, we intend to publish the new good relations strategy 'Together: Building a United Community'. It will go to the Executive tomorrow, and we hope to publish it shortly thereafter. This will be a significant step forward and provide the basis of a comprehensive programme of work to promote improved relations and try to tackle the root causes of community tensions.

On 9 May, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced a package of significant and strategic actions that will help to build a prosperous, peaceful and safe society that is enriched by diversity and welcoming to all. The package includes a number of significant programmes. It will focus on education; young people not in education, employment or training (NEET); regeneration and deprivation; housing; and learning from the past. We will have working groups consisting of officials and advisers from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the relevant

Departments. These have been established for the projects that will deliver the individual strategic actions. The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) will provide support in developing the programme of work.

The working groups will report to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the detail of what will be delivered by each project, the timeline and the indicative costs. The immediate costs associated with the delivery of the new projects and programmes are minimal. I anticipate that the initial design and set-up costs can be covered from existing budgets and reallocations during the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, in which we have allocated £36 million to good relations work. We plan to bid in the next CSR period to significantly increase the available funds for that work. Since devolution, approximately £500 million has been spent on supporting valuable good relations work across Northern Ireland. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Peace funding, the International Fund for Ireland, Atlantic Philanthropies and Big Lottery are just some of the funders.

We have come a long way, but we realise that much work has yet to be done. We are determined to address issues of division and build a truly shared future. The largest element of the cost of the new programmes is likely to be associated with the capital cost of the 10 shared educational campuses. We will consider all funding options available to us, including the reallocation of capital for the delayed A5 infrastructure project. The 2012 update on the good relations indicators, which was published at the end of January this year, indicates that relations have improved between the two main traditions here. We are committed to improving relations. Although the statistics in the latest report are not the solution, they will inform further policy decisions. It is encouraging that the positive indicators in the report outweigh the negatives. The significant positive trends include the proportion of adults aged 18 and over who believe that relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than five years ago. At 62%, that is 10% higher than in 2005, when it sat at 52%. The number of people presenting as homeless due to intimidation decreased by 33.4% from 694 in 2010-11 to 462 in 2011-12. That is almost half the baseline of 880 in 2005-6. However, it is important that we do not become complacent. We are committed to continuing to improve on that trend and achieve our vision of a united and shared community.

Despite such progress, intolerance and prejudice in our community continue and are manifest in physical violence against people and attacks on property. We utterly condemn that kind of behaviour. We are committed to tackling the attitudes and mindsets that can be manifest in such negative ways. The finalised strategy 'Together: Building a United Community' will build a community based on respect, mutual understanding and trust. This will include tackling all forms of intolerance and hate crime and working with the local community and statutory agencies to prevent our young people becoming engaged in such activities.

We recognise that there are still negative influences in our community who would seek to bring us back to the darker days of our past. We are resolved not to allow these elements to detract from the undoubted progress that we have made collectively as a society. Our vision is of a united community based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation. It is a vision strengthened by its diversity, in which cultural expression is celebrated and embraced, and in which everyone can live, work and socialise together free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.

We have invited each Executive party leader to nominate two members to an all-party group that will consider and make recommendations on matters that include parades and protests, flags, symbols, emblems and related matters, and dealing with the past. The all-party group will have an independent chairperson, and it will want to hear from various stakeholders across the community about how best to address the issues causing community division.

Ms Jennifer McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The announcement of 'Together: Building a United Community' followed several years of hard work. The proposals announced aim to secure a more positive future for all our citizens.

Community relations and the difficulties associated with them are, I am sure, well known to everyone here today. The Committee will wish to note that many questions on good relations have been raised in the Assembly on numerous occasions and that Ministers have answered them as fully and openly as they could.

The Committee will be aware that the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration was subject to an extensive period of public consultation following its launch in 2010. The independent analysis of the consultation exercise was informed by a wealth of material, including 288 written responses and

feedback from 15 central events and 11 public meetings. The commitment of individual and groups from across our society to 'Together: Building a United Community' was made very clear through the consultation. We are determined to harness this commitment as we go forward with the implementation of a final strategy and a high-level action plan. The analysis of all contributions to the public consultation has formed an integral part of the work plan for the cross-party working group and informed the consideration of the group.

We do not propose to consult on the specifics of each action arising from the detailed strategy because doing so would significantly delay and completely frustrate the process of delivery. Ministers have listened to what the public, interested sectors and Members have said about shared future issues. Now, we believe, is the time for action.

The ministerial code requires that we bring our proposals to the Executive, and we will do that tomorrow. The actions that we have announced will go ahead to support the messages contained in the new good relations strategy, 'Together: Building a United Community'. What was announced were positive tangible actions designed to improve good relations and provide opportunities for all our citizens. They have the support of our ministerial colleagues, whose representatives will take them forward in the design groups. The Assembly and its various Committees will have an opportunity to discuss the actions and scrutinise their implementation.

We have identified an initial set of seven strategic actions on which work to prepare for implementation has already commenced. These actions are important in engendering a real sense of ambition and pace in this process.

The 10,000 placements for young people not in employment, education or training are designed to foster good relations and improve their life chances. The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), along with other Departments, has implemented, or is in the process of implementing, a number of programmes, primarily to meet the skill and work experience needs of the NEETs category. These include the additional support provided by OFMDFM in October 2012 through the signature projects. The new programme will go further in providing a wider range of opportunities to challenge, motivate and reward these young people. They will regain a sense of worth and a connection with society and the community. They will learn valuable transferable skills that will, we hope, stand them and our economic future in good stead.

The 100 summer schools are also an important initiative. They will provide a range of opportunities for our post-primary children to come together for academic and leisure purposes. This is part of the shared education agenda and looks at the range of development needs of these young people and how to deliver them on a cross-community basis.

The four urban villages seek to revitalise urban areas by looking at the education, retail, recreation, employment and housing needs of communities in a joined-up way. In doing this, a real sense of community and revitalisation will be forged, overcoming a legacy of piecemeal design and urban decay. We are looking at a number of options for situating these urban villages, but the preparatory work, already being carried out in the Colin area and led by the SIB, makes it an obvious candidate.

We envisage a range of types of campus over the 10 shared education campuses, from large multi-school, multi-age campuses to more modest shared campuses bringing, perhaps, only a few schools together. The first flagship campus for this initiative will be in Omagh, where six schools from a range of backgrounds and sectors have agreed to come together on a particular site.

In July 2012, the Education Minister fulfilled a Programme for Government commitment by establishing a ministerial advisory group to advance shared education. The advisory group presented its report to him on 22 April 2013. It made 20 recommendations on shared education and its potential to provide a framework for creating a world-class education system. The recommendations are now with the Department of Education for consideration.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) will take forward work on the 10 shared neighbourhoods, building on the work that it has already done on social housing and responding to a strong demand for that. We see the new initiative extending that work and looking at issues of housing tenure, particularly bringing social and private housing together, and considering issues of community background. Potentially, this initiative will also prove helpful in progressing the urban village concept.

There is already significant support for sports played on a cross-community basis. Historically, support has come from a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. The purpose of the new cross-community programme is to take this to a new level. It will build on what has already happened and link the new sporting programme to other aspects of the good relations strategy and strategic action programme.

This is a comprehensive programme of actions with a substantive strategy underpinning it. We will implement the actions set out in the strategy to achieve it.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. Colum is first.

Mr Eastwood: Thanks Chair, I thought that you would be asking a few questions.

The Chairperson: I know.

Mr Eastwood: Thanks very much for coming and presenting to us. I have probably made the point that it would have been nice if you had come to the Committee before making the announcement. However, we have been through that, so we will try to get down to the details.

Junior Minister Bell, I want to clarify something to which people from the north-west will be very keen to hear the answer. You said that moneys from the delayed A5 could be used for the shared education projects. Will you elaborate on that? Obviously, people would love to see the A5 happen as quickly as possible, but I suppose that they would want any money that cannot be spent on that to go to infrastructural development in the north-west. I do not think that I need to make the argument that that has been lacking in the past number of decades. Will you clarify that because I think that people will want to know?

Mr Bell: I think that the clarification is in the words that we used. I said that it was an option. It is an option, and it is for the Executive to decide how they allocate their funds.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you. We will keep an eye on that one. I think that everybody in our part of the world will be interested to see where that goes. I know that other members want to get in, so I will just ask you another couple of questions.

Given that the all-party group will deal with difficult issues of the past and try to find a positive way forward, two organisations that we see as important in that are the Irish and British Governments. They not only have a stake in our future but in our past, so we would like them to be involved. The history of this place shows that, if everybody is around the table, we can get things done. Are there any plans to invite the Irish and British Governments to send representatives to the all-party group?

Ms J McCann: The short answer is no, Colum. The groups, in their design phase, will look for people with particular expertise. I do not know whether particular individuals in the Governments will be invited, but, as far as I am aware, there are no immediate plans to do that.

Mr Bell: There is no formal role, as such, for the Governments in this, but it is for the all-party group to decide who it takes evidence from or who it listens to.

Mr Eastwood: A meeting took place yesterday between the First Minister and deputy First Minister and some of our people. It was stressed at that meeting, and I stress again in public, that we would like the two Governments to be involved in a formal way, if possible.

Finally, how do you see the potential urban village projects being delivered? In this Committee and in Derry, we have some experience of urban regeneration companies. They are maybe not always the best option to deliver regeneration projects. Have any lessons been learned from projects in other places such as Derry?

Ms J McCann: I will not talk specifically about Derry, but I can talk about the Colin one that I mentioned earlier. That is a good example of where the community came together to decide what it wanted. It went out to public consultation, and there were a number of issues that the people who had been involved in the planning stage at the beginning had not been aware of. One was about a new post-primary school in the area. So, it was a good model of where the community made the decisions on what they wanted in an urban village. It is also a good example of how the local community and

the statutory organisations came together with different Departments and worked for years to develop the strategic plan that they have now. Everyone has bought into it, and that is the type of example that we will be looking at.

Mr Eastwood: I was asking more about the actual delivery. We can get people together to come up with a plan, but who delivers?

Mr Bell: We will be looking towards a development corporation to do that. It will be a development corporation with powers to draw people from, obviously, the local community, which is critical to all this, and experts in the field. The urban village is about revitalising urban areas, and, of course, we will look towards what lessons have been learnt in the past. We also want to look towards the whole education, retail, recreation, employment and housing needs of communities all together in a joined-up way. So, we will draw on the expertise that exists in the area. The aim, essentially, is to ensure that we have a real sense of community and a revitalisation being forged in the community to try to overcome, perhaps, what has been seen in the past as the very piecemeal design and urban decay of what we have done.

Mrs Hale: Welcome. Junior Minister McCann talked very briefly about the NEETs programme, which we know is delivered through DEL. How do the united youth programmes differ? You also said that you looked at international examples. Which international examples have been scrutinised with a view to delivering the united youth programmes?

Ms J McCann: The united youth programme is different in that it is an additional programme. A number of programmes are being rolled out, particularly through DEL. It is hoped that it can bring people together in a space, if you like.

I will use an example of an international comparison. One of the key parts of this programme that has been identified is that it is not only about building relationships between the people who are coming together in the programme from different backgrounds but about looking at how we can build relationships with people in other countries; for instance, countries that are less well off. We were talking about that earlier. I do not want to get into the exact details of particular models, but there are good models of practice out there. I do not want to mention particular organisations, but those young people will have the chance to volunteer, not only in their local communities, where they can go and help the elderly, the homeless and people such as that, but in other countries. I am looking at Project Zambia, for instance, and Habitat for Humanity. In some of those types of projects, they can learn how people, and other young people in particular, in other countries live.

I have spoken to a number of young people who have been involved in those projects down through the years. It helps them to develop their personality because they come back here and want to do that good work. They see that, sometimes, it is not just about the end of their street or their school or friends; there is a big wide world out there as well.

I hope that explains it properly. That is where some of the programmes are a bit different. They are about the skills that those young people are going to build through building relationships outside the placements.

Mr Bell: A critical point is the volunteer opportunities. We are looking for young people from 16 to 24 to volunteer. We looked at some 30 international examples from all around the world, including German examples, Austrian examples, the Peace Corps and different things. We are not going to replicate all those examples, but we looked at what works and we have tried to draw down what works from international best experience and best practice, put it into our programme and then put together a very exciting programme for which young people volunteer. The volunteering is the critical part of that.

Mrs Hale: Will it be a fluid programme rather than a static one?

Mr Bell: It will be a one-year programme for each young person involved.

Mr G Robinson: Junior Minister Bell, when will the new strategy be published?

Mr Bell: The Executive meet tomorrow. Then, imminently thereafter. We are obliged to bring it to the Executive. I cannot prejudge that, but the intention — is that fair enough?

The Chairperson: Yes; perfect. Are you looking for an adjective, junior Minister?

Mr G Robinson: Short and sweet.

Mr Bell: I am looking for someone to tweet that the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee said that my words were "perfect". It will go to the Executive tomorrow, and, very shortly thereafter, we will publish.

The Chairperson: I hope that you are relaxing.

Mr Bell: Thank you.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you, junior Ministers, for your statements. Obviously, there has been a fair amount of political debate and rhetoric around this serious issue, so I welcome the opportunity to try to get into some of the details, notwithstanding the fact that publication is still to come.

You set out education as being one of the most significant issues that the strategy should seek to address. The First Minister said that it was fundamentally wrong for us to segregate our young people on the basis of religion at such an early age. We know the levels of support that opinion polls show for integrated education, for example. Today, at Parliament Buildings, I met the parents of 342 three-year-olds who wanted their children to be educated in an integrated setting in preschool, but the places were not available. There are 145 four-year-olds who have not been able to get a P1 place at an integrated school. Will you help me, therefore, to understand why, so far, in the significant actions that have been laid out, there are no actions on integrated education?

Mr Bell: Integrated education should be a part of what we are doing. We are taking a significant step towards integrated education. When we look at integrated education and shared education, we are looking at different types of shared educational campuses that will range from large multi-school and multi-age campuses to more modest shared campuses that bring a fewer number of schools together. The flagship for the initiative will be in Omagh, where six schools from a range of backgrounds and sectors have agreed to come together on a very spectacular site that overlooks the Strule.

In July 2012, the Education Minister fulfilled a Programme for Government commitment on shared education. A ministerial advisory group was established to advance shared education. The group comprised Professor Paul Connolly, Dawn Purvis and PJ O'Grady. It presented its report to the Education Minister on 22 April. The ministerial advisory group then engaged in a widespread consultation exercise with stakeholders across the region, as well as directly seeking the views of parents, children and young people. The group made 20 recommendations on shared education and its potential to provide a framework for creating a world-class education system here. We will look to what we can do to significantly enhance integrated and shared education.

Mr Lyttle: Do you not think that a five- or 10-year strategy should mention specific actions about integrated education?

Mr Bell: We have got to work with people. It is easy to say that a number of people want this programme. It is less easy to say which schools will be affected or have funding changed to allow a programme to go ahead. For example, you are campaigning to save Dundonald High School; we all are. However, there is a limited pot of money, so it is a question of doing what we can. The 10 shared education campuses are significant in bringing our young people together to live, be educated and socialise together.

That is not the only solution; it will build on what Jennifer said earlier about the shared sporting facilities and community relations through sport, and the residential opportunities that will be offered to young people. There is also the bigger picture of the opportunity for a significant one-year placement with a stipend for many of those who come out of school at 16 and are not in education. That placement will seek to build good citizens, foster good relations and bring together young people who, in many cases, would not be together and have not been together for significant periods of their lives.

Taken as a whole, it is a significant and ambitious programme. I am quite excited about the 10-year strategy.

Mr Lyttle: How will you decide on the location of the shared education campuses? Given that the Lisanelly budget is approximately £150 million, how do you propose to fund the other campuses?

Ms J McCann: Lisanelly would probably be the first major one to be looked at. It is important to underline how education has evolved and developed here historically. We cannot just ignore that. I know where you are coming from about people being segregated through education, but I think —

Mr Lyttle: I am just asking how you will decide where to locate the campuses.

Ms J McCann: Sorry. I was just adding to the points that Jonathan made.

Again, we will be looking to the design groups for that. Specific groups have been set up with officials and advisers around the specific proposals that were announced. They will be coming together and deciding where the programme will be rolled out, and the cost. I think that Lisanelly, because it has agreement and has been out there for quite a number of years, will more than likely be one of the first major sites.

We also need to have agreement with schools. We cannot just decide that we will put a campus here or there. There has to be a consultation process with schools in those areas.

Mr Lyttle: You said that, to avoid delay, public consultation was not prudent. Is it correct that the timescale for commencement of the 10 shared education campuses is 2015?

Mr Bell: I am not sure, Deputy Chair, that we said that we did not want to go to consultation to prevent delay. I think what we said was that we have extensively consulted. You and I worked together on the CSI working group, and there was a huge amount of public consultation. The question really was whether, having received all that public feedback, we should do it again.

We want all the programmes commenced within five years. We are looking to take forward what we do where potential options have been identified. We have to work with schools. It comes down to the old story of someone asking for directions and somebody saying, "Well, if I wanted to go there, I wouldn't start from here", but we have to start from where we are at the minute.

We are seeking the consensus of schools and a willingness to engage and participate. We are very focused on seeing where we can save money on the cost of division. We want the schools to work with us in a very logical and practical way, but we want all the programmes to be commenced within a five-year time frame. It will be for the design groups to give us the precise detail of where they will be and how they will be achieved.

Mr Lyttle: I have a couple more questions. You identified housing as a significant issue. Analysis would suggest that about 90% of social housing in and around Belfast has 80% single identity. Are the 10 shared neighbourhood schemes going to be adequate to address that level of segregation?

Mr Bell: They are certainly ambitious, and they are an action that we have put forward that has not been in existence heretofore. We are asking DSD to take this aspect forward, building on the work that it has done on social housing and responding to the strong demand for shared neighbourhood housing developments. We see the initiative as extending and looking at issues of housing tenure, bringing social and private housing together, as well as considering issues of community background. The initiative could potentially prove very helpful in establishing the urban village concept. It is a significant and ambitious programme, but, in many cases, the public are way ahead in respect of looking to live in shared neighbourhood housing developments.

Mr Lyttle: This is my last question. You proposed a different format for the next all-party working group that is going to examine flags, parades and dealing with the past. Will that be able to look at any other issues? Can you tell us any more about how the independent chair and community stakeholders will be appointed to the group?

Ms J McCann: It was very obvious that there was no agreement in the last group that worked on flags, parades and emblems. For that reason, those other issues were covered in the announcement, including that a group would be set up by the party leaders, who would invite two party members on to it. The difference this time is that there will be an independent chair. I do not have any detail on the appointment of that chair, but if we can get that detail for you, we will. I also think that it is very important that other stakeholders will be brought on board; I know that people felt strongly about that.

I want to go back very quickly to one of the points that was made about shared housing. We also have to remember, particularly with social housing, that we have to allocate housing on the basis of need. You need to have agreement with people to come together and live in a shared housing facility. There are good examples of that happening. I know of particular areas where it has happened in the greater west Belfast and Lisburn area, for instance. I will bring the information on the timescale of the establishment of the group back to you if we can get it.

Mr Bell: You mentioned parades, protests, flags, symbols and other matters. We have invited the party leaders to nominate two people from their party to join that group and told them about the issues and the related matters. So, if there are related matters, it will be open to the group to discuss those, but I presume that, in the first instance, individuals will bring that forward and then the group will decide whether they agree to take any other issues forward. So, it will be for the group to decide. There are ongoing discussions on who the independent chair will be, and there have been consultations with party leaders and parties about who the best available person will be to take that forward.

Mr Moutray: Thank you for your attendance. It is definitely ambitious to have all the barriers removed within 10 years, and the interface barrier project provides a great opportunity for communities that are impacted by those barriers. Can you confirm that, as some communities are further down the line than others, no community will have its barriers removed or its wall lowered without the buy-in and support of all of the communities that will be impacted by that?

Mr Bell: Yes. Mr Moutray has raised an important question, and I say a clear yes. I restate and re-emphasise that no peace wall will be removed without the consent and the support of the communities that are living beside it. Local agreement will be the key issue when determining what can happen with any peace wall. The strategy and action point is about creating the conditions that will allow for the walls to come down. I do not think that any of us will accept that, in the 21st century, it is right that our own citizens are separated by walls. It runs counter to the whole thrust and tenor of the strategy and what we are trying to do, but we accept that it is a difficult process. We will build on the good work of the peace walls programmes and IFI and Department of Justice initiatives as well as the positive steps that many communities have taken, which you alluded to in your question, Mr Moutray, to engage with each other on the issues. We will also provide financial support.

I say again that interface barriers will be reduced and removed only with local agreement and support. Local communities will be encouraged to come together to decide whether they want to be part of this programme. If we get their agreement to become part of the programme, the area immediately surrounding the barrier will be able to avail itself of a range of support and help over a 10-year period, provided that targets are met throughout that period. That support package will be designed for communities to come together and for them to agree on the action that needs to be taken.

I will give you some examples of possible benefits from that for communities. Community interface workers could be there to support the putting together of the plan, to ensure the implementation of key actions of the plan and to support the local community in creating the conditions to reduce and remove the barriers over an agreed and specified time frame. Further benefits are the establishment of, and funding support for, an ongoing community forum to implement and monitor the plan; a capital improvement package that will be designed to change and improve the barrier while ensuring that walkways and gates that can be used as part of a phased opening programme are included; and a community capital and project grant that would be specifically targeted at the local community in addition to those community interface workers.

The short answer is yes, and we are restating and re-emphasising that no peace walls will be removed without the consent and the support of the communities that live alongside them.

The Chairperson: Stephen, do you mind if I come in again here before you pick up on that?

Mr Moutray: OK.

The Chairperson: Jonathan, just over a week ago, I was in a meeting in north Belfast after this announcement, and the concern about imposing the removal of barriers was well aired. The concern expressed by the community was based on a fear that the consultation process would be used to achieve a predetermined result. That was in the context of them saying that the barriers make them feel safe. Beyond that, the concern about the consultation was on whether it will be consulting people who live 50 yards from the barrier, 100 yards from it or a quarter of a mile from it. People who live

under the shadow of the barrier said that it is their opinion that is the most important. Can you factor that in?

Mr Bell: Yes, I think that it can be factored in, and I think that it will be factored in. I cannot be precise about the feet or yards, but we are giving a very clear answer. You raised the points very well to reflect what you heard on the ground about the safety of people who live there and their agreement to any change being paramount. I hear the same things when we are in interface areas, and it is not only about safety but about respecting many of the people who live beside the barriers who are saying that they would like a different future and a different way forward. It is about marrying the two. We have set our ambitions down. We will certainly set a facilitation process around, as I said, community interfaces and workers with the option of gates and phasing and all the things that should be factored in to reassure communities that there will be no change without their support.

Ms J McCann: You mentioned north Belfast. I point to the Alexandra park example. It involved a gradual opening of the barriers with a lot of community consultation and support. You are right: it is about trying to change the mindset that had the barriers up in the first place. That is more difficult to do. We need to do it gradually as part of a process. The most important thing in the process is that the people who live close to them feel safe.

The Chairperson: It is the fear that the opinion of somebody a quarter of a mile away will have the same weight as that of someone living in the shadow. Sorry to interrupt to, Stephen.

Mr Moutray: I agree with the point that you made, Chair. It is about the people living up against them and how they are impacted. They must be given their say.

It is OK putting some financial resources into producing a phased plan, but will people be resourced in whatever way they feel necessary to work through that plan?

Mr Bell: Yes. The discussions that we are having are very clearly about giving interface workers the capacity to formulate a plan in the first place. Communities also need to be resourced for the timescale of that plan. I think that we all know that there is no unlimited resource, but we will certainly seek to resource as much as possible to facilitate local communities in bringing their own plan. I imagine that there will be different plans in different areas; it will not be one size fits all. We are also looking at the International Fund for Ireland programme that has been considering local community opinion, which is critical, and looking at the useful models and learning points that we can draw from that programme to factor into ours. There will be resources available for communities to do the work that we are asking them to do.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Ministers for coming along today. It is good to see you, but I think that your visit here is a bit premature. The announcement was made just a week ago. After the document is published and we hear what the public have to say about it, we could have had a better debate about the whole thing. I think that it will be broadly welcomed across all —

The Chairperson: Jimmy, we agreed this at last week's meeting.

Mr Spratt: I was not at last week's meeting, but I am making a point, Chair. I did not interrupt you, so please do not interrupt me.

I notice in the report that flags or parades were not the main topics that came up. There were something like 288 replies and 11 public meetings. Is that right?

Mr Bell: Yes, something in that region.

Mr Spratt: It is interesting that youth issues was the top one that came up. Will you elaborate a bit more on some of those meetings and the consultation process to refresh our memory?

What consideration has been given to the location of the urban villages? What information is there about the city?

Mr Bell: You outlined some of the facts from the consultation report. We have tried to focus on seven priority issues. Of course, the key issue is provision for our young people, particularly those who are not in education, employment or training. It is about building on the good work that is being done in

the Department for Employment and Learning, and providing new and additional opportunities for 10,000 of those, sadly, 46,000 young people who are not in education, employment or training. There is very much a strong focus on youth. That is what people are telling us. There are excellent examples right across Northern Ireland through councils and sporting bodies — my own children are involved in some of them — of initiatives that bring together young people from different backgrounds and religions. The good news is built on what was in the peace monitoring and Life and Times surveys, which showed that young people are probably well ahead of us in their desire to come together. We went out to consultation with young people, and the feedback asked us to look at matters differently. We took that on board and refocused the strategy to facilitate that good community relations element.

We now know from the Life and Times survey that more of our young people are mixing together and for longer. The quality of their interactions is stronger. Responding directly to your question, in many cases it was young people who told us to focus on good relations, which is why good relations and good citizenship are front and centre in the united youth programme.

Mr Spratt: And the urban villages?

Ms J McCann: No decision has been taken yet on the location of any of them.

Mr Bell: It will be for the design group to suggest the best locations.

Ms Fearon: Thank you for your presentation. The united youth programme has serious potential to have a good impact on a lot of young people. However, I have concerns. How can the Department assure us that the positions and placements created in the businesses that come on board will not replace existing staff? I do not want to see businesses or big organisations taking advantage of vulnerable young people.

Ms J McCann: We have been working with the Department for Employment and Learning, for instance, on that issue. It is very important to see this as additional but also that it is twofold: while you have a placement there, we are trying to develop a place where, first of all, young people can come together in a shared environment with the potential to open opportunities for them. It is also to build their skills base.

This is not specific to what you are asking about with regard to placements, but we all know about the people in our communities who volunteer to train with young people, take them to football, GAA, boxing, and all sports. Those groups have no core funding and cannot get money to pay for training on pitches or transport costs, yet they do excellent interface work; for example, midnight soccer. They do excellent work in building bridges with people from other communities.

It is about trying to develop that and roll that out. In my opinion, this is all linked. It is not just having the youth or placement programmes here and the sporting programme, shared housing or removing interface barriers there. They are all part of a process that will, hopefully, interlink. I am just repeating what I hear from people in the community who I interact with daily. They want more detail, like everybody, but they are excited that this programme will have a big focus on young people. Unless we do something imaginative, innovative and different, we will just be here in another 20 years. We need to break down the barriers between young people. It is about breaking down the mindset. For me, it is all about building positive relationships with people.

Mr Bell: There will be periods of work, but built into the programme is an attempt to get significant third-sector charitable or voluntary workplace opportunities for young people to engage in, and to balance that with leisure and sport, which are critical in building the relations that Jennifer outlined. We will be looking for reasonably significant third-sector involvement in providing those opportunities.

Ms Fearon: I am very keen to make sure that the placements that are created are purposeful. I think that it is important for us to be able to measure the outcomes and the impact that they have on those young people and their relationships with others. I know that it is early stages and that you referred to design teams a few times. Are there any indications, at this stage, of what types of accreditations will be involved? I know that that was part of the announcement.

Ms J McCann: The short answer is that I am not totally sure. It is a bit early to look at it in that detail.

You hit on a very important point about the placements being meaningful. We sometimes see people involved in estate management in local communities. A project was initiated by one of the community organisations in my local area whereby young people from east Belfast came across and got involved with some of the young people in the Colin area. Basically, they did estate management in the form of collecting litter and removing graffiti. That might sound like very menial work and not a valuable placement, but they contributed to that community, and people from Colin went over to east Belfast and did the same thing in a housing area there. While people may not see that as meaningful, it was meaningful to those young people. It brought them together and they met people from those different neighbourhoods, including older people when they went to cut their grass. We can make that type of work meaningful if we foster relationships, build those bridges and establish the future that we want for those young people.

Ms Fearon: I want to make a final comment; it is not a question. I know that the overarching theme of this is to bring two communities together, but I think that it has to be recognised that, in 2013, there are many different communities in society. I would like to see that feeding into the overall strategy to build a properly united community. There are many different ethnic minorities and religions.

Mr Bell: That is an important point. It is slightly different to the strategy, but the minority ethnic development fund which sat at, I think, £1.1 million was ring-fenced to ensure that all our communities got a strong chance to work together. We listened to the ethnic communities. They asked for different periods — for one year or two years — and we factored that all into the fund.

The volunteering opportunities will be open to everybody. While it is too early to give you the very important points such as which specific businesses will be involved, etc, I think that it is fair to say that we are looking at serious people, serious businesses and real opportunities for young people. Some of the work that Jennifer and I have done is to talk to young people who may not have been on exactly the same schemes but who have been on similar schemes and who got sustainable employment as a result. We are very serious about the point that you made and about making sure that young people will have a real opportunity to work towards an accredited diploma that they can use to build the rest of their lives.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentations. I welcome the announcement of the shared education campuses as a core component of the programme. In my constituency, the rural village of Moy has seen a lot of engagement between Moy Regional Primary School and St John's Primary School about coming together. I know quite a bit about the background of that, and it was not a flash-in-the-pan idea. I agree with Minister McCann: it has to be about parental consent. Have you looked at the model being considered by those schools? What capital funding would be available for such a project?

I also want to make a comment regarding the youth programme. I sit on the Committee for Employment and Learning. This morning, the Committee received a presentation from an organisation that identified that there are potentially 1,000 job vacancies, I think in the IT sector, but that our young people do not have the skills to fill them. We talk about models of best international practice, but sometimes we need to look a wee bit closer to home.

Mr Bell: That specific example has been discussed.

Ms J McCann: Taking your first point, obviously not all the educational campuses will be the same; they will probably not all be as grand or as big as Lisanelly. We are going to have to factor in rural schools, as you mentioned. I think that they will all be different designs and different sizes and shapes. Again, the design team will be working in consultation with local communities, local schools, etc, to see what way that develops.

On your second point about the vacancies, we have come across that issue before. I remember one particular firm that came to Belfast but could not get young people trained to the level of skills they needed, and the jobs went to people outside the North.

Today, we launched what is called a Fab Lab in north Belfast. It is one of two across the North, with the other one in Derry. They are situated in deprived communities and they are, if you like, innovative centres that allow people from all ages to access equipment and best practice. They also give people the opportunity to have contact with people in other countries right across the world. They are being innovative and developing skills that, maybe, they did not think that they had. What I am trying to say is that we need to be looking at that type of innovative way of thinking. There is a lot of potential. In

my view, all young people and children have potential; they have a skill and an expertise, and it is about unlocking that. Sometimes, they can go through school and, for whatever reason, that is never unlocked. We need to look at new ways of doing that, and the Fab Lab is one such one way. Those centres are in communities where children and young people might not have access to some of the equipment — computers or whatever — that others in more affluent communities might have. That is a very important point. It is about skilling people up and giving them that chance.

Mr Bell: Moy is under active consideration.

Ms McGahan: I am delighted to hear it.

Mr Bell: My father was one of 12 children from Blackwatertown, and I have a bit of sympathy for the Moy/Blackwatertown area. It is under active consideration.

Ms McGahan: That is brilliant.

Mr Bell: I want to give you example of what that Fab Lab is offering our young people. It offers a shared, safe space. Today, I saw a 3D printer, which can literally replicate a 3D graphic image in plastic or, in the more advanced model, in powdered metal. It provides an exact model from 3D graphic technology. Belfast is now linked to 200 Fab Labs across the world, and, critically, it is also linked to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). If you look at some of the latest reports from the United States of America, MIT comes ahead of Harvard and Yale and it is the leading institute in America for digital cutting-edge technology. Indeed, it is probably the world leader. There is now a direct link between the Nerve Centre in Londonderry, the Fab Lab in Belfast and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The Fab Lab is designed for young people, but it can be used by anyone from seven to 70; there is no age limit. It is designed to give young people opportunities to play on the international stage.

Mr Maskey: Ministers, thank you. I am sorry I was not here to hear the start of your presentations, but it has been very interesting. I also welcome the interface barriers removal initiative. I think that somebody said previously that, if you asked everybody who lives at an interface whether they want those barriers removed, they would tell say yes, but definitely not tomorrow. It is a reflection on all of us that people feel comfortable living under, beneath or behind some of those very ugly barriers in many places. I think that there is an onus on all of us to work with those communities to get those barriers down and to give them a better quality of life.

The underpinning principle that the removal of those barriers will be sought with the consent of the local communities is very important. They are the ones who are directly affected. There is a fine balance in that, because it has to be driven. As I said, unfortunately, people will feel more comfortable as it is, but we need to make sure that it is not allowed to continue. I appreciate that it might be a bit early, but it is my view that a process of getting people together needs to be somehow driven and very much not imposed. How does the Department intend to do that? The document states that people will be asked to come together, but who might drive that? Is there a lead official or a lead Minister? As I said, if we leave it to people, the comfort zone will obviously always dictate what happens, and understandably so, if you live there. Is there any sense of how we might drive a programme over the next number of years?

Ms J McCann: You are right, and, using the analogy of older people and crime, for instance, it is the fear of crime that is the factor. Obviously, you have to show leadership, and you have to also put the support mechanisms in. A great volume of sterling work is already carried by people in the community sector who are working on a daily basis in interface areas. Those people also live in those areas and work together with those communities to break down the barriers, and that is very important. The first thing that the Department will do is to connect with those communities and to speak directly to the people who are already involved in that good work about how it can be developed. Obviously, we will give them the resources to roll out the proposals around the barriers. It will be a gradual process.

You are right to say that, if you asked people tonight, they would definitely say no, but, again, it is about trying to create that safe environment for people. That is where the hard work needs to be done. It is about people's mindsets, because, when we talk to older people who live in communities, we find that they are very fearful of young people and of crime. The reality is that, although there is crime, it does not happen to the extent that people feel in their minds. However, they feel unsafe, so, in my view, it is up to the Department to make sure, while we are going through that process, we are

building the infrastructure that will help to take it forward. To my mind, a big component of that is working in those interface areas and working with some of the groups that are already doing sterling work.

Mr Bell: You hit the nail on the head when you said that it is about pushing forward towards an agreed goal, but that it is not about imposition. That is part of the delicate balance that will have to be struck in communities. We will look at a combination of monitoring of what is happening on the ground and also at the agreed targets that we are setting. That is what we will be scrutinising, but we will also use the incentive package. In some part, that incentive package will look towards the progress that has been made against agreed targets. There are many different models, and it is for communities and people on the ground to tell us how they will take it forward. Interface workers will have to be people who have an insight into what the communities are thinking, and the plan will have to have community engagement and buy-in.

There are all sorts of examples of what could be done. Gates can be used during daylight periods, mornings, or weekend mornings, just to see how things go, and it could be built up by an evolution towards something, rather than an immediate revolution. It will all be done in the context of sharing communities. All the community organisations, the police and everyone else involved need to have a considerable degree of synergy around all of that to provide the necessary support. It will be built up to give the communities the support that they need to allow them to do the work, which, in many cases, they are telling us they want to do.

Mr Cree: I want to return to housing integration and urban villages. Your paper states that there will be proposals for housing integration on new developments. How much work has already been done on that? What vision has been developed? Will people be moved from different parts of the city or, indeed, from further afield? Will there be cash inducements? Do we have a clean sheet at this stage or is there actually a plan with a lot of work already done? Does it relate directly to the urban villages? If you already have one of the new incentivised housing areas, there must be a temptation to say that it is one of the villages. Will you flesh that out a bit?

Mr Bell: I think that there were about seven, if I counted correctly. That lies with the Department for Social Development. The DSD Minister will bring forward proposals on that. There are some examples of good practice. I am not being prescriptive at all, but I look to the Newtownards Road and what is happening with Colin in relation to urban villages. The straight answer, as best I can give you, is that there is no link between the shared housing and the urban regeneration villages. The urban village is a mixture of education, retail, recreation, employment, housing needs, and communities telling us how they want to join all those up together in a particular way. It will be for the working groups to bring forward the detail. There is no single example of what will work best. We have set a target of what we want, based on what our communities are telling us they want to see. They want to share and live together in safety and security. We will facilitate that. The minutiae, such as whether you can transfer into it from a Housing Executive property, will be for the working groups. They will tell us the precise detail of how we take it forward.

Mr Cree: If you have working groups already, that suggests you have already looked at specific areas.

Mr Bell: We have a design group that is looking at where the areas are to be. It will also give us the methodology of how we bring people to those areas. We do not yet have the detail on that for you.

Ms J McCann: You cannot force people to go where they do not want to go. It is about creating a place — the Minister for Social Development will take this forward — where people will want to go to live. It will be up to the design team to develop the centres. You can show leadership, and you can try to encourage and support people, and everything else. You have to create the space and place where people will want to go to live together as well — that is going to be more difficult.

Mr Cree: Do you have a time frame and a budget line?

Ms J McCann: No. Again, that will be up to the design teams. We do not have that at this stage.

Mr Bell: I think that you said that the meetings are happening. The first meetings of the design groups will happen this week.

Mr Lyttle: This is a very quick supplementary question. Do you assess and accept that dealing with the really serious issues around flags, parades and dealing with the past are inextricably linked to being able to remove interface barriers and enhance regeneration?

Mr Bell: Do I assess and — what was the second one?

Mr Lyttle: Do you agree?

Mr Bell: These are very important issues. I am not going to say anything that might prejudice the all-party working group. I think that every party around the table has spent a lot of time on these issues in different forums. It is for the all-party working group to bring forward solutions for those areas. It can be done and, if it is, it will significantly enhance the target of building a shared community together.

The Chairperson: I have just two questions, Jonathan. You did not consult on the initiatives. You, as a Department, made a very vigorous and robust defence of why that was, and talked about departmental responsibility. I am not trying to reopen that; I am just acknowledging that fact. The questions flowing from that are these: how did you know that 10 was the right number for shared educational campuses when you did not consult the Department of Education, and how did you know that four was the right number for urban village regeneration without consulting DSD?

Mr Bell: Again, that idea of not having consulted is fundamentally wrong. We had many responses from the community. We also looked clearly in a co-ordinating role at the Departments in terms of the Executive and what we, as Ministers, have as a co-ordination role across all Departments. What came out of all that is that we consulted extensively. I personally spent up to 100 hours with political parties, individually and collectively, discussing what they wanted. Arising from all that consultation, the dozens of pieces of feedback from community groups and individuals, the dozens of hours of work with individual political parties, and our insight in terms of a co-ordination role across all Departments, we decided that we had to start somewhere. If things are working well, we can increase the numbers.

Ms J McCann: You could probably create dozens of urban villages and still probably not meet the need that is out there. You have to start somewhere. You have to get momentum, but you have to make a start somewhere. The issue of consultation was debated in the Assembly yesterday. There has been ongoing consultation with different Ministers around different issues. Some of the issues that we have discussed today will not be totally alien to Ministers who have responsibility for those issues in the proposals. Resources also dictate what we can and cannot do to meet the social and economic needs of all our people.

The Chairperson: You referred once or twice to the cohesion, sharing and integration document of 2010. You have informed us that, tomorrow, the new document goes to the Executive. Do you have confidence that the criticisms of the previous document will not be repeated? I refer not to my thoughts but the thoughts of Joanne Wallace, whose consultancy you commissioned to look at the 2010 document, and who decided that it:

"did not 'go far enough' in addressing separatism".

Her consultation analysis found it disjointed, confusing and not user-friendly; inconsistent in relation to short-, medium- and long-term goals; and failed to explain core concepts. It was uncertain as to its connectivity to existing and proposed government policy and strategy, and was out of touch and demonstrated a class bias. For a number of groups:

"The language [used in CSI] was removed from the common sense attitude of people on the ground".

The 2010 document was a step back from the 2005 strategy, and sought:

"to manage rather than address division".

There was no effort to deal with the past; it was politically negotiated between the most diverse politically opposed parties in Northern Ireland and, therefore, did not reflect what the majority of people wanted. The analysis found it to have no action plan, targets, budgets or monitoring arrangements; a weak vision; and no reflection of the role of key organisations in wider civic society in tackling division and creating a shared future.

The consultation analysis also found that the 2010 document lacked acknowledgement of older people; included no analysis of how sectarianism and racism manifested differently in rural communities; that there was a lack of willingness to address segregation in education; and that economic issues were barely mentioned.

As I said, those are not my criticisms but those that came from Joanne Wallace, whose consultancy you commissioned.

Mr Bell: Those are her views and she is perfectly entitled to them, but that is exactly —

Mr Lyttle: The point, Chair, is that they are not her views.

Mr Bell: Are you giving evidence or am I?

Mr Lyttle: It is an important fact that those are not her views, but a reflection of 288 responses.

The Chairperson: Whoa, Chris.

Mr Lyttle: That is an important point of information.

The Chairperson: Chris.

Mr Bell: If you ever get enough electoral support, you can sit here. The situation is that those are her views. She can reflect some of the views that are on the ground. I have heard many, many different views. I cannot pre-empt the document, because it has to go to the Executive, and I know that you are not asking me to do that. It has to go to the Executive, and then it will be published. Will it be criticised? Well, nearly anything that any of us do will be criticised. Is it the best way for taking things forward? I believe that it is, and I believe that there is an imperative now that falls upon the all-party group.

We have taken comments on board, not only from Joanne Wallace; we took on board dozens of other views. We have put out our seven strategic actions for how we intend to take this forward. I have been in many different communities from the New Lodge to rural communities, and I have listened to what they are saying about the seven strategic actions. Right across the board, I am hearing and heard again in Belfast this morning that these plans are ambitious, exciting and that the community wants to give us buy-in to them. I am hearing very practical, not academic criticism. I am hearing very practical encouragement from people who are saying "fair play" to us and telling us that we have looked at a significant problem, particularly on the proposal to give 10,000 young people a one-year opportunity, which is very fresh and new. They are saying to us that we have seen the need that exists and have done something about it. So, when our plans are ambitious, they will also give you an indication of where we intend to go with the document, having listened to everybody.

I hope that the strategy gets a fair wind. I am not one of these people who believes that because something is criticised, it is wrong. I try to look towards where there is constructive criticism, and, if we can get the community and the party political buy-in, we will look towards what we can do. The seven projects that we have outlined are ambitious to meet the needs of Northern Ireland society in 2013.

The Chairperson: I accept that. I mentioned Joanne Wallace and her opinions specifically because you brought her in and paid her to look at what happened in 2010. The question, if Jennifer wants to answer it, is this: are you confident that, when Joanne Wallace takes a look at the document that you are presenting to the Executive tomorrow, all these criticisms will have been addressed?

Ms J McCann: I cannot tell you whether all the criticisms will have been addressed, because I do not have them in front of me now. I know that some significant changes have been made. There have also been some significant actions, which we have been talking about here today. That was one of the criticisms. I cannot remember the ones you listed.

The Chairperson: There were 18.

Ms J McCann: Yes, so I cannot remember. The actions that we have announced will be a way to address those. I cannot speak for her on what way she will view the document.

Mr Bell: The tone of what you have said and the tone of the responses that we are already receiving on our strategic actions are entirely different. We are much more ambitious and hopeful to see what we can do on the ground.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you both very much indeed, and I thank Donna and Denis. Oh, George wants to come in.

Mr G Robinson: Chair, I do not know about the rest of the members, but I want to thank the two Ministers. They were so concise and so open and honest. I have been on this Committee for a couple of years or so, and that is one of the best presentations that I have heard. I congratulate both of them for being so open and so honest and so straight.

The Chairperson: I am sure that there is no dissenting voice around the table. Junior Ministers, thank you very much.

Mr Bell: Thank you, George, and thank you, Chair.