



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Together: Building a United Community
(Departmental Briefing)

25 September 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Together: Building a United Community (Departmental 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
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr George Robinson

Witnesses:

Miss Donna Blaney	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Fergus Devitt	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Dr Denis McMahon	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson: We are joined by Donna Blaney, Denis McMahon and Fergus Devitt. You are all very welcome. Denis, will you start?

Dr Denis McMahon (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Yes, Chair. If you are happy, I will say a few words of introduction.

The Chairperson: Yes, please. If you would take just a couple of minutes, that would be very welcome.

Dr McMahon: Thank you for asking us to come and talk to you about the strategy. Members will be aware that the united community strategy was published on 23 May, following the announcement of seven strategic headline actions on 9 May. It outlines a vision of a united community based on equality of opportunity, desirability of good relations and reconciliation. There are four key priorities: children and young people; shared community; safe community; and cultural expression. There are a range of actions across a range of fields, including education, housing, regeneration, sports, community interaction and interfaces. In addition to the seven major commitments, there are 35 additional actions and commitments. The Committee will be interested in the initial seven actions, so, if you are happy enough, I will say a few words about where we are on those.

The first is the United Youth programme, and the idea is to have 10,000 one-year placements for young people who fall into the NEET category. There are many good examples of programmes being delivered in that area, and a huge amount of work with the Department for Employment and Learning

(DEL) is ongoing. We are working closely with DEL and organisations that already do that sort of work. We are going through a design process whereby we are writing to and having other contact with stakeholders. We are working our way through to the end of the year, when we hope to have a conference that will finalise the details. One thing that came across to us very early on was that there needs to be really good involvement with others on the development of this; we cannot just cook it up by ourselves in a darkened room. Obviously, we are very keen for the Committee to be involved in that process and, if members are willing to come along, the conference.

The next action is the creation of 10 shared educational campuses. The Department of Education (DE) is continuing to work on this, and there are some very good examples, such as Lisanelly, and some good work being done on that. The intention is that DE will seek expressions of interest from schools and look at a development fund for the programme to take that work forward.

The third action is the creation of four urban villages, and Ministers are considering where best to situate these to get the maximum benefit from the proposal. However, the message that Ministers have given to us loud and clear is that they want something that is innovative and fits with much of the other innovative work that we have talked about previously when discussing Delivering Social Change. All of this must join and work together.

The fourth action is to hold 100 summer schools/camps. Officials from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and DE have gathered a lot of information on existing intervention programmes, and some additional summer intervention projects were run this summer to see what we could do to start to roll this out early on. The idea is that we will update Ministers in the coming weeks on what that has told us and how it might help us to design a bigger programme.

The shared neighbourhood programme is an action for the Department for Social Development (DSD), and the Minister for Social Development is to produce proposals.

On the cross-community sports programme, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is taking the lead and developing a paper detailing a range of proposals for its design. We are about to have another design meeting with DCAL to discuss its proposals.

Finally, on the removal of interface barriers by 2023 and the interface support fund, we had a number of meetings with the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), Belfast City Council, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) to identify good practice and explore how we can take that forward, and we are refining a proposals paper.

I realise that I am running out of time, Chair, but I will say a few words about the next steps. A new united community division has been established, which Fergus heads. That reflects the focus of Ministers on this and the fact that they want it to happen.

Engagement is critical, as is the case in everything that we do. A message that came across to us — I mentioned it earlier when talking about United Youth — is that we cannot take forward the strategy in isolation. We have looked at design and have taken views from a range of stakeholders. The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) has been assisting us with some of the technical work and looking at some of the technical challenges. The same message keeps coming through: we cannot design this on our own. Therefore, we are ensuring that we ramp up that engagement.

A panel comprising Ministers and senior representatives from a range of statutory agencies and community partners will oversee the actions and commitments. An important point to make is that we are learning from our cross-departmental experience elsewhere. The panel will be able to hold individual Departments to account.

There is a proposal to establish an equality and good relations commission. That will involve a lot of work, which Fergus can talk about in a bit more detail if you wish. The new commission will challenge and scrutinise government, and it will also have a challenge and support role in district councils to ensure that work is going on under the good relations action plans. A transition group involving OFMDFM, the Community Relations Council (CRC) and the Equality Commission has been established. Again, we are happy to talk about that in more detail. The provision of policy advice from the equality and good relations commission will be separated from the delivery of funding, and there will be a review of the effectiveness of that funding.

The message that I want to give to the Committee is that this is the beginning of a process of engagement. Some technical work is already under way, but we need to do much more, so we are very keen to have the Committee's input as we move ahead with all the individual programmes and projects.

The Chairperson: I appreciate that, Denis, and I am sure that the Committee will want to engage with you on it.

I appreciate your briefing the Committee. Is the budget for Together: Building a United Community £0.5 billion?

Dr McMahon: It is not possible to say exactly what all of these programmes will cost. There are two parts to that question: what this will cost; and what resources are available. It is clear that we need to do more work. We need to do some co-design work to work up the programmes in detail, and that will involve answering some big questions.

On funding, we will look at existing resources to see how we can make sure that the programmes are taken forward. I can say with certainty that Ministers are absolutely clear that this will be delivered and that the resources will be found, so the funding will be a mix of existing resources and central funds. As I said last week about Delivering Social Change, some of what we are looking at under this strategy will resonate with other ongoing work. Other projects that we are taking forward using different funding streams will impact on this, and vice versa.

The simple answer is that we do not have a clear costing. At this stage, we certainly do not have one that adds up to £0.5 billion. It is absolutely right to say that it is a major programme that will have major impacts, so it is quite easy to see how you could work up to a figure of that scale. Lisanelly alone will, potentially, amount to £100 million by the time that it is all bottomed out.

The Chairperson: So it would cost £1 billion just to build 10 campuses?

Dr McMahon: Lisanelly is a major project.

The Chairperson: I would just like to seek clarity. Last week, you told us about the six signature projects, which have been around for 11 months. The budget for those is £26 million, and no moneys are yet on the ground. Today, we are looking at an even bigger initiative that has been around for 124 days and still does not have a defined budget.

Dr McMahon: Money has been, and is being, spent on the signature projects. Teachers have been appointed, and so on. I do not want to go over that, but, in fairness, resources have been spent.

The Chairperson: Yes, but the money is not on the ground, so it is not yet doing the work.

Dr McMahon: The 20 nurture units have been established and the teachers appointed, so it depends on the definition of "on the ground", but they are moving ahead. However, I take your point, Chair. There was an announcement in May, and I accept that we need to do more work to take this forward and that we need to co-design it with stakeholders. That is the key point that has come out to us.

We have looked at all of the issues from a technical point of view. We have had many discussions with Departments and have gone as far as we can possibly go with them in designing the various programmes. However, there is a serious danger of us getting it wrong if we do not engage with the people who will use these programmes. Take United Youth: if we get that wrong, there could be a scenario in which young people leave jobs or good educational opportunities because they think that that is such a positive opportunity. In a sense, it is about how we make sure that we get these things right. It goes a little against the grain for the Department. The Ministers, in particular, are very keen to push this and have made that clear. However, at the same time, there is a realisation that such projects require a level of joining up that goes beyond even what we are talking about with Delivering Social Change.

The Chairperson: It would be fair to say that it is a very challenging and ambitious way of doing government. However, potentially, it is a very profitable way. Fergus, you are heading up the new division.

Mr Fergus Devitt (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): That is right, Chair.

The Chairperson: Do you have a budget?

Mr Devitt: The budget that is coming to the division is already partly in place from the team that Donna heads up: the community relations unit. It has significant funding for the likes of the district council programme, the north Belfast programme, summer interventions and other projects. We are looking at whether we will need additional budget for this year. However, most of the programme spend of what is, if you like, our ongoing business rather than new business, is there.

The Chairperson: So you know your budget.

Mr Devitt: I know my budget within the current division —

The Chairperson: You know your budget, but we do not know the budget for the programme.

Mr Devitt: — but that is for ongoing work. It is not for the new work that has come out of the strategy.

The Chairperson: How do you see governance changing to deliver this?

Mr Devitt: A number of structures are set out in the strategy. A ministerial panel will ensure that the overall strategy is implemented in full, and there is scope in the document for people to be added to that panel, perhaps from the business or voluntary and community sector. Below that is a good relations project board with responsibility for the operational delivery of all the projects that will sit within the strategy. There will also be a review of funding, and a funders' group will be established to ensure that whatever money goes into good relations now and through the headline actions is spent in the best possible way. That group will also make recommendations on how that might be spent in the future, particularly, for example, the district council funds.

The Chairperson: If I am hearing you correctly, it will, perhaps, follow the model of the social investment fund (SIF). So will you bring in expertise from the business community, for example, to advise?

Mr Devitt: Potentially. We have not yet worked through exactly what the mechanisms might be. However, there is an acknowledgement within the scope of the strategy that Ministers want other people with expertise to help them to ensure that the strategy is delivered as well as it can be.

The Chairperson: The last we heard, the business seats on the zonal advisory panels for SIF had not even been appointed.

Mr Devitt: This is just one body. I think that there are a number of SIF advisory panels; this is a single ministerial panel with a few places for individuals who have recognised skills and experience that will help them to ensure that the strategy is implemented. They will come not just from the business community but from the voluntary and community sector.

The Chairperson: Will people apply for these posts or will there be a laying-on of hands by the Department?

Mr Devitt: That process has yet to be resolved.

Dr McMahan: I think that it is probably worth saying that there is already a panel — not a ministerial panel. There are governance structures in place, and we have monthly meetings of the programme board. The idea is that this panel will expand to become a ministerial panel and that we will bring in expertise as needed after that. However, as Fergus said, the process for it —

The Chairperson: How will you identify the expertise?

Dr McMahan: Again, we need to work through the process. There will have to be some method of determining and then bringing in the skills and experience that we need for specific programmes.

The Chairperson: Will there be a publicly advertised public appointment process.

Dr McMahon: I do not think that we are at that stage yet. I think that we just need to —

Mr Devitt: Chair, I think that the first stage will be for the ministerial panel to meet and discuss the appointments process and how that might be taken forward. As we have not had the first meeting of that ministerial panel, that is an unresolved issue, so we cannot give you a definitive answer.

The Chairperson: Thank you.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you for your presentation, guys. It is good to hear that you are engaging with Ministers and those who will have to deliver the projects on the ground. What engagement did you have before the announcement was made?

Mr Devitt: On the whole —

Mr Eastwood: On all these ideas that were announced a number of months ago.

Mr Devitt: A ministerial panel representing the five main political parties in the Assembly was established to develop the strategy. It took quite some time to ensure that the strategy was developed. I am not sure what position individual political parties took when seeking views from their constituencies on what may or may not be contained in the document.

Mr Eastwood: Were all these ideas cleared with the relevant Ministers beforehand?

Mr Devitt: There was certainly political engagement on what may have been contained in the strategy.

Dr McMahon: This comes back to some of our discussion last week on Delivering Social Change. Last time, there was a very clear central direction, the benefit of which was that it created momentum and got the resources out there. The Ministers liked that creation of momentum. In this case, however, a more consultative approach was needed, so the announcement was made on the basis that there would be design work with Departments. We have engaged closely with Departments —

Mr Eastwood: Was it the intention that the design work would be after the announcement?

Dr McMahon: Yes. However, in fairness, our Ministers were very clear that neither they nor other Ministers would take final decisions until the design work had been done.

We are trying to find the right balance. You can be very consultative and engage for a long time but not get anywhere. So the Ministers have outlined the outcomes that they want but said that they want their officials, in conjunction with other Departments, to work those designs up to a point at which they can be handed over and Departments will feel comfortable that they can take them on. I raised one issue that relates to United Youth. Those sorts of issues apply in other areas, too.

Mr Eastwood: It seems strange to make the announcement without having that work in place. Let us take United Youth, for example: DEL might have been on a particular trajectory in dealing with NEETs when, all of a sudden, it has to create 10,000 places. DEL is told that there is no budget line for it — that you do not know what the budget line is — but that you will work that out later and work with that Department. That seems like a strange method of government.

I would have thought that people with expertise in the Department would provide their plans to you. You would then tell us where the budget line was coming from and move forward like that. It seems as though this was about making an announcement and working out the details later. I am not so sure that that is the right way to do things.

Dr McMahon: Part of this is a political process, and part of it is an administrative process. I cannot really comment on the political discussions that happened or how those worked. However, we can certainly say that, when this was announced, there was a very clear understanding that it was not being allocated to specific Departments to say, "You are doing this. Whether you like it or not, this is how it will work." Rather, it was very much a case of Ministers saying, "We have looked at this and

identified the issues. We think that additional momentum is needed across a range of areas, so here is the sort of thing that we want to happen." As officials, we were instructed to engage with other Departments as part of that process.

I will be honest with you: these are the same issues as I talked about last week, and there are always challenges. Some Departments have said, "Absolutely fantastic. We are doing that anyway, and this gives us more power to our elbow to take it forward." Other Departments asked us to explain to them exactly what we mean and work through it, and we have done that.

Generally, it is a messier approach, in the sense that it would be nice to be able to say, "We have worked out every detail in the world. We are putting it out there. You will deliver, and here is the money."

Mr Eastwood: I do not even mean the detail necessarily. However, you would imagine that the ideas should be generated in the Departments tasked with the actions. I think that it is a bit back to front.

Chair, if you do not mind, I want to ask specifically about United Youth. Will you give us a wee update on that? Have any businesses, Departments or organisations signed up to for the 10,000 places? When will it begin?

Dr McMahon: We did quite a bit of detailed work on that over the summer. We worked with colleagues in the Strategic Investment Board. They identified some international models, and we looked at that sort of work. We have had a number of discussions with other Departments, including DEL and DSD. We have also had conversations with DCAL as recently as this morning about the same issue. In fairness, Departments have been very cooperative and helpful in saying, "Right, OK, here's what we are doing already; here's how this could fit in".

The next step is that we have written to umbrella organisations in the youth sector and are in the process of writing to a wide range of organisations on the ground this week. If it has not happened already, it will happen in the next day or so. We are saying to those organisations, "Can you help us to organise events, particularly for young people?". I had a chat with the Children's Commissioner, for example, and she said that the commission has mechanisms in place for a youth panel and that we can use as a way of engaging early. The message coming back from everybody is, "Forget it — if you don't talk to young people about what they want from this, you can design all the clever programmes you like, but it will not happen". So the idea is that we will have a number of further engagements and events, building up to the end of the year. After that, we aim to have the conference, probably in January, at which we will provide detailed proposals and work through those with all of the stakeholders, including the Committee.

Mr Eastwood: The conference will be in January, so when do you envisage the placements starting?

Mr Devitt: We hope that we will be able to run a number of programmes starting next summer. They may be badged as pilots, just to test some of the ideas that have been coming out. That will have to be ramped up to get to the figure set out in the strategy. It is also worth saying that Donna's team, in particular, has done a lot of work on engagement already. Donna may want to say a bit about who she has spoken to in the voluntary and community sector.

Miss Donna Blaney (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I have been speaking to a number of groups and taking on board their engagement and feedback on the strategy, particularly on some of the strategic headline actions. I am trying to make it as effective as possible and using umbrella groups who can bring together, and are very willing to bring together, smaller organisations that may not have a voice at the table. I have already met the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA); Rural Community Network's shared future group; the Youthnet intergeneration group; and Corrymeela Community has facilitated a meeting bringing together people for whom it works. That is so that they can give us their opinion of the strategy and outline how they can contribute to delivery of the seven headline actions and 35 commitments in the strategy to keep the whole thing moving.

The level of willingness and enthusiasm to get involved is comforting and provides reassurance that we will, hopefully, come up with really good products. We will follow up those face-to-face engagements by providing an opportunity for them to write to us with any other thoughts that they have after the meetings.

The Chairperson: Is it just me? I get the sense of reinventing the wheel as far as consulting is concerned. It is as though the Department has gone to see NICVA and the Children's Commissioner for the first time. Surely, that is stock in trade for you guys.

Dr McMahon: I do not deny that consultation happens through these groups. We are saying that, in the past, there were examples of Departments being criticised for coming up with a set of proposals and then going out to consultation. Even in our initial pre-consultation, the message that came out loud and clear was that this strategy would not work on that basis. It would be great, in a way, to be able to come here today and say, "Look, we have it all worked out. We have gone out to consultation, and people will come back to us". Personally, I would love that, but that is not where we are. We are getting the message that, if we do not do this properly, we will find real problems trying to implement parts of it.

The field may not be crowded as such, but there are a lot of different players — particularly in the United Youth programme — and many are doing different aspects of this strategy already. Some of what DEL is doing under its NEETs strategy will fit into this approach, and this needs to fit into DEL's work as well. That is why people are telling us that this needs to be really well thought through and that we need a lot of early engagement.

The Chairperson: You say that DEL is doing a lot of this already?

Dr McMahon: It is in the same sort of space. Much of what DEL is trying to do is focused on engaging young people who are not in education, training or employment, which is also part of the purpose of this programme.

The Chairperson: Is that repackaging then? Is that all that you are doing?

Dr McMahon: There is a big difference, in that this also has a major good relations dimension, but it is in the same territory of giving young people the best possible opportunities to grow, learn and engage.

The Chairperson: I will come back to that, but Bronwyn is waiting patiently.

Ms McGahan: Denis, I have a general question on how the aspirations and ideas in the document will be measured against the existing instruments of section 75, which is also about promoting equality of opportunity. The document refers to sectarianism and racism. In my constituency, a Polish family was attacked, but it was a sectarian attack, not a racist attack. So you need to be cognisant of situations in local areas.

You mentioned the rural dimension to engagements with young people. Are you engaging with young people in rural areas or with the organisation that represents them?

Dr McMahon: We will be.

Miss Blaney: Initially, we will use the Rural Community Network to get outside the urban centres. Then, we will use Youthnet, which is another umbrella organisation for youth groups. It is about trying to get a broad approach. As Fergus said, we want to use groups to ensure that young people can feed into what will ultimately be delivered through them and for them.

Mr Devitt: I can answer the first part of your question on the equality duty. One of the major tasks in the strategy is to establish the new Equality and Good Relations Commission. Part of its function will be to draw up and expand the new equality impact assessment, so it will look not only at equality but at good relations. The new commission will also have a responsibility to ensure correct implementation and to hold government in general, but also specific Departments, to account for how they implement everything contained in the strategy. That oversight role will be part of the new commission's responsibilities.

The Chairperson: When do you see the legislation for that coming through, Fergus?

Mr Devitt: Primary legislation will be required, so our current best estimate is that taking it through the various stages, including Committee Stage, will take between 18 and 24 months.

The Chairperson: Part of this will involve an equality impact assessment (EQIA) to screen all policies to ensure that they conform to Together: Building a United Community (TBUC). Will that apply to every Department?

Mr Devitt: Potentially, yes. Now, as and when policies are developed, they are subject to an equality impact assessment. In future, they will be subject to an equality and good relations impact assessment.

The Chairperson: So every strategy that every Minister brings to an Executive meeting will be liable to that?

Mr Devitt: First, every new policy will have to be screened, as it is currently, and any differential impacts will have to go through an equality and good relations impact assessment.

The Chairperson: That covers new policies. What about existing policies?

Mr Devitt: It does not include existing policies. This is for future policies.

Mr Lyttle: What about Together: Building a United Community? Will the community relations strategy not be assessed for its good relations impact?

Mr Devitt: An equality screening of the strategy was carried out, and the intention is that, as any new policies that emerge from that are developed, such as the United Youth programme, they will be subject to whatever process is in the legislation at that time. If the Equality and Good Relations Commission is operational, the policies will certainly be screened under both grounds initially.

Mr Lyttle: Do you hope that the United Youth programme will be operational earlier than 18 months from now?

Mr Devitt: Yes, the intention is that some pilots will be run next summer.

Mr Lyttle: So it will not be screened by the new Equality and Good Relations Commission?

Mr Devitt: Not by that commission, but it will go through whatever normal processes exist at that time.

Dr McMahon: Yes, the normal equality screening.

Mr Lyttle: Is there a timescale for the overall strategy?

Mr Devitt: There are a number of timescales in the strategy. The longest timeline that I can recall is for the removal of all peace walls and interface barriers by 2023, but there are a number of other targets, such as for the establishment of summer camps by 2015, and various other milestones along that path.

Mr Lyttle: What is the timescale for the 10 shared education campuses?

Mr Devitt: There is no specific timescale for those in the document. Clearly, there will be a long lead-in time to ensure that the schools have the capacity to come together and that the capital funding is available.

Mr Lyttle: So there is no timescale for the delivery of the shared education campuses?

Mr Devitt: Not as set out in the strategy.

Mr Lyttle: Have any education campuses been identified yet?

Mr Devitt: The Department of Education is trying to identify the criteria under which schools may want to put themselves forward and potential areas in which that might happen. As Denis said, Lisanelly is probably the first of those.

Mr Lyttle: It had already been identified.

Dr McMahon: In fairness, that is correct, but there has been other interest as well in, for example, *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Lyttle: The strategy identifies the delivery of 10 shared neighbourhoods. Is there a timescale for that?

Mr Devitt: No, not as set out in the strategy.

Dr McMahon: The Minister for Social Development was asked, when the strategy was announced, to provide recommendations. We are still waiting for them.

Mr Lyttle: Have any shared neighbourhoods been identified?

Dr McMahon: We do not yet have the recommendations.

Mr Lyttle: Without timescales, how do you intend to measure performance against targets?

Dr McMahon: It is a fair point, but Ministers have made it clear that they want us to work up the designs with Departments and other stakeholders. When those designs are worked up, they will be required to have monitoring key performance indicators and clear milestones. There will be very specific milestones, but, in addition to that, the strategy points to the need for a revision of the good relations indicators, so that will be part of this. As that is happening, there will be monitoring at two levels: specific milestones and the good relations indicators on the ground.

Mr Lyttle: Will there be departmental delivery plans for each of the actions?

Dr McMahon: Yes, there will be clear delivery plans with clear lead Departments allocated, but it may be that, in a number of cases, an action requires a number of Departments. That is one of the reasons why Ministers were keen that we did the design work upfront.

Mr Lyttle: Is there a timescale for completion of the delivery plans?

Mr Devitt: We are working on the co-design of United Youth. We want to complete that as quickly as we can, but to a correct quality, before it is given to Departments to implement. We see that process taking another few months before we pass projects over to Departments to take forward.

Mr Lyttle: The United Youth programme has three core aspects: work experience or volunteer placement, citizenship training and a cross-community element.

Dr McMahon: Leisure, too.

Mr Lyttle: As you said, the programme will require a cross-departmental contribution.

Dr McMahon: Absolutely.

Mr Lyttle: In addition to contributions from DEL, have you received United Youth proposals from other Departments?

Mr Devitt: We have had discussions with DSD, particularly on volunteering because it is the lead Department on that. We have also discussed the leisure aspects with DCAL. The seven headline actions should not, necessarily, be seen as being mutually exclusive. The DCAL programme on sports, for example, might include elements that fit into the United Youth programme. Similarly, elements of the summer camps might fit within United Youth, particularly the good relations aspect. We are trying to ensure linkages across the seven headline actions.

Mr Lyttle: There will be a transition from the Community Relations Council to the new Equality and Good Relations Commission. The Community Relations Council will have a significant body of good

practice, best practice and policy experience in community relations programmes. How will that be maintained, sustained and continued?

Mr Devitt: We have established a transition project group to take forward that work. Our Department sits on that, as do the chief executives of both organisations. We are taking that forward to ensure that such experience is captured and to handle aspects of the change management, such as identifying which staff might have to transfer to the new commission to take forward elements of policy work currently done by the Community Relations Council. The chief executives are fully engaged in that process.

Mr Lyttle: Who will perform the policy function in future?

Mr Devitt: We envisage that it will be the new commission.

Dr McMahon: The new Equality and Good Relations Commission.

Mr Lyttle: Lastly, how will the Assembly and the public be included in the decision-making process for exactly what happens with the Equality and Good Relations Commission?

Mr Devitt: The legislation will have to go through the normal consultation process and Committee Stage. That is when people with an interest will be able to give their views.

Dr McMahon: The legislation will be the basis for that consultation, but it is important to know that, if other issues need to be raised, we would be keen to get those built in as early as possible, even if they are not, strictly speaking, related to the legislation.

The Chairperson: As you said earlier, the initiative that does have a timeline is the removal of peace walls by 2023. Why a timeline of 10 years? How did you come to that figure?

Mr Devitt: It is not the only initiative that has a timeline, but it is the one with the longest timeline. It is recognised that a lot of good work is going on in communities, some of it very quietly, in an attempt to create the conditions for some of the structures to be lowered, removed or changed in some way. The 10-year time frame recognises how much is involved. There are about 80 structures in total, and there is a need to identify and then create the conditions that will allow them to come down before their physical removal. Those factors make it a longer-term project, and 10 years was estimated to be an ambitious but realistic target for doing all of that.

The Chairperson: I have heard people who live near peace walls express significant concern about consultation. What can you tell us about how you will consult?

Mr Devitt: I will pass over to Donna shortly because she is involved in a number of the structures that are set up to do exactly that. We are clear that this can be done only if there is community support and buy-in. It will not be imposed on any of the communities. Donna, do you want to say a bit about the structures that exist to try to create those conditions?

Miss Blaney: Yes. As Fergus said, that there are two aspects to this — the removal of the peace walls and, perhaps more importantly, the creation of the conditions, on which a lot of good work is ongoing. It involves working with the people and taking on board their ideas about what can and cannot be achieved.

Through current practice with IFI funding, a number of groups are already on the ground, such as the Duncairn partnership, Black Mountain and the greater Whitewell. That grouping of community workers, community representatives and statutory agencies is working together to identify, on the basis of what the community tells them, what changes might be needed to facilitate action. The agencies will then take on board what the communities say and make it happen across the Departments in a joined-up way.

Some groups are at the early stages of building confidence among community groups and between community groups and the statutory organisations. Others are at the stage of having architect-designed draft plans that are ready to go, and they say that, if we can facilitate this, it will create community confidence so that a gate could be opened or a barrier removed. We hope to build on that model as we take it through. We have also established an interface community partnership, which is

based in Belfast and involves statutory agencies sitting on a forum with representatives of lots of local groups from interfaces across the board. That is chaired by Jonny Byrne from the University of Ulster, and it will identify what needs to be done and bring forward ideas. We do not want to make this just look pretty; we want to make a difference. So that will guide us in how we might take forward the creation of the conditions to remove the peace walls.

The Chairperson: When interacting with community representatives and groups, how do you quality assure their mandate, if I can put it like that?

Miss Blaney: It is difficult. We take our lead, and the group in the interface partnership is brought together under the ownership of the Community Relations Council.

The Chairperson: Sorry, Donna, I need to interrupt because I am not in any way implying a criticism of any group that you mentioned; I am talking about the principle. If you engage with a community group, how do you know that it represents a certain percentage of that community? How do you know that a group represents a community and not just family and neighbours?

Miss Blaney: We have identified the potential for doubt over whether a group is the voice of its community. We ask groups to engage with the community and provide evidence of what emerged from that. There may have been a lot of, "I am the representative of that community — believe me, I am telling you, so it is true."

The Chairperson: What is the evidence?

Miss Blaney: We are moving into this process, and we have been working with CRC to commission work on consultation on interface areas. The aim is that we build the practice that it is not enough simply to knock on a few doors and then tell us what you found out. We need to gather that information. We would like to try to build that skill set in people doing that work, without their becoming overly officious but so that we have evidence of how many people have been engaged and where. In that way, we will know whether it is representative.

The Chairperson: Are you saying that, broadly, that does not exist?

Miss Blaney: There is evidence that we need more of it to be able to stand over the decisions. However, that is the advantage of groups such as the Duncairn partnership and the greater Whitewell project, which are doing that. So we are taking that learning from those groups.

We want to tease out what the community is saying. It may be that the community says that it wants a road-calming measure or new lighting, and those are valid requirements. However, let us see how these partnerships found that out; let us have cross-community meetings attended by the various statutory agencies; and let us have wider engagement to validate the initial proposals that came forward.

The Chairperson: Again without any implication about any organisation named so far, you accept the need to be robust in determining the extent to which these groups represent the community that you wish to engage with.

Miss Blaney: In anything that involves using taxpayers' money to take forward significant capital improvements, we need to have an evidence base that we can use to justify that expenditure.

The Chairperson: The other issue that I am picking up on the ground is that those living directly in the shadow of peace walls fear that a consultation process would give equal weight to the voice of people living 400 or 500 yards away, and they, rather than waking up to a view of a peace wall, only pass it on the way to work. What assurance or comfort, if any, can you give to those living directly in the shadow of the peace walls that their voice will be the one heard most clearly by you?

Miss Blaney: The situation that you outlined is exactly like one in which evidence has come to light. In the design for the interface programme or the high-level process map of how we deliver it, we want to ensure that we can engage with the right people and give them assurances and confidence. Ministers have said that we will not remove the barriers without the confidence and the agreement of the people who are immediately affected by those barriers.

Dr McMahon: It also comes back to the general point that these do not fit into a one neat package that fits all. You roll these out. So, there is a real challenge here to, on the one hand, get momentum and, on the other hand, not make assumptions. So, each of the individual cases will have to have tailored solutions. The physical side of it is almost the easy bit of it. It is about the work up to that and getting the right people on board.

The Chairperson: We have not mentioned some of the headlines, and I want to pick up on one that we have not mentioned at all:

"Develop, in partnership with the relevant agencies and Departments age-appropriate primary and post-primary anti-sectarianism resources and ensure that teachers are trained, equipped and supported to deliver an effective anti-sectarianism module".

Where are we with that?

Mr Devitt: There are number of aspects to that, Chair. There is that specific one, and there is also a requirement to come up with a definition of sectarianism. We envisage that the definition of sectarianism will be potentially taken forward through the work to create the new equality and good relations commission. Specifically, on the point that you raised about developing materials, we had an interesting meeting with the Corrymeela Community earlier this week. It has been doing some very positive and proactive work on exactly that type of issue, so some materials already exist. It is just one organisation, and, obviously, we want to work with others to see what else might be out there. Again, it is almost into this process of co-design. It is not right for us to determine what that package of material should look like. There are other practitioners out there who are actually doing some of this work, and we want to learn from best practice. So, that is something that we are beginning to look at and take forward.

The Chairperson: Are you telling me that we have to define sectarianism before we begin?

Mr Devitt: No, I am not, Chair. What I am saying is that one of the actions that is in the document and in the strategy is to ensure that there is a definition of sectarianism that will go through the legislation. Also, there is the requirement to develop modules for age-appropriate schoolchildren, and that work has already been begun by some external partners, particularly in the voluntary and community sector, and we want to learn from that.

The Chairperson: Surely, it exists internationally, Fergus?

Mr Devitt: That may be the case, Chair, and it may also be the case with the definition of good relations. One of the issues may be that, in our society at present, there is not an agreed definition of good relations or sectarianism, and we want to be able to get to that point.

The Chairperson: Or reconciliation.

Mr Lyttle: Should this strategy not have set that out clearly before it started?

Mr Devitt: That is an argument. I suppose that the counterargument to that is whether it is potentially better to develop that in conjunction with the voluntary and community sector and other stakeholders who may have a view on what those definitions might be, rather than them being imposed by a strategy.

Mr Lyttle: Could you not have done that to be included in the strategy?

Mr Devitt: Done what, sorry, Chris?

Mr Lyttle: Consulted. Your response is to question the method by which to reach the definition, not whether or not it would be prudent for it to be included in the strategy. So, could that not have been done prior to that, and why was it not done?

Mr Devitt: That is being taken forward now across a range of areas, as we have all tried to outline about the co-design. We will not be able to implement this strategy just through officials sitting in Departments. This has to be co-designed and implemented through the community.

The Chairperson: In what way might the definition of sectarianism that will be reached through this process that you are talking about differ from the definition of sectarianism in the Oxford English Dictionary?

Mr Devitt: It is not possible for me to answer that, Chair. However, it is correct that we seek views on it so that, when it is necessary to have that agreed, there will at least be a certainty that it has been defined and agreed with a degree of buy-in rather than it being imposed by government.

Dr McMahon: We know that these are very sensitive and politically challenging issues. One of the things that has characterised the process is that there has been a lot of intensive political work by a lot of people to get to the point where the strategy was published. That has taken it so far and given us a framework. We have very clear instruction from Ministers to work within that framework, to deliver it in a sensitive way and not to simply roll it out and hope for the best.

The Chairperson: From my point of view, I have grave concern that we are going to redefine sectarianism and allow that to be done, potentially, on party political grounds.

Dr McMahon: Sorry; that is not what I was saying. All I was saying was that a lot of the work, including the materials that we are talking about producing, is being done within a framework. We are trying to make sure that, when we do that work with other stakeholders, we do it in a sensitive way. That is really the general point. I would not want us to get tied up over a specific definition. We really want to make sure that these materials are produced in a way that is likely to work and that educationalists and others see them as being positive and a real addition to what they are doing already.

The Chairperson: I just cannot believe that it is not all out there after, for example, the Holocaust. I cannot believe that those sorts of teaching tool templates do not exist. If you do not mind, we are practically doing another lap, starting with Colum.

Mr Eastwood: Sorry, Chair; I meant to ask this question earlier.

I am not even going to go into the sectarianism issue, because if people are watching this — they probably are not — they will think that it is ridiculous that we do not know what sectarianism is. I can bring you loads of people who experience it and who will tell you all about it, but anyway.

This is my last question. Will the 10,000 one-year placements for the United Youth programme be a one-off initiative, or will that happen annually?

Dr McMahon: Obviously, we need to go through the pilot process. If this works, Ministers will want to do it annually. It is the same issue that we have with Delivering Social Change. If these things work, Ministers will want to ramp them up.

Mr Eastwood: Is it a pilot programme of 10,000 one-year placements, or are there pilot programmes happening before that, and then you might have the 10,000 one-year placements?

Dr McMahon: One of the purposes of the pilot exercise is to assess demand. It is one thing designing it and getting all the —

Mr Eastwood: So that pilot is not for the 10,000. It is for a smaller number.

Dr McMahon: It could be up to 10,000, but it probably will be a small number. It depends on what is achievable.

Mr Eastwood: Next summer is the start date for the pilot. What is the end date for providing the whole 10,000 placements, if there is no commitment to do it annually?

Mr Devitt: There is no specific end date. Part of this will be around the capacity of the organisations involved in delivering this and how many one-year placements they can put through at any particular time.

Mr Eastwood: So it is not really 10,000. That is a just a figure —

Mr Devitt: Well, 10,000 will be delivered. The question is —

Mr Eastwood: If the capacity exists.

Mr Devitt: The capacity will exist; it just depends over what period of time. As Denis said, if this is successful and if the capacity can be demonstrated, there is the opportunity for it to continue beyond the 10,000 set out in the strategy.

Mr Moutray: My question is about good relations in local councils, which relates to a point that the Chair raised a few moments ago. I declare that I am a member of Craigavon Borough Council. We have a very active good relations department, but over the years that I have been there, I have found that when you hold engagement evenings, you tend to get the same people from the same communities turning up. You could almost name them before they come. They are well-meaning people who play an important role, but how do we get out to people in the community who are relatively silent and who want to get on with their day's work and live in peace. Further engagement with these communities was referred to. How do we get to those people and give them a voice without their having to run to meetings in community houses and centres on a regular basis, because that is not what they want to do? Their voice still needs to be heard, and we need to get through to them.

Dr McMahon: In our experience, one of the things that definitely does not work is consultation events, for which we put notices in the paper and hire out a place, because you do not get the turn-out. People just do not feel that they are being listened to or do want to —

Mr Lyttle: That was not the case in the composition of the work around this strategy though?

Dr McMahon: To be honest with you, I am just making a general point. We as Departments have been criticised for doing that sort of thing. So one of the things that we are trying to do is look at whether there are other ways of engaging with community groups. Again, you probably sensed that it is not a comfortable position for us. It would be great to be able to say that we have it all pinned down. We have to go to these groups now and say, "Can you help us to get people in through the door?"

Mr Moutray: I am going further even than community groups. I am talking about individuals in communities, who, for one reason or another, may not be represented on the local community group. What way do we get to those people, who, in many cases, are the silent majority in communities?

Dr McMahon: We certainly want to look at focus groups, and, again, it will depend on the issue, on the programme that we are talking about and the area. We can certainly look at focus groups and some of the work that Donna was describing earlier will use that sort of approach.

Miss Blaney: For example, Rural Community's Network's shared future group met earlier in the week. That is an amalgamation of lots of groups from all over Northern Ireland, and that is exactly what they are saying. Lots of work is going on beneath the wire with people who do not feel that they come to these forums and say that their voice is equally important, and we must not let them be isolated. That is why we need to engage, as far as possible, with the umbrella groups, who are out there on the ground and telling us that. We need to listen to that and then address the design of the project so that it does not hit only the big urban population centres but those other groups that you are talking about.

Dr McMahon: The next stage, once we have done that, is that we need to get focus groups. It comes down to finding a way to attract people who are not necessarily engaged or politically engaged normally or in these sorts of processes into a room and have a conversation with them. That is one of the things that I want to distinguish between this and the normal, if you like, consultation process that we go through. This is happening at the start, albeit we have done some of the homework over the summer on some of technical aspects. We need to really get into a conversation with people and just ask them. For example, one of the first questions on the United Youth programme will be, "What will attract you into the programme?" We will ask young people what they want to get out of it. It is a matter of trying to have a conversation.

The Chairperson: As we have discussed, the issue of peace walls, for example, will impact on clearly defined populations. There are 63,000 people who are unemployed, and there are hundreds of millions of pounds undefined in the budget. Go and knock a few doors and ask people. The resources — the money — are there.

Dr McMahon: Yes, that is a fair point.

Mr Lyttle: I will be very brief. OFMDFM commissioned a report to direct future planning in relation to good relations policy. It was entitled 'Progressing Good Relations and Reconciliation in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland', and it was published in 2012. It said that, to address deep divisions and institutional polarisation, we need to deliver fundamental institutional change. Do you believe that this strategy has the capacity to deliver fundamental institutional change?

Dr McMahon: In as much as I can answer that as an official, my view is that, if we implement this properly, we will definitely create major change. To some extent, when you start to talk about fundamental institutional change, it depends what you mean by that, and there may be different political views about what that means. So, obviously, I cannot comment on that. Some people may have the view that it means reorganising Departments, and other people may have the view that it means reorganising agencies. It will certainly lead to a reorganisation of some of the significant agencies in the area, and we have talked about some of that already. It will certainly lead to major changes in the way that services are delivered, and, if we are talking about 10,000 young people on the United Youth programme or, for that matter, the sort of work that we are talking about on peace walls, we will need to have a level of joined-up working that we have not necessarily had before. One of the things that DOJ has said to us in our discussions with it is that it is attracted by the fact that it has been doing this work and pushing ahead with it and will now be able to access OFMDFM's and the Executive's imprimatur to try to ensure that, if an organisation needs to do something on the ground to help a peace wall come down, we will help to push that from the centre. So, on that level, there will be organisational change and reform, but I cannot answer whether it is the fundamental reform that everyone feels is fundamental reform.

Ms McGahan: I want to comment on and flag up to you the issue of sectarianism. This is a concept that is taught at GCSE Learning for Life and Work (LLW). Perhaps it is worth examining that as well, rather than conflicting with what is being taught in schools.

Mr Devitt: Sure; thank you.

Mr G Robinson: My question is about the establishment of 10 new shared education campuses and 10 new shared housing schemes. What work has been done on those so far and have any locations been identified yet?

Dr McMahon: As I said, there has been some discussion and engagement on both those schemes. The Minister for Social Development has to come back to OFMDFM with proposals for the shared housing schemes; we do not have those yet. However, we certainly have had discussions with DSD officials, and they have a lot of ideas for the schemes. There are a lot of issues in housing in general that they are looking at, and they see the shared housing schemes as part of that. We do not have specific proposals at this point back from the Minister for Social Development.

Similarly, the Department of Education is designing criteria and a programme whereby it will go out to schools to ask them to consider putting themselves forward. Schools have also been approaching the Department in that regard. A proposal has come forward in Armagh, for example, and Lisanelly, as we said, is already there. There are a couple of potential locations but they have not moved forward as yet.

Mr G Robinson: So, the full complement of locations has still not been worked out yet?

Dr McMahon: We have not got to that point yet. One of the useful things is that we have learned a lot from Lisanelly. There was a huge issue there around getting schools on board. Members will be aware that there was a court case and so on. It is a real challenge to ensure that, on the one hand, you maintain some of the ethos that schools, parents and pupils value, while making sure that there is sharing and people use their resources to best effect.

Mr Cree: I will be quick. Earlier in your evidence, you referred to the need to reinforce budgets. What bids were made, if any, in the monitoring round for October?

The Chairperson: We are getting a briefing on that in a couple of minutes, Leslie.

Mr Cree: I am aware of that; I was just wondering whether any bids had been made for those particular areas.

Mr Devitt: Without trying to pre-empt what our colleagues are going to say, we have certainly put in a bid around what we call the central good relations fund, which we hope to open in the very near future, for groups to bid into for small amounts of project-based funding. That is for the current financial year. Beyond that, as we said at the outset, the overall budget for implementing the strategy has not been established yet and will probably go across a number of CSR periods, particularly if it is to take us up to —

Mr Cree: How much is that bid to which you referred?

Mr Devitt: It is for £400,000.

The Chairperson: Finally, the third of the seven commitments is:

"Roll out a 'buddy scheme' in publicly run nursery and primary schools"

You have had 124 days; tell me that that is done.

Mr Cree: They are working at it.

Mr Devitt: Again, Chairperson, it is one of those issues where some of that practice is happening already. That is why we felt that it would be important to use that best practice and expand it where possible. We are trying to learn the lessons from it. Clearly, we are into the start of the new school year, and we would intend to put it in place as soon as we can, but it is not there yet.

The Chairperson: As soon as we can, but it is not there yet. So, you have done nothing to make an impact on the ground in publicly run nursery schools and primary schools?

Mr Devitt: Well, not on that specific one, but you will be aware that a childcare strategy was launched earlier today, which is —

The Chairperson: Confusing. Are we content that we know the definition of "buddy"?

Mr Devitt: Well, as I say, there is work going on already —

The Chairperson: Just say yes.

Dr McMahon: Yes, we are.

The Chairperson: OK. Fergus, Donna and Denis, thank you very much.