



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Delivering Social Change: Junior Ministers  
and Departmental Officials

27 November 2013

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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

Delivering Social Change: Junior Ministers and Departmental Officials

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)  
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Alex Attwood  
Mr Leslie Cree  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Ms Bronwyn McGahan  
Mr Stephen Moutray  
Mr George Robinson  
Mr Jimmy Spratt

**Witnesses:**

Mr Bell	Junior Minister
Ms J McCann	Junior Minister
Dr Denis McMahon	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ms Margaret Rose McNaughton	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

**The Chairperson:** I welcome junior Minister Bell, Denis McMahon and Margaret Rose McNaughton. Jonathan, are you content to start?

**Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** Yes. I thank you, Chair and members of the Committee, for providing us with the opportunity to address you today. Due to time pressures, I will have to leave at 3.30 pm, as we have other engagements.

The Committee identified a number of issues that it wanted us to cover. There are also some areas that we, as junior Ministers, wish to bring to the attention of the Committee. I will provide an update on Delivering Social Change, victims and survivors, childcare and race. Jennifer will cover other issues, or I will do so if she is not here by that time. We will then be happy to take any questions that Committee members may have.

Members will be well aware that Delivering Social Change is the comprehensive delivery framework that the Executive set up to tackle poverty and social exclusion. It seeks to coordinate actions between Departments to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages, improve children and young people's health, well-being and life opportunities and break the long-term cycle of multi-generational problems.

Ministers were very keen to demonstrate early momentum in recognition that Delivering Social Change is primarily about delivery and about Departments working collaboratively with a focus on outcomes. Departments were asked to deliver a number of immediate actions that would help to address the key priorities identified in addition to the mainstream work already underway to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

In October last year, following a trawl of existing examples of good practice interventions, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister announced the development of six signature programmes totalling £26 million under the Delivering Social Change framework. Those programmes were established to improve literacy and numeracy levels, family support and pathways to employment for young people. Significant progress has been made by Departments leading on the development and implementation of the signature programmes. It is a positive contribution to the Executive's policy under the Delivering Social Change framework to tackle poverty and deprivation and equip everyone with the skills and the support to strengthen our economic growth.

As the Committee knows, we have seven signature projects underway: a literacy and numeracy project, family support hubs, parenting support, nurture units, the community family support pilot, social enterprise hubs and a play and leisure project. It is clear from all of that work that Delivering Social Change is a new level of joined-up working across Departments to achieve real and long lasting social benefits for those who need them most. It is about focusing on a smaller number of actions that can really make a difference.

Clearly, Delivering Social Change is not something that the Executive can deliver on their own. We recognise that a partnership approach will be required to help make change happen. It is about creating a new culture and focusing on cross-cutting work to achieve social benefits, and it offers us the opportunity to respond quickly and flexibly to address the specific needs of those most in need.

We took the opportunity of an invitation to the PlayBoard conference in October to announce a seventh signature programme on play and leisure. The Committee should have been briefed on that announcement in advance, and I apologise, on behalf of Jennifer and me, for that oversight. The new funding of up to £1.6 million will be provided over three years and will support initiatives that champion play, greater local access to space for play and planning and support for play at a community level. This will build on the delivery of the play and leisure implementation plan, which supports the Executive's play and leisure policy statement of January 2009. Officials are meeting with colleagues in other Departments to develop the detail of how the programme will be delivered.

On the issue of victims and survivors, the Committee will be aware that a programme board was established in October 2013 to look at the issues being raised regarding the Victims and Survivors Service. The Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Kathryn Stone OBE, in her evidence to the Committee on 9 October, provided some detail on issues being presented to her by individual victims and survivors and by groups who provide services to victims and survivors. We take the commissioner's concerns very seriously and can report that significant progress has been made on addressing those issues. For example, improvements have been made across a number of operational aspects of the service, including telephone call handling and award processing. Indeed, at the most recent meeting of the programme board, the members of the Victims and Survivors Forum working group acknowledged the progress made and said that it was filtering through to the sector.

We have also asked the commissioner to bring forward an independent assessment of the service in line with her advice to us in September. That assessment will look at the work of the service, the individual needs review and its interactions with clients and groups.

We are also pleased to confirm that we will be announcing a permanent board for Delivering Social Change in the coming days. Departmental officials will provide a more detailed briefing to the Committee when they attend on 11 December.

On race, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has always been, and remains, strongly committed to the mainstreaming and promotion of racial equality and good race relations through the minority ethnic development fund and the racial equality strategy. That strategy has to reflect the actual needs of our minority ethnic people. To that end, officials have been liaising with the racial equality panel and wider representatives of the sector to refocus and refine the strategy. We want to make sure that the document is fit for purpose and that partnership working with representatives of minority ethnic people on drafting the strategy will continue to ensure that we achieve that stated aim. This has taken time, but we consider that time to have been well invested if we can bring to the table a strategy that addresses need. Our next step will be to seek commitment

from other Departments to the high level actions that will take place under the strategy. Officials are continuing to liaise with the racial equality panel, with which it is intended to meet in December 2013 to discuss the final draft strategy.

As you know, in September, Jennifer and I launched the first phase of Bright Start, which is the Executive's childcare strategy. The first phase sets out where the strategy aims to go. It also details 15 key first actions that will begin to get it there. Our key first actions are major policy initiatives to be taken forward over the first three years. They are actions we have carefully chosen to address the main childcare priorities that people highlighted to us when we carried out the consultation earlier this year.

The 15 actions will safeguard, or create, up to 8,000 childcare places. Those places will fill the major gaps in childcare provision. There are not enough childcare places for children aged four to 14, not enough childcare places in rural areas and not enough childcare places for families and communities that are in need. We are going to help childminders extend their services to children with a disability, and we are going to improve the information on childcare services available to parents.

Finally, almost everyone we consulted said that childcare is too expensive. One of our key first actions will be to promote to parents throughout Northern Ireland the very significant financial assistance they can get with the cost of childcare. Current uptake here is low compared with that in the rest of the UK, and we aim to increase it. Childcare is good in itself, and it is good for child development. That is the consistent message from decades of international research. But, more and better childcare can also have an immediate impact on the labour market and, therefore, the economy. Better and more extensive childcare services can deliver social change. The Bright Start childcare strategy has come a very long way in just a few months. It has moved from consultation to a set of ambitious first actions that will deliver real social change. All the same, I emphasise that this is just the beginning. Over the coming months, we will be reviewing how our actions perform, looking out for any additional gaps in provision that we need to address and talking and listening to childcare stakeholders. We will be developing the full, final version of Bright Start for launch and publication around this time next year. Chair, I hand over to Jennifer.

**Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** Apologies for being late. I also thank the Committee for giving us this opportunity to meet you and to discuss the very important work that we are taking forward. Clearly, all these efforts are intended to deliver social change in a real and meaningful way. I will update the Committee on the social investment fund (SIF), Together: Building a United Community and some of our other equality strategies.

I will start with the SIF. The fund is an innovative, challenging and focused programme that seeks to address years of deprivation and underachievement. To afford the optimum opportunity for success, we want to ensure that projects are considered, realistic and economical. The success in progressing so much of the programme through the necessary approval channels in a relatively short time bodes well. Our focus remains fixed on assisting communities with the greatest need to address the issues that have assailed them for decades. On that basis, we have agreed the indicative zone allocations for the SIF programme, and, last week, officials met the chairs of the nine steering groups to inform them of the allocations and begin discussions on the delivery phase. Officials are meeting each of the steering groups to discuss which projects in each zone from the 10 submitted are likely to be funded, subject to the economic appraisal process.

Following that, we will move into the delivery phase, and work will begin on appointing lead partners for each project and getting letters of offer agreed, with the aim of getting as many of those projects up and running to benefit the communities as soon as possible. We can assure the Committee that the total expenditure on the programme will be ring-fenced at £80 million, and that is reflected in the allocations.

As you are aware, we received economic appraisals for 89 projects across the nine zones, the total value of which came to over £130 million, meaning that the fund was heavily oversubscribed. The 89 projects are currently going through the OFMDFM internal approval process, and each steering group prioritises projects within its area plans. The £80 million of funding will be allocated in line with this ranking. A significant number of projects have full internal approvals in place, and the next step is gaining the required approvals from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). We will then move to the delivery of these projects. This process will run in tandem with the other projects that fall within the allocations but do not yet have approvals through the economic appraisal process. Those that fall outside the allocations will, essentially, be parked to allow officials to focus on the projects that are deliverable within the funding allocations. Steering groups may advise us, through the current

series of meetings, that they wish to revise their prioritisation, and, where there is a robust justification for doing so, we will respond to that. Our overall focus must be to get projects started to meet the objectives of the fund and ensure that the communities see the benefit of it.

I want to say a few words about the progress that we are making on Together: Building a United Community. The strategy sets out a clear vision of how society here can move forward through greater interaction, mutual respect and social cohesion. The vision centres around four main themes. They are as follows: our children and young people; safety; sharing, and cultural celebration. Within those themes, strategic projects focus on education; young people not in education, employment or training; regeneration and deprivation; housing; and learning from the past. Significant progress has been made across all these areas and we expect to see projects being delivered on the ground early in the new year.

The United Youth programme is being progressed through an intensive co-design engagement with statutory, community and voluntary organisations. There have been around 40 meetings with organisations and groups, including significant engagement with young people themselves and a number of co-design workshops. We have also written to over 200 stakeholders to get their views on the elements of the United Youth programme. The process will come together with an event in January, which a wide range of individuals and organisations, including employers, will be invited to in order to finalise the design of the programme, which will then be passed to Ministers for approval. Preparation work for the planned summer camps is currently in a co-designed phase with voluntary and community groups, external stakeholders and other interested groups. We intend to open the scheme for applications in the summer of 2014.

Building on existing good practice, officials are working with community representatives, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and statutory agencies to design a process to create the conditions that will allow interface barriers to be removed. The most recent workshop with community representatives was held on 15 November. We expect to receive firm implementation proposals before Christmas, with work getting under way shortly afterwards. This is an Executive strategy that will be delivered by a number of Departments.

We are working with the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Department for Social Development (DSD) to progress the 10 shared education campuses, the cross-community sports programme and the 10 shared neighbourhoods and urban villages respectively. The relevant Ministers will be bringing forward details of their progress on these three commitments to the ministerial panel meeting in December.

The strategy is not just about delivering the seven key actions announced on 9 May. Officials have begun work on the other actions and commitments in the strategy, such as establishing the new equality and good relations commission, the associated legislative changes and the review of good relations funding. To ensure effective delivery of the whole range of commitments in the strategy and provide the collaborative leadership approach necessary to bring about real change across our society, we have established a ministerial panel that will set the strategic direction for improving good relations across our society, oversee delivery and implementation of the strategy and monitor progress through a robust action planning and reporting process. Officials are also in the process of establishing the various subgroups that will report to the ministerial panel. The first meeting of the panel will be on 16 December and will be attended by Executive Ministers and permanent secretaries.

I also want to touch on the gender equality and sexual orientation strategy. A review of the gender equality strategy and its associated cross-departmental action plans is nearing completion. The review considered how effectively the strategy has performed against its objectives, assessed the effectiveness of the action plans and made recommendations for the aims, objectives and delivery of the strategy and actions plans in the years remaining from 2014 to 2016. A revised gender equality strategy is being developed in consultation with a gender advisory panel, which is made up of key stakeholder representatives. It is intended that the revised document will be published in January 2014.

One of the key achievements of the gender equality strategy is the strong partnership that we have achieved between government and stakeholders. Our sexual orientation strategy is being developed on the same partnership basis. Discussions with key representatives of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community — the Rainbow Project, Cara-Friend and Here NI — have been positive and there is ongoing engagement between the sector and the Department. We are hopeful of initiating public consultation on a sexual orientation strategy shortly.

Tackling child poverty is an issue for the Executive. Through Delivering Social Change and our seven signature programmes, we have focused on the needs of children and families, providing parenting programmes, numeracy and literacy help for struggling children and training and employment assistance to young people who need it. We are developing initial thinking for a Delivering Social Change for children and young people strategy to integrate the policies for child poverty within a broader strategy for children and young people, again under the Delivering Social Change banner. The Committee will also be aware of the work of the child poverty outcomes framework. That model will inform our new strategy to focus our efforts and work to improve outcomes for all children.

That is basically all that I have. Do you want to open it up for questions, Chair?

**The Chairperson:** I most certainly do. Thank you very much, both of you. Members, just a reminder that we have 40 minutes for questions. I will restrict myself to two issues.

Two weeks ago, we ran a stakeholder engagement on the signature projects. However, at that stage, were aware of only six. What can you tell us about the seventh?

**Mr Bell:** This is all about delivering outcomes. The first intended outcomes of the play and leisure signature programme will be championing play, raising awareness of the value and benefits of play, how play can be provided for, and promoting positive attitudes to play. The second outcome will be greater local access to space for play through building sustainable support for play at community level, and the third outcome will be making planning and support for play central to the thinking and work of all of our local councils.

**The Chairperson:** Is this a cross cutter?

**Mr Bell:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** With which other Departments?

**Mr Bell:** A range of other Departments will be involved. The £1.6 million will be spent over three years. The obvious one is the Department of the Environment (DOE), through local government, the Act, and the legislative commitments towards play. I imagine that DE will be another. In the conference that we addressed, the education sector was represented, the voluntary and community sector was represented and local councils were represented. There is also strong involvement from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

It is like anything, Chairman, once you drill down into an issue. The health service, for example, operates as the very first port of call, having health visitors as sort of first educators to educate parents on the benefits of play. I imagine that this will translate through to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the people who are teaching in universities to ensure that teachers are aware of the value of play. I think that we know that there is a basis, in educational psychology, for the value of play and the learning that can come as a result of play, plus there is the socialisation and development of a child through play. It is about ensuring that, at school level and with parents as first educators, play is valued as opposed to being something that is done after the important things are finished. It is about giving play and leisure a central part and making sure, through our coordination, that councils have the facilities to ensure that children have the space in which to play.

**The Chairperson:** You have acknowledged that it was an oversight that the Committee was not briefed on this, so let us park that. Is there a danger, due to how long you have been thinking about this and how long you have been engaging with stakeholders and the rest, that people will think that the Committee disrespected and ignored them in holding an event for six of, what now turns out to be, seven projects?

**Mr Bell:** I am saying that we should have briefed the Committee on that.

**The Chairperson:** Apart from that, do we need to reach out to those stakeholders?

**Mr Bell:** I got a very positive sense, when Jennifer and I announced this at the conference. In fact, on leaving the conference and talking to many of its participants when we made the announcement —

**The Chairperson:** When was that?

**Mr Bell:** October. From talking to people, I got the sense, and I think that Jennifer did too, that, for one of the first times, those who were at the PlayBoard conference on 4 October actually saw value in devolved government. I do not think that I am over-egging the pudding in saying that. There was huge support and encouragement from the sector that we had a strategy and that we were putting £1.6 million to the strategy. I do not think that there was any sense of disrespect. We have spoken with our officials, and we will ensure that, in the future, you are briefed in advance.

**The Chairperson:** Will they think that we were disrespectful in not inviting them?

**Mr Bell:** I personally do not think so, but they would need to answer for themselves. I got a very positive sense from them on that day. It was not raised with us by anyone at the meeting.

**The Chairperson:** Minister McCann, you talked about the move to the new equality and good relations body. Most people will probably accept that, if you were to start now, it could take two years to get the legislation and the rest of the process through and up and running. Where does the Community Relations Council (CRC) fit over the next 24 months?

**Ms J McCann:** There have been ongoing discussions with the CRC. You are probably aware of some of those discussions. You may remember that some staff transferred from the Victims' Commission to the Victims and Survivors Service under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). That will happen in respect of this as well. We have had a number of meetings, and there are ongoing consultations and engagement with both the CRC and the Equality Commission to make sure that the process moves on. They are going to have different duties, so you are going to have to have legislation that will look at that. It is inevitable that legislation will be required. It is slow, but it is a necessity.

**The Chairperson:** The CRC accepts that it could take two years, but it is also concerned about its functions, whether it will last for the two years and, particularly, whether the functions will include it being an intermediate funder or if that function will be moved elsewhere in the meantime.

**Ms J McCann:** Those are the type of discussions that have been ongoing. Obviously, there will be issues around the funding. There will be new specific roles, but the CRC is still involved in what it is involved in. In 18 months time, or whatever the period will be, it will be a different organisation. A lot of people are concerned about their jobs as opposed to just their roles, so we are hoping that the engagements we are having will settle people down.

**The Chairperson:** So, the CRC will still be in existence in 18 months.

**Ms J McCann:** It will be morphed into the new equality and good relations commission.

**The Chairperson:** That will take 24 months to set up.

**Ms J McCann:** Well, 18 months or 24 months is what we are talking about.

**Dr Denis McMahon (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** It will take 18 months for the legislation to become law, but there are other elements that will need to go in.

**The Chairperson:** So, the CRC will be around for roughly 18 months, but the functions are still to be negotiated.

**Ms J McCann:** Are you talking about between now and 18 months' time or after the 18 months?

**The Chairperson:** It is my impression that the CRC feels that it does not have any certainty about how long it will be around and what functions it will have between now and then. There may be a rolling change in functionality.

**Ms J McCann:** Some functions will move: there is no doubt about that.

**The Chairperson:** Do you know which ones?

**Ms J McCann:** I do not have the detail, but we can see whether we can get it for you. Things such as funding for groups, for instance, will not move.

**The Chairperson:** So, it will remain as the intermediate funder.

**Ms J McCann:** For the 18 months.

**The Chairperson:** That is very helpful. Thank you.

**Mr Moutray:** Junior Ministers, you are very welcome. Of the £26 million ring-fenced for the signature projects, about £12 million will be allocated to literacy and numeracy. That is very welcome, and it will impact not only on thousands of children but on over 200 young teachers to whom it will give work. Can you give us a progress report on that? How soon will it be taken forward? I know that some work has been done.

**Mr Bell:** Thanks for outlining the support for the literacy and numeracy projects, which are based on what we are being told, namely that getting five good GCSE grades is a child's route out of poverty. Literacy and numeracy are critical to that. It is important to note that Delivering Social Change is additional to what is already going on. So, this is extra and of added value.

As of 20 November, we have 199.7 of the 233.3 full-time equivalent teachers in post. They had an allocated budget for literacy and numeracy, through the Department of Education, of £12 million. We have drawn down £3 million of that, and we hope to have an additional drawdown of another £500,000 in January 2014.

**Mr Moutray:** I welcome that, but this is a time-related strategy. Is there any potential for something at the end to continue the good work?

**Mr Bell:** There will be a review. We have said that we will go by outcomes. Over the year or two years, we will review whether the outcome is being delivered. As we have said before, if the outcome is being delivered, we will look at where it could be mainstreamed.

**Mrs Hale:** Welcome, junior Ministers. I will touch on the play and leisure project, which the Chair mentioned. We welcome the acknowledgement in your briefing of play and leisure and very much welcome it being the seventh signature programme. Given that £1.6 million is a significant investment, is there a plan to extend the term of the programme to consolidate and extend the good work that will have been started?

**Mr Bell:** We have allocated the funding over a three-year time frame and are talking to stakeholders to finalise how it can be used. We will consider the programme depending on its outcomes. We are clear that this is not just money "to do" but money that has to deliver an outcome. We will review that, look at the outcomes and see what more we wish to do. We also want to see how we can develop support for play, ultimately to children's benefit. That will be examined over the three-year time frame. If we deliver successful outcomes in play and leisure for children — I believe that we will because we are going where the evidence leads us — we will look at how we can extend the programme.

**Ms J McCann:** These are separate initiatives but all part of Delivering Social Change. The same applies to the play and leisure project as to the project that your colleague has just raised, Brenda. These are signature programmes, and we are launching them with certain budgets. However, we will look to Departments and hope that they will continue them under core funding. On the education projects, in particular, we will look to the Department of Education to put something in place. When talking about Delivering Social Change, we are talking about a framework. We want all Departments to buy into it. The signature programmes are only a drop in the ocean that kick it off. We want them all to work together in a joined-up way.

**Mr Spratt:** I thank the junior Ministers for their presentation. I would like to cover two areas, the first of which is the social investment fund. What do you think will be its impact on the community? I know that we are due to get a briefing on it, probably next week, but will you give us some idea?

The second area is the Victims and Survivors Service, which junior Minister Bell spoke about. I welcome the very fast-moving action of departmental officials on some of the issues raised with us. A number of those issues should never have arisen — simple things like telephone calls and e-mails not



being answered — but I understand that quite a bit of work has been done on that. An issue that comes up with most groups that I have spoken to is the level of information that the Victims and Survivors Service wants. I understand the need for certainty for accountability purposes and so on. However, the plethora of forms — three or four different forms — that have to be filled in is re-traumatising individuals. Information already exists — from the memorial fund, for instance — and should have been transferred. Very simple things, such as asking for a death certificate relating to an incident in the late 1970s or early 1980s, re-traumatise the victims left behind.

On the back of that is an issue that I have dealt with personally. I am happy to share details privately but not in the public domain. A certain individual asked me to help him. He had been asked to provide a police crime number for an incident in the very late 1970s or very early 1980s. Try going to a police station and getting a crime number from the 1980s or the late 1970s — it is virtually impossible. With my background, I was able to contact somebody and ask whether there was any chance of looking back through the records. Nine times out of 10, the police will say, "No. We don't have the software to search for that." That response re-traumatise people because they think that obstacles are being put in front of them. The individual concerned told me that he thought that obstacles were being placed in front of him in the hope that he would go away.

**Ms J McCann:** If you do not mind, Jimmy, I will respond to your second point first. What you say is true. When the commissioner was before the Committee, she expressed some strong views, particularly about the assessment forms re-traumatise some people. Their length alone was a problem. Also, some of those coming forward want only to access therapies, such as relaxation therapy. My constituents have told me that, even when that was the case, they had to go through the whole process. We moved very quickly to ensure that questions on the form were kept to the bare minimum. Obviously, there must be some record or assessment, as you will appreciate.

We realised that there were other difficulties in the service. A programme board has been set up, which officials will attend. Advisers and, more importantly, the Victims' Commissioner, will also sit on the board, which will consider a review of the service. Most people around this table will know through their constituents that we have to be sensitive, particularly given that the issue is getting so much coverage in the media. More and more people, and I know some of them, are only starting to speak about the trauma of having lost loved ones. So we need a service that is fit for purpose. We will certainly keep a close eye on that and monitor it to ensure that that is the case.

As I said in my opening remarks, there has been progress on the social investment fund over the past number of weeks. Again, quite a lot of people were involved, such as those who sit on the board set up in each zone. Communities have been identifying where the needs and priorities are. The allocations have been agreed, and there has been a lot of engagement and contact over the past number of weeks with people from the SIF groups in local areas. A lot of them might have to re-prioritise the 10 projects that they initially put forward. The process is ongoing. A number of projects have gone through the appraisal stage in OFMDFM. The next stage is that they go to DFP because that is how the system works. We hope to get projects that pass through all the stages on the ground as soon as possible.

**Mr Bell:** Ideally, Mr Spratt, projects would look at what the social investment fund should deliver to communities and work back from that. The SIF focuses on increasing employment opportunities. All of us, as MLAs, are acutely aware of the need for increased employment. How do we do it? First, we have to tackle educational underachievement, the lack of skills and access to jobs. We want to make it appealing for businesses to start up in areas suffering deprivation so that people can see that happening, because people look to what is immediately around them. It is not just a matter of going where the success is. It is about looking at areas of significant deprivation and seeing businesses starting up there so that young people growing up can see positive employment opportunities in their area.

We know the issues with mental and physical health, and alcohol and drugs. From the evidence base, we also know about the needs of young mothers and young people involved in antisocial activity. It is about asking communities to come together to tell us what they believe will be the best fit in addressing deprivation. Part of it will be improving existing facilities, part of it will be making the environment better and part of it will be to add to existing facilities, where possible. Again, we have to address dereliction. We need to make areas suffering deprivation and dereliction more appealing to investors.

I am impressed by the projects that have come forward. The steering groups have been informed of allocations and are considering their priorities. It is important that we in government do not take a top-

down view of communities, having said to them that they should come together, form a steering group and tell us what they need. We have informed them of their allocation, what the money is to be used for and the targets and outcomes that we expect them to deliver. The steering groups are considering their priorities before getting back to us.

**The Chairperson:** I am conscious of the time, members. Junior Minister Bell, you mentioned that there would be an announcement on a permanent board for Delivering Social Change in the coming days. Is there a date in the calendar?

**Mr Bell:** I have not got a fixed date, but I expect it to be in the coming days.

**The Chairperson:** I am no clearer. Will it be in a week's time?

**Mr Bell:** Within a couple of weeks.

**The Chairperson:** OK. Thank you.

**Mr Bell:** I have not pencilled in a date, so I cannot give one. I am not being deliberately disingenuous; the announcement will be in the coming days.

**Ms McGahan:** If you will bear with me, Chairperson, I have four questions.

Thank you for your presentation, and I apologise for being late. My focus is on equality, particularly for children and young people. We are told that the scope of the goods, facilities and services legislation is not agreed. Our impression is that there is an issue with extending protections to children and young people. How can the Department consider introducing anti-discrimination legislation that starts by discriminating against children and young people? I would like you to address that before I move on to my other questions.

**Mr Bell:** The scope of the proposed legislation is under consideration. I do not think that we will produce any legislation to discriminate against children and young people. The policy development of the other aspects of the legislation is under way and being considered. We are meeting a number of voices from the children's sector and talking directly to children. We are talking to many in that sector to see what can be done. It is complex legislation and cannot be broken down into sound bites on goods, facilities and services.

In our discussions with the children's sector, people have suggested reservation clauses. That takes us into a hugely complex area, which we have under consideration. We are trying to ensure that the legislation prohibits only the treatment that amounts to unfair discrimination. Within that, we are trying to research the potential exceptions for inclusion in the legislation. I will give you just one example: technically, a half-price policy for children under the age of 16 using a leisure centre amounts to discrimination and favour, but I do not think that anybody on the Committee would say that, as we are trying to encourage sport and healthy development, we should not have it. We are focused on prohibiting in legislation treatment that amounts to unfair discrimination. Our officials are working on what can be excluded or included, or what reservation clauses need to go into the legislation.

**The Chairperson:** Bronwyn, may I suggest that you ask your top two questions? If there is time, we will come back to you for numbers three and four. We are tight for time, and every member has questions.

**Ms McGahan:** OK, I will ask two more.

**The Chairperson:** One more.

**Ms J McCann:** I am convinced of the need to strengthen the rights of children and young people through this legislation. That is how we can address key inequalities for people of all ages.

**The Chairperson:** One more question, and you can put the other two in writing.

**Ms McGahan:** There are issues with how the Victims and Survivors Service delivers for victims. You told us about the establishment of a programme board. How is the work of addressing the difficult issues proceeding?

**Mr Bell:** Mr Spratt spoke about the number of assessment forms, which we accept was excessive, and work was done immediately to reduce their number. He raised communication issues, with people not having access to e-mail and telephone calls not being answered. In some ways, it is about how calls are answered and what support is available. There has to be a balance: when spending government money, we have to be accountable for that money and have an information and evidence base against that.

The programme board is chaired by the director of our equality and strategy directorate. The Victims' Commissioner and Anne Dorbie, chief executive of the Victims and Survivors Service, sit on it, as do our special advisers to deliver these specific needs. There has been progress on the assessment forms and communication. The forum's services working group acknowledges that the work has led to improvement, which encourages us because that is the victims' voice in direct engagement with the board.

When I met the Victims and Survivors Forum on a political level, I was extremely impressed by the number of people from a range of backgrounds and how they had come together, synthesised their ideas and delivered to us the clear message that what happened in the past must never be allowed to happen again.

**Ms J McCann:** It is important that the Victims' Commissioner is central to the programme board and any review. The issue is wider than just assessment forms. We must ensure that we deliver what the victims need from the Victims and Survivors Service

**Mr Lyttle:** It is good to see you, junior Ministers. I wish that you were here more often. I like hearing from you, and it is clear that you are working across a number of important issues. I have questions on three areas —

**Mr Bell:** I was waiting for a "but".

**Mr Lyttle:** The social investment fund project was launched in June 2011, and steering groups were appointed in October 2012, roughly. What took place in that first 16 months?

**Ms J McCann:** You will be aware that all 10 zones put forward their plans, and the Department was looking at those. Is that what you were —

**Mr Lyttle:** Sorry, let me reframe that. Sixteen months elapsed from the launch of the project to the appointment of the steering group. I am interested in what happened in the 16 months prior to the steering groups starting work.

**Ms J McCann:** Are you talking about way back when it was first launched?

**Mr Lyttle:** Yes.

**Ms J McCann:** First, OFMDFM had to decide where the zones would be. There was then no point in bringing people together in a group unless you knew what the projects would be. The first people who got together in the zone groups were community organisations. They then had to bring in statutory bodies, businesses or whatever else was relevant to the projects that they had decided to bring forward.

**Mr Lyttle:** I have just remembered that I need to declare an interest as a member of the east Belfast area steering group. I always forget to do that.

How long were the steering groups given to consult with the public, establish need in their area and develop and prioritise proposals? How much time were they given to do that work?

**Ms J McCann:** Before I came into this post, I was part of one of the steering groups and involved in its setting-up. Quite a lot of consultation was done. Smaller community organisations in particular were met and asked what they would like to see in an area plan. Obviously, projects had to be prioritised,

because everybody wanted to see everything in it. There were also a number of other plans that were already sitting there in local communities. It was about putting all of those in as well. You will know from your work on the board that you had to prioritise. OFMDFM was looking for the top 10 projects to come forward to be prioritised.

**Mr Lyttle:** Was roughly three or four months given for that work?

**Ms J McCann:** I do not know, Chris. I will have to go back and see. However, I would say that it was probably roughly that, yes.

**Mr Lyttle:** What benchmark was used to decide that three or four months was enough to do all that work?

**Ms J McCann:** It would have been based on whatever the community groups that came together to build those boards decided as opposed to anybody at this level making the decision.

**Mr Lyttle:** OK. Once the proposals were submitted to OFMDFM after that period of work, how many met its viability criteria?

**Ms J McCann:** I think that most of them probably did. Groups that were up and running would have had to meet the criteria when people were appointed to them.

**Dr McMahon:** As I have said before, one of the issues was that a lot of the projects were coming from communities. We had a very clear steer from the Ministers that those projects had to be looked at and looked at very openly. It was not just a case of just taking them in and saying that they did not meet certain quality standards. That means that, in some cases, it may be taking a bit longer to get some of those projects to a stage at which they can be approved and go through the DFP process.

**Mr Lyttle:** There is a DFP quality assurance process on top of that. What does that look like?

**Dr McMahon:** That is not unusual as a standard process for economic appraisals.

**Mr Lyttle:** What stage are we at with approving proposals so that they can actually be delivered?

**Mr Bell:** The lead-in time to get projects started depends on a number of factors, some of which I will outline. Pre-contract checks on the lead partners need to be carried out. We also need to ensure that the letters of offer are robust and contain the right and specific targets and timelines for the projects so that we can monitor and evaluate them and ensure that the focus that we have given is getting the right high-quality outcome. The delivery of projects will all have to be tendered for. A number of the projects will have to be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU). That process takes time: first, to get it right and, secondly, to keep it within the legal requirements that we have. We anticipate the expenditure from both the revenue and capital schemes —

**Mr Lyttle:** Minister, may I ask you a quick supplementary on a point that you have just made? Are you confident that the process so far is within the legal requirements that you have?

**Mr Bell:** I have no information to suggest that we are outside the legal requirements. If anybody brings that forward to me, I will certainly look at it.

**Mr Lyttle:** Fair enough. I have one last question, although I realise that you are under pressure.

**Ms J McCann:** I will add very quickly that a number of projects have already gone to the DFP appraisal stage.

**Mr Lyttle:** I have one last question on the SIF. What criteria were used to distribute the funding among the nine zones?

**Ms J McCann:** There were three criteria: first, if you were in the top 10% of multiple deprivation areas as indicated by the Nobel indices; secondly, if you were in the top 20% based on the indices through deprivation of education, health and a number of other factors; and, thirdly, if you could prove that the project would be a robust one that could make a difference to deprivation in your area.

**Mr Bell:** The robust project had to be linked to the four strategic investments of the social investment fund, independently and verifiably.

**Mr Lyttle:** Can I just ask one or two very quick questions?

**The Chairperson:** I am sorry, Chris, but I would rather you put them in writing. There are three other members waiting to ask questions.

**Mr Lyttle:** OK, but I have one very quick question, as I would like this to be on the public record —

**The Chairperson:** We are pushed for time. Leslie Cree.

**Mr Cree:** You have had your share, and, to be fair, so has Bronwyn.

It is good to —

**Mr Lyttle:** It is about an inaccuracy in one of the questions.

**Mr Cree:** Sorry, but I have the Floor.

It is nice to see you here, and thank you for your presentation. It was good to hear Jonathan use the word "momentum". I was encouraged by that. My question refers to the signature projects. We have obtained the expenditure profiles for the projects that commenced last year. My question is in two parts, and the first is this: how realistic is the projected spend for the six projects for the current year, bearing in mind that we are well into that year? Secondly, can you give us some idea of the profile for the new, seventh project?

**Mr Bell:** Let me take you through the six projects first. I think that the projected spend is realistic. The Department of Education's literacy and numeracy project had an allocated budget of £12 million. There has been drawdown of £3 million to date, with a further £500,000 expected to be drawn down by January 2014. For the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's family support hubs project, there was an allocated budget of £3 million. There has been drawdown of £1.33 million to date, and we are not expecting anything further by January. For DHSSPS's parenting support project, there was an allocated budget of £2 million, and there has been drawdown of £1 million to date. Again, we are not expecting any further drawdown by January 2014.

For the Department of Education's nurture units project, there is an allocated budget of £3 million. Drawdown to date has been £1 million, and we are expecting to have an additional £320,000 drawn down by January 2014. For the Department of Employment and Learning's community family support project, there was an allocated budget of £2 million, with drawdown to date of £800,000 and nothing more anticipated by January 2014. For the Department for Social Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's social enterprise hubs project, there is an allocated budget of £4 million, of which £100,000 has been drawn down to date, and we anticipate that, by January 2014, another £150,000 will be added to that.

In addition, both the Department of Education at £2.03 million and the Department for Employment and Learning at £2 million have committed funds to the signature programmes that they are taking forward. To be fair to both Departments, that demonstrates the buy-in that we are getting. The additional £2 million of DEL funding enabled the programme to reach 720 families instead of the 500 families as planned when the project was announced in October 2012. The Department of Education's funding of £2.03 million to the literacy and numeracy signature programme, which it is leading on, has enabled an additional 36.4 full-time equivalent teaching posts to be created.

It is early days for the play and leisure spend. There will be a minimum spend in 2013-14, but in 2014-15 we are looking towards the majority of that spend, which has the potential to be around £1 million. In 2015-16, we are looking at around £400,000 to £500,000.

**Ms J McCann:** The play and leisure funding has three objectives, which are promoting play, creating the space for play and working with councils on that. I think that, once we have the discussions and the engagement that we need to have with councils, the DOE and all the people who have responsibility, we will be in a better position to know what the profile will be that we need to draw down.

**The Chairperson:** George is next.

**Mr Bell:** We are under time pressure.

**The Chairperson:** A quick question from George.

**Mr G Robinson:** Chair, I am just letting you know that my question has been answered.

**The Chairperson:** Alex is the only member who has not spoken.

**Mr Attwood:** Later on this afternoon, I will be proposing that, given the backlog of issues in correspondence and in substance between the Department and the Committee, you come back every three weeks until that backlog is addressed. Would you be agreeable to that if the Committee were?

**Mr Bell:** I will certainly take seriously any consideration that the Committee is about to decide on.

**Mr Attwood:** Would you be supportive of that?

**Mr Bell:** I would certainly look at it with interest to see what it does and see how it fits in with existing ministerial commitments.

**Mr Attwood:** More than that, junior Minister. I apologise that I was delayed with another matter, but given that my colleague to the left had four questions that barely got answered —

**Ms J McCann:** That is fair enough. We would be open to that, yes.

**Mr Attwood:** Would you be agreeable to that, Jennifer?

**Mr Bell:** Let me assure you that anyone who has not had their question specifically answered today, and, unfortunately, we have ministerial commitments —

**Mr Attwood:** I believe very strongly that —

**Mr Bell:** As the Chair said —

**Mr Attwood:** — the junior Ministers should be brought back every three weeks until all these matters are resolved.

**Mr Bell:** We are open to answering any question from today that members had in their head that we were not able to answer. Just drop us a line, and we will answer any question.

**Mr Attwood:** Jonathan, you know that it is the interrogation of the answers that is most revealing, not the written word. The Committee needs to have the opportunity to interrogate your answers, and passing pieces of paper does not wash.

I will ask questions only about the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS), but that is not to be taken as my not having a lot of questions about anything else. Save for the programme board, which has now been started, has an independent review been conducted by a third-party consultant team into the internal workings of the VSS, such as how it conducts its internal business and financial affairs?

**Ms J McCann:** No, that is what we are asking the commissioner to do.

**Mr Attwood:** No third-party organisation has conducted a review of the internal mechanisms of the VSS to date.

**Dr McMahon:** The main review of the financial mechanisms has been an internal audit review, which has been taken forward. That is done by our auditors to an independent standard and, in turn, shared, as audit reports are, with the Audit Office.

**Mr Attwood:** Are you prepared to share that report with us?

**Dr McMahon:** We would have to look at that. I am not sure what our normal policy is.

**Mr Bell:** We will check against policy, and we will take a look. As I said before you came in, we have asked the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, Kathryn Stone, to commission an independent assessment of the Victims and Survivors Service.

**Mr Attwood:** Let us deal with that, but I think that it is very important that, given the issues around the VSS, given that there is to be an internal audit report and given the need to get the issue right — whatever way we do that over the next period — if there is source material that would be useful to share with the Committee to inform it in its assessment of the VSS, I look forward to a positive reply.

Let us take the board that you have set up.

**The Chairperson:** One last question, Alex, I am afraid, because of the time.

**Mr Attwood:** That is why I look forward to seeing you again before Christmas.

**Mr Bell:** I always look forward to seeing you, Alex.

**Mr Attwood:** Yes, I know. Is there a properly managed VSS complaints process when it comes to victims' concerns about the conduct of their affairs? On the board that has been set up, save for the Victims' Commissioner herself, is there anyone else outside the life of the Department who is part of that management board?

**Ms J McCann:** To be honest, the Victims' Commissioner was very challenging in the evidence that she came to the Committee with. She has been very open. As I say, she is very much part of setting up the review process.

**Mr Attwood:** I think that we would all agree with that, Jennifer.

**Ms J McCann:** I know where you are coming from.

**Mr Attwood:** Is there anyone else —

**Ms J McCann:** Outside of the Department?

**Mr Attwood:** One reading of it is that there is one person who is sourced from the life of victims and then there are a lot of departmental people. Given that departmental people and the VSS itself created the concerns around the VSS, it seems that the balance of numbers is disproportionately with those who arguably created the problems in the first place.

**Mr Bell:** We have to be focused on getting it right. I, as did members, earlier acknowledged the issues around forms. We have reduced those. Secondly —

**Mr Attwood:** It is not an issue of forms.

**Mr Bell:** Chairman, I really wish to —

**Mr Attwood:** It is about the fundamentals.

**Mr Bell:** With respect —

**Ms J McCann:** Can I very quickly —

**Mr Bell:** With respect, I just want to finish the point. That is what the victims brought up with us, so please do not tell me what it is not. I spoke with them. I met the Victims' Commissioner. That is what the victims told us. Forms were an issue for them.

**Mr Attwood:** Were?

**Mr Bell:** We have reduced that.

Communication was a difficulty —

**Mr Attwood:** What about —

**Mr Bell:** — and we have addressed that. The interesting thing is that, no matter how things may seem to you, we specifically listen to the victims' forum and the service's working group. We listen to victims directly. They have acknowledged, as I said earlier, the progress that has been made in each of the areas.

**The Chairperson:** These are very important and detailed issues. Members, I suggest that, rather than trying to squeeze them into what is now overtime, we return to them at the earliest possible moment. I acknowledge the frustration of members in not getting enough time to speak. That was my call: I decided to postpone the meeting for half an hour because several members felt that they had a desire and a duty to attend another event this morning. We could not have started at 2.00 pm. That has cut off half an hour, or a third of the time. If members feel that that is wrong, I apologise, but I felt that it was the right call. Hopefully, we will get you back sooner rather than later. Obviously, Alex is going to make a proposal.

Next week, we have a meeting predicated on two briefings from officials. Have we any reason to believe that we will not get those briefings?

**Mr Bell:** None that I am aware of. I am very sympathetic to why you made the call. I feel that it was the right one. There is no reason why you will not get the briefings.

**The Chairperson:** Should a briefing be postponed, there will be plenty of time on our hands if you care to come back.

**Ms J McCann:** OK. Thank you.

**Mr Bell:** That is even earlier than three weeks.

**The Chairperson:** That would be one week. Junior Ministers, thank you very much.

**Mr Bell:** Thank you very much, Chair and Committee members.

**The Chairperson:** You look kindly on a prompt reply to any questions put in writing that were not asked orally.

**Mr Bell:** Yes.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you.