



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Delivering Social Change for Children and
Young People: Departmental Briefing

22 January 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

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

Witnesses:

Ms Patricia Carey	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Ms Margaret Rose McNaughton	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mrs Janet Smyth	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson: We welcome to the Committee Margaret Rose McNaughton, Janet Smyth and Patricia Carey from the Department. You are very welcome. Margaret, are you in a position to make some opening remarks?

Ms Margaret Rose McNaughton (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I am indeed, yes. Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you all for the opportunity to brief the Committee on the Delivering Social Change for children and young people consultation. Patricia Carey and Janet Smyth both work on child poverty and have been most closely involved in bringing this whole process to this stage.

I will give you a bit of background on how we have reached this point. You will know that the Delivering Social Change framework was set up by the Executive to tackle poverty and social exclusion, and Delivering Social Change represents a new level of joined-up working right across Departments to achieve real, long-lasting social benefits for those who need them most.

The Delivering Social Change agenda has full ministerial and cross-departmental support, which is reflected in its structures through the ministerial committees and the programme board. So, this is a new way of doing business, and we are moving away from lengthy action plans listing existing activities. We plan to focus instead on a smaller number of actions that we feel can really make a difference. Underpinning all of this work, in recognition of how important it is that all our children and

young people get the best possible start in life, the significance of early intervention is well recognised. The early work on Delivering Social Change focused on identifying the needs of children and families. Through a more joined-up approach, we think that we can make changes in children's lives and, in doing so, break the cycle of multigenerational poverty.

In consultation with stakeholders in 2012, the 'Children and Young Persons Early Action Document' was developed. That set out the key priorities to be taken forward under the Delivering Social Change framework. The priority areas included early years, early interventions, literacy and numeracy, transitions, integrated delivery, and joined-up planning and commissioning.

'Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People' builds on that work and further represents the Executive's commitment to reducing child poverty and delivering improved outcomes for all children. The document brings together all that work and represents the Executive's child poverty strategy as required under the Child Poverty Act 2010. We intend that it will provide an annual report to the Assembly on child poverty, deliver our commitments under Our Children and Young People — Our Pledge, which is the Executive's 10-year strategy for children, and will help with further implementation of our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The consultation document has taken account of the work commissioned by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) to develop a child poverty outcomes model. It also takes account of responses from all Departments on the progress in tackling child poverty, as well as the work being developed by the children and young person's programme in the UNESCO centre, which is carrying out a piece of work on behalf of OFMDFM to develop child rights indicators.

The consultation document sets out a vision and outcomes. Indeed, six outcomes in the document have been developed from documents that are out there at the moment, from the 10-year strategy, the child poverty strategy and the child poverty outcomes model. We have brought all those together in the one document.

You will probably know that OFMDFM commissioned the National Children's Bureau to assist in establishing an outcomes model. A significant amount of work was undertaken in the development of the outcomes framework, which was published last October. Since then, we have been building on that work, which has culminated in the children and young people's strategy. Indicators in the strategy will hopefully provide measures to help to quantify the achievement of the outcomes and give us a better understanding of how we are actually progressing in trying to meet the outcomes.

In the document, there are a number of scorecards that aim to show clearly how we are progressing against each of the outcomes. That approach will, hopefully, help us to set the baseline information relative to where we are at present in meeting the outcomes, ensure that the actions taken are measurable through clearly established indicators, allow us to observe emerging trends and respond accordingly, and reconsider the actions that we need to take, as necessary.

As a first key action, we are proposing that we have further consultation and engagement with key stakeholders as we develop the scorecards. As proposed in the child poverty outcomes framework, we want to use the turning-the-curve methodology. I understand that the NCB is to provide the Committee with an update or more information on the outcomes framework within the next few weeks.

'Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People' issued for public consultation on Monday. First, I would like to apologise to the Committee for the short notice in making you aware of the consultation. We are also aware that the consultation period provided is shorter than we would have liked.

In respect of where we are at the moment and our responsibilities to lay the revised child poverty strategy before the Assembly at, I think, the end of March, we wanted to combine the policies that were currently out there in respect of the 10-year strategy and the obligations under the UNCRC. That work took a little bit more time than we had anticipated, but we now hope that we have a much better and more comprehensive strategy that maps out how we will take forward the work on child poverty.

During the consultation period, we want to continue to work with Departments, key stakeholders, parents and children to further develop the proposals in the document. We will have a consultation plan laid out over the next four or five weeks. We plan to have extensive further consultation through public consultation events, Turning-the-curve exercises with Departments and their stakeholders, online surveys, questionnaires and any other opportunities that will allow us to present the strategy to as many people as possible in order to enable us to move forward.

We hope to lay the strategy before the Assembly by 24 March, as required by the Child Poverty Act 2010. We plan to continuously review the plans within the strategy and work collaboratively across Departments and with key stakeholders from now right through the course of the next 12 months.

The strategy will be reported on annually, with reports laid before the Assembly each March on the actions in the final strategy, current data on the indicators for each outcome and the measures set in the Child Poverty Act. The strategy will formally be reviewed in three years, but I stress that we intend to update the strategy as required, depending on the progress that we are making. As we continuously monitor, if changes are needed at perhaps six-monthly intervals throughout that period, we can do that.

I assure the Committee that any of its views on the document, at this stage and subsequently, will be taken on board as we continue to engage throughout implementation and delivery. I hope that that information is useful. The Department welcomes the Committee's views on this approach and on the consultation document.

The Chairperson: OK, Margaret. Thank you for the briefing. In your opening remarks, you mentioned consulting, including children. Is there a child-friendly version of this document?

Ms McNaughton: Yes, one is in development at the moment, and we hope that it will be available and with us when we go meet the children.

The Chairperson: So the answer is no, there is not one, but there will be one.

Ms McNaughton: Yes, we are currently working on one.

The Chairperson: When will that be ready?

Mrs Janet Smyth (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): By the end of next week.

Ms McNaughton: Yes.

The Chairperson: By the end of next week. This is a four- to five-week consultation process, and that document will not be ready for another week and a half.

Ms McNaughton: We hope to have it available to take with us when we actually go to the children, so we can take them through it.

The Chairperson: For how long will the document be available during the consultation process?

Ms McNaughton: About three to four weeks.

The Chairperson: Why is it not a 12-week consultation, as is standard practice?

Ms McNaughton: I appreciate that 12 weeks is standard practice, but we are obliged to lay a revised strategy in the Assembly by 24 March. We were hoping that this new approach would enable us to provide our revised strategy, as well as the annual report.

The Chairperson: Yes, but 24 March is not news to you. You have known that for a considerable time.

Ms McNaughton: You are absolutely right; we have. However, when we were looking at revising the strategy, we wanted to take account of the work that had been completed on the child poverty outcomes model. That was published in October and we had referred, I think, in the most recent annual report, last March, to the fact that the child poverty outcomes model would form the basis of any future strategy report. Taking that board and trying to amalgamate the documents has taken this length of time to get to this stage.

The Chairperson: So, from October last year, you have been engaged in some form of formal review and seeking the views of stakeholders.

Ms McNaughton: Throughout last year, in developing the child poverty outcomes model, there was extensive stakeholder engagement, with many workshops. From September onwards, we have, internally, been doing a literature review of all the actions being taken right across Departments and working up this revised document.

The Chairperson: But with no engagement with the Committee.

Ms McNaughton: To date, there has been limited engagement. You met the Child Poverty Alliance. Last Monday, at the Belfast City Council event, this was discussed — it probably was not discussed in detail — but people were advised of the document at that point. We hope that, over the next four to five weeks, we will get out to as many people as possible to get their views at this stage. After that, right throughout next year, we hope to continue that engagement with stakeholders and, indeed, with parents and children.

The Chairperson: I hope that you do not think that I am being precious, but you did not brief the Committee ahead of your event on Monday. When were we invited? On Monday? When was the invitation to the Committee?

Ms McNaughton: For the Belfast City Council —

The Chairperson: For the launch of this consultation.

Mrs Smyth: The launch was a press release.

The Chairperson: We were not invited.

Mrs Smyth: The press release went out on Monday.

The Chairperson: We were copied in on the press release, but we were not invited to the event.

Mrs Smyth: The Lord Mayor sent out his own personal invitations across the sector. We were not involved in sending out invitations. That came from Belfast City Council.

The Chairperson: OK. The consultation is open until 21 February, and you would welcome the views of the Committee by 21 February.

Ms McNaughton: Yes.

The Chairperson: The same as everybody else.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 talks about eradicating child poverty by 2020. Does this document of yours address eradicating through concrete actions?

Ms McNaughton: We have to be realistic about eradicating poverty by 2020. The document tries to agree outcomes and focus on a smaller number of actions. As we focus on those actions, we will report progress and watch the trends on those actions to see whether they are making a difference throughout the course of the year, rather than waiting until the end of the year to see whether we have actually made any progress. We certainly hope that it will help to reduce poverty with the actions that we are taking. There are no guarantees that we will be able to eradicate child poverty by then. Indeed, the latest report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which was published on Tuesday or Wednesday of last week — 15 January — suggests that, for all of us, the trends at the moment are not going the way in which we would have hoped. We hope that the actions to be taken in the document will help.

Ms Patricia Carey (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The requirement in the Act is to identify measures that will help to eradicate child poverty. In a devolved setting, those are within the functions that fall to the individual Departments. An awful lot of the factors that determine child poverty are determined at Westminster, so there is already limited scope here to have a huge impact on the child poverty figures. For example, one of the big factors that causes child poverty is parental income. Obviously, benefit rates contribute to that. Initiatives are going on in the UK to eradicate that. What we are doing is on top of what is already government policy on non-devolved

issues. The actual scope to have a big dent in the overall figures is limited. That is why, in the Child Poverty Act, the requirement is to identify measures that will help to contribute to eradication. There is always a difficulty in establishing the extent to which that happens.

The strategy, and the work that we have been trying to do up to now, is about trying to get to the measures that we can take in the circumstances that will make as big a difference as possible. The work done on the options model is to try to get to the stage where we are as certain as we can be that what we are doing is going to make a difference. That is a big difference from before. A huge amount of work has been put into that exercise. The National Children's Bureau (NCB) is going to talk to the Committee more about that. In many ways, that is a better approach than what we have had before. Bringing together the three strands of work is a better way of looking at children's issues in the main — to look at them in the round. Rather than separating off child poverty and looking at it on its own, it makes more sense to look at all children's issues in a holistic way. In some ways, that has meant that the process has got squeezed at this end to having a consultation document ready, but we think that, in the longer term, it will make a bigger difference to children and be a more meaningful way of addressing child poverty.

The Chairperson: Given the influence that you identify of the UK Government at Westminster, what is your view of Northern Ireland-appropriate or Northern Ireland-specific targets?

Ms Carey: It is quite tricky, because the definition of child poverty is below 60% of the median salary. That is set at a UK level, so because our median salary is lower than that in the UK, there is already a bigger gap to meet. If we had specific measures here, it would be quite hard to set a baseline, and we would be setting a rate different to what we were looking at in the UK, so we would be measuring differently. There would also be less opportunity to influence the eradication of poverty, because meeting those targets would not be within our control, in the same way as it is not now. So, in some ways, it would not really help the problem. The problem can be addressed by taking action to increase the income of families and, therefore, the children in those families.

The Chairperson: Is it not the case that an improving picture UK-wide and a worsening picture in Northern Ireland are not mutually exclusive? The two could happen in parallel. Could you answer, just for the sake of the recordings, rather than —

Ms Carey: I am not really in a position to comment, because, although there are some merits in that, I could not comment on how it would work in practice. It is not something that we have really looked at or thought about before.

Mrs Hale: Welcome to the Committee, ladies. Disabled children and their families are particularly prone to poverty, given that a lot of their parents, as you said, become carers and forgo outside parental income. How will the strategy protect families who have disabled children? Have you looked at the disability strategy and tried to put that together in this one?

Ms McNaughton: Do you mean, how can the strategy help disabled children and their families?

Mrs Hale: Yes, given that they are more vulnerable to poverty as one parent tends to be a full-time carer.

Ms McNaughton: The strategy will apply to all children, right across the board. Take the first outcome at page 26: "Families have adequate incomes and work that pays." One of the things that we are planning as part of that is childcare for school age children. Within the childcare strategy, there are two key actions around supporting disabled children. We hope that each of the outcomes will impact in some way on all children, including disabled children.

If there are things in each of these scorecards where we ask, "What works to do better?" that are specific to disabled children, we are happy to look at them. Some of them may be part of the disability strategy, but we recognise that there is a need in some cases to specify a little bit more about disabled children and the support that might be available for them. That is one example of where some of the things that we are doing will also impact on disabled children.

Mrs Hale: The families of disabled children will be glad to hear that. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Margaret, you referenced the childcare strategy. There is not one: there is a strategy framework. For the record, there is no such thing.

Ms McNaughton: Sorry. That is absolutely right, yes.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you for your presentation. You are very welcome to the Committee.

I am a bit more flabbergasted and shocked than I normally am, even in this Committee. To be notified of something as significant as this via a routine press release on Monday and have a matter of days to give it any sort of consideration before this briefing is extremely difficult. I presume all of that was not down to your decision-making, so I do not target that criticism solely at yourselves, if at all. It makes life very difficult for us.

I will give you some initial reaction from the limited opportunity I have had to consult some of the stakeholders and practitioners whom I am sure you will be hoping to work with on the delivery of much of this. There is real concern that five weeks is not enough to adequately respond to a strategy of this stature.

The explanation of 24 March as the deadline — if memory serves me right, Chair, that deadline has yet to be met in any year. Obviously we want you to meet the deadline, but it seems a strange reason for having the five-week consultation, given that it has been passed on at least one previous occasion by quite some period of weeks. Outcomes and indicators are obviously a key part of the strategy, and there are some being set. A lot of them seem to be existing strategies or first actions for strategies, in the case of childcare, and a lot of them seem to be very close to the signature projects. I will need time to look more closely at it, but I am struggling to identify too much beyond that at this stage. There is also concern around an absence of quantifiable targets. Can you say something about being able to measure how successful we have been in relation to those outcomes?

Ms McNaughton: I appreciate that you have not had an opportunity to go into any detail yet in the document, but from page 26 onwards, we have the balanced scorecards, and in all those scorecards there is a baseline that should tell you where we are starting off from and where we are at the moment. Some of the figures are perhaps just up to 2011-12.

We have gone away from talking about targets; it is more about outcomes, indicators and actions rather than targets. So, in terms of how this is actually laid out, people agree the outcome first of all, and then, in agreeing the outcome, we work backwards. What indicators will tell us whether we are meeting that outcome? Who do we need to be involved in trying to meet that outcome? What other Departments need to be involved? Then we start working out what the actions are likely to be. So, we are not talking about targets here; we are talking about outcomes, indicators and the actions to take.

I take your point that most of the actions here are things that are already being done, but, as part of the consultation exercise, what we are doing with Departments — and we will have the support of NCB in doing this — will be taking each of the outcomes and carrying out a turning-the-curve exercise on each one of the outcomes. So, the actions might well change as we go through the course of those exercises. There may be other actions that Departments feel are a better way to actually meet our outcome, providing that we have an indicator already developed and that the data is there that we can use. So, we are getting away from targets a wee bit more.

Mr Lyttle: OK. So, if we take an indicator, for example, that children in poverty achieve good educational outcomes, one of the indicators is the proportion of school leavers achieving five A* to C GCSEs. What proportion is a good success for the strategy? Will that be detailed at some other stage?

Ms McNaughton: The population that we are aiming this at is all 14- to 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, and it includes subjects in academic and vocational areas. The aim is that a large proportion of 14- to 16-year-olds will be able to meet the target. We will start off at the baseline, and we will know what proportion at the moment are meeting that target. Our aim will be a fairly substantial increase. When we look at the story behind the baseline, we can say that the proportion of those who are achieving has steadily increased from 61.6% to 67.9% between a particular year. The whole point of that one page is to tell you the entire story of where we are in terms of meeting an outcome, what the baseline is and where we hope to go to.

Mr Lyttle: OK. Does the strategy link in with other departmental initiatives, for example DSD benefit uptake work or DETI financial capability strategy?

Ms McNaughton: Yes, the financial capability strategy will need to take account of all those. It fits within the whole Delivering Social Change framework. That is one of the things that we want to discuss with Departments when we are doing the turning-the-curve exercises. There are probably other things happening that we would like to include in the "What works to do better" part of this.

Mr Lyttle: Does the children's budgeting pilot link in with the strategy? Can you tell us a bit more about the pilot?

Ms McNaughton: The pilot is really one of the issues that are coming through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We want to see how we can trace the money that goes to particular Departments. I am not quite sure if the two or three Departments have been identified yet. It is to see just how easy it is to trace the funding that is going directly to children. In some Departments, of course, it will be very difficult to trace. For example, on roads, it is very difficult to trace where the money goes, but it will be for health and education. That will all be linked here. If that is an action that we need to pursue further, then we will put it in as part of what works to do better.

Mr Lyttle: Chair, is it possible to have another session or a more detailed session to take a bit of a run through the strategy? Having said what I have said on the negative aspect, there may be quite an amount of material for the Committee to work with, support and try to follow up for you, but it is extremely difficult to engage with something properly in a 48-hour period.

Ms McNaughton: Absolutely. I appreciate that. Would it be useful to have a turning-the-curve event with the Committee? We could organise something as part of our consultations with Departments.

The Chairperson: I think it would be useful if the Committee took a view on that after this session.

Mr Maskey: Thank you, Margaret Rose, for your presentation so far. Obviously, it is quite a document and report that we have to look at, so it is a wee bit difficult to absorb it all. I appreciate the work that you have put into that. Like Chris, I think it is important that we all meet our statutory obligations, but I think it would be better if we were pulling our hair off in here rather than stakeholders and organisations that are working on it on a day-to-day basis are pulling your hair out, because that is what is going to happen, given the five-week time frame that they have. I think it is nearly unheard of to have a consultation for such a short period of time on an issue as important as this.

I am looking at a couple of key things. I am as much asking myself and my colleagues around the table how we deal with it. For me, policies, strategies and legislation are tools to deliver something. It is rightly based on outcomes, but, as I read it — you referred to the Institute for Fiscal Studies report — the trajectory for child poverty is actually going to get worse, rather than improve. I think the methodology of measurement is one factor, but it does not address the key issue. For me, if we implement the Welfare Reform Bill today, like we are supposed to, we are automatically going to put quite a number of young people into the statistics of poverty. What use is this document to me if I am trying to address that matter? More importantly, what use is it to those families who will be put into poverty as a result of that?

There are other measures as well that would have a similar impact. I am trying to work out how we actually address that. For example, if we are looking at legislation for the provision of goods and services and we do not want to include young people in that, how does that square with the idea that children have to live in a society that respects their rights? I am asking myself how the consultation and those suppositions address those issues. They are more fundamental questions for the politicians, but I am just looking for your opinion.

There are two key things for me. Welfare reform is going to increase the number of young children in this community in poverty. Goods and services legislation that does not deal with young people does not respect their rights, in my view. What use is it to those people who need those rights enshrined and protected? Ultimately, if it is about outcomes, those are the kinds of outcomes. That is the only thing relevant to me at the end of the day. Are those things going to help us to address those problems or not? There are two key points, in my view, where this is not going to make a blind bit of difference, as far as I can see. That is no disrespect to you in putting it together; I am just making the observation. I think Patricia reminded us earlier that it is about having to report on what measures

might make a positive impact. Are there any measures contained in it that I have not seen that would make a positive impact against some of the difficulties that you have outlined?

Ms McNaughton: I suppose, with all of these things coming along, we absolutely have to focus on the things that will make a real difference and make sure that Departments are working together and using their budgets accordingly to actually do the things that will make the biggest difference. I think that that is where we need to try to get to as we go through the consultation.

Mr Maskey: I will make a final point, Chair. Those are the answers that people will be looking for in the middle of a consultation. They will be telling you what they think the problem is, but they will also be looking for some advice as to how it might be corrected.

Mr Attwood: Maybe I should know the answer to this question, but have any of the other devolved Administrations set domestic targets in relation to child poverty reduction or eradication?

Mrs Smyth: The devolved Administrations have got the same targets as us. We have to apply the Child Poverty Act 2010 across the board. We are currently coordinating a review of our practice over the past couple of years. We will produce a review, and that will go forward to the Committee over the next week or two. The same applies to Wales and Scotland. They are also undergoing a review and looking at their targets. The UK is producing a report across the devolved Administrations, as well. As soon as that has been produced, we will forward it to the Committee and you can have sight of it. That will clearly demonstrate what they are doing and how they are taking it forward.

Mr Attwood: To answer the question, are they taking it forward with hard targets?

Mrs Smyth: I am not able to answer that, to be honest. I have not seen sight of their review report, so I cannot answer that at this time.

Mr Attwood: Are they not doing what you are doing — laying before their domestic Parliament or Assembly a report at this time? Maybe they are even ahead of where we are in tabling the report.

Mrs Smyth: I think they are running to the same time frame as us. I know that the UK has not issued its document for consultation, as yet, so we are a bit ahead in relation to that. Scotland is also running to very tight turnaround times. They are either ready to go out for consultation in relation to their revised strategy, or it has gone out over the past day, or whatever. That is as much information as we know from the devolved Administrations.

Ms Carey: We can find this out, because I am not absolutely sure, but they may have set their own targets. However, the statutory obligation that they are working to is the same as the one that we have and as the UK, which is in line with the UK salary median. That is what they have to formally report against. They may, as an Administration, have set their own targets. We can certainly find that out and give that information to the Committee.

Mr Attwood: Is there not some joined-up discussions going on between the devolved Administrations about how each is handling this? I do not have the answer — maybe I should — but I am surprised that you do not have the answer.

Ms McNaughton: There have not been any discussions during the past year on what the targets are. I think you are absolutely right: we probably do need to have a bit more discussion. We will be sharing what we are planning to do on the outcomes model with the UK Administrations. I think the National Children's Bureau has already shared its outcomes model, and people are quite — not excited about it, but they feel that it is something that is really worth pursuing. In some ways, we might, at this point, be a little bit further forward than some of the devolved Administrations with what we have seen. Because they have not published anything formally —

Mr Attwood: I hope the other devolved Administrations are not as far behind as we are. I can understand why there do not seem to be better conversations going on with the other devolved Administrations. Given that this is UK-wide legislation and the headline requirements are laid down by Westminster, why is there not more knowledge today about what Wales and Scotland are going to do? Scotland has a practice of going for hard targets. It did so in climate change and the reduction of emissions, for example. Scotland has hard targets — which it is not meeting, and it will admit that — but nonetheless it put into law its own climate change legislation and hard targets on the domestic

reduction of emissions, whatever about the wider UK and European requirements. They may have done the same on this or, on the contrary, they may be doing precisely what you are doing and trying to go by other means.

Today, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) produced a report commenting on procurement practice. One of the report's conclusions criticises DFP for setting "unambitious collaborative procurement savings targets." The PAC, on one hand, is telling government and Departments that their targets are not challenging, yet when it comes to child poverty we are not setting targets at all. My view is that you should set targets. Yes, you may not live up to them, and there are factors beyond the control of a domestic Parliament in that regard, but you should set targets and they should be challenging, because when we do not have targets or when we have targets shaped, if I can put it that way, by the Civil Service, then you do not get very far.

Ms Carey: When the child poverty legislation was being developed, the whole issue of targets and what was meaningful was discussed. It was always recognised that to eliminate child poverty by 2020 and to have targets that actually meant something would be a difficult task. The decision to have income-based targets was taken almost as a proxy, as the best guess. It is a difficult issue. To set separate targets here that would actually mean something is, of itself, not as straightforward as it might sound, because how do you decide whether the target you are setting is the thing that is going to eliminate child poverty? That is the kind of dilemma.

Mr Attwood: Subject to the Hansard report, you said earlier that, when it came to targets — I quote — "That was not something that we looked at or thought about before".

Ms Carey: No, this Administration did not, but the UK Government, when they were deciding how to measure and decide whether they would know in 2020 whether child poverty had been eliminated, had to decide what kind of targets they could use, and they used four. They decided on absolute poverty, relative poverty — absolute, relative — and those are all income-based. In the UK legislation, yes, thinking was done about setting targets here, but this Administration have not given that consideration in this mandate as to what specific targets would be. However, the point I am making is that the same problems would apply. In deciding whether child poverty is eliminated, it is a fairly crude measure to use income-based targets. One reason why this exercise was taking place was to try to make a bridge between income-based targets and the functions that Departments can deliver.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. I am just looking at some of the key actions. There is a point here:

"Provide additional support to young people with disabilities to improve their transition to adulthood and enable them to seek further education and qualifications."

Can you explain exactly what you mean by providing additional support? In my understanding, the real issue here is that when children leave a school such as, for example, Sperrinview in Dungannon, there is nowhere for them to go. It is only very recently that Dungannon FE college has provided a course.

I should also flag up as well that DEL has recently announced an inquiry into the area of special educational needs, and there is also a review going on, which is probably something that you should look at as well, but there is a very real issue in that these kids have nowhere to go once they leave a special educational needs school. I notice that you do not have the Departments listed, but those issues would be for DE and DEL. Transitions would be for DE and the rest of it would be for DEL.

Ms McNaughton: We recognise that transitions is a huge issue, and it is one of the things that we need to focus on when we go out to consultation. Janet is taking forward some work on transitions as well with DE and DEL. Did you want to say anything about that?

Mrs Smyth: At the last interdepartmental ministerial group meeting, DEL tabled a paper on the Bamford action plan. It requested that, because it is such a cross-cutting issue, we look across all Departments at how to move that work forward. We are at the point at which OFMDFM will coordinate and facilitate meetings across Departments to look specifically at transitions. We have set up a departmental advisory group on implementation of the disability strategy, which will also be addressed through that forum. So this is very high on the agenda. Earlier this morning, I met the Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance to update them on the disability strategy and this paper. At that meeting,

I mentioned that the transitions issue would now be put on the agenda and how, working across Departments, we would progress that work.

Ms McGahan: I appreciate your response, but there is no getting away from the fact that when some of those kids leave school, there is nowhere for them to go. It is DEL's responsibility to deal with them. We are looking at and need to be very focused on transitions.

Mrs Smyth: The Minister for Employment and Learning is really keen to move forward with that. He recognises that it is an issue. His Department is keen to engage with other Departments, with OFMDFM facilitating, on taking it forward.

Mr Cree: I, too, am concerned about the lack of targets. The Programme for Government has key performance indicators. Indeed, it mentions the model to be used to develop a "monitoring and evaluation framework." How will you do that if you do not have milestones, key performance indicators (KPIs) or measures?

Ms McNaughton: We had hoped to use the balanced scorecard for monitoring. We have the outcome, the indicator and the baseline, so we will have a graph showing the trend.

Mr Cree: Do you have a baseline for all of the Departments involved?

Ms McNaughton: The baseline will be where we are now and our present outcomes, which our data shows. It depends on which Departments are involved. We already know from annual reports whether outcomes are being met or what progress is being made. We were trying to get away from setting a whole range of targets by having an outcome that everybody could sign up to and work towards meeting. In monitoring how well we do against the outcome, we will still have our data and all of our indicators. The project that NCB carried out for us was on outcomes-based accountability.

Mr Cree: Will the indicators be performance indicators?

Ms McNaughton: Yes, they will be indicators because we will monitor them regularly to ensure that we are going in the right direction: for example, what is our performance on children leaving school with five GCSEs? Each time that we collect data, whether on a three-monthly or six-monthly basis, if we do not see performance improving, we will need to take action at that point.

The Chairperson: Sorry, did you say that you collect GCSE data on a three-monthly or six-monthly basis?

Ms McNaughton: No. Sorry — children leaving school is only one of several examples. As part of the process, we hope to monitor all of the outcomes quite closely. Some, such as the GCSE one, will be longer-term, so we will not know the results until the end of the year. For others, such as certain health issues, we will have much more regular data. One outcome, for example, is:

"Children and families live in a safe and secure environment."

The indicator is the number of families presenting to the NIHE as homeless. We might have more regular data for those. We hope to monitor much more regularly those for which there is more regular data. We will then be able to see from our graph whether the trend is upward or downward. That will show us how we are progressing.

Mr Cree: Is your expectation, in itself, not an indicator?

Ms McNaughton: I suppose that it is. If we look at the trend regularly and it is not in the direction that we hoped, that is the point at which we can change either the indicator or some of the actions that we were planning to take.

Mr Cree: If you are liaising with different Departments, how do you hope to achieve that result?

Ms Carey: The duty and the requirement are on each individual Department, as well as all of us collectively, so much of the expertise will lie within one Department. For the actions identified on a departmental basis to help to eradicate child poverty, it will be for one Department to provide some of

the information, set reasonable targets and look at what the indicators might be. We coordinate, and have responsibility for, the areas that fall within the remit of OFMDFM. The intention, using this new tool, is to identify with Departments the best ways to progress. Much of it will be the responsibility of Departments to take forward in consultation with us.

Mr Cree: Yes, but, to hold them to account, surely you must have some sort of indicators.

Ms Carey: Yes, absolutely. What those indicators are will be determined as part of the process.

Mr Cree: I ask you again: will they be targets?

Ms Carey: We are probably using different terms to mean different things. I do not think that we are at cross purposes except on definitions. To measure whether there is progress, we will have to set a baseline, and that is the intention. We will have to decide through some measure or indicator whether progress has been achieved. We will then have an action to achieve that target. Some of the terminology is different in this model. I am not absolutely sure that I am talking about exactly the same thing as you are.

Mr Cree: I am just putting myself in your place and asking, "How can I possibly know whether a Department is not meeting a target unless we have agreed a clear baseline and an expectation of what we want to achieve?"

Ms Carey: We will have a baseline for whatever the indicator is: for example, the number of families presenting to the NIHE as homeless. As the consultation document shows, we know what that baseline has been and that we are starting in 2008-09. So, as we regularly monitor the number of families who present, we will see, as the year goes on, whether the trend is upward or downward.

Mr Cree: I do not want to labour the point, but you could achieve that by having an increase or decrease of one. You need to have a meaningful expectation.

Ms McNaughton: Absolutely.

Mr Cree: I will switch to another issue. This has been touched on, but I believe that it is very important. How will you organise the consultation in the few weeks that remain? You mentioned a press release. What else will you do to get to these groups and people to ensure the maximum input?

Ms McNaughton: Janet, you have been working on a consultation plan. Do you want to say a wee bit about how the consultation will take place?

Mrs Smyth: We appreciate that it is a short consultation period and that that is not ideal by any means. However, within that period, we hope to have full and extensive engagement and consultation. We will go out to public consultation: we will have five or six events across the geographical spread of Northern Ireland. We will work with the sector —

Mr Cree: These are open, public meetings.

Mrs Smyth: Yes, public consultation across Northern Ireland is one avenue. The meetings will be held in the evening to facilitate folk who work during the day and are not able to attend a daytime public consultation event. There will be a mix of evening and late-afternoon events across Northern Ireland, and we will work with the sector to facilitate those. In the past, when we went out to public consultation and organised events across Northern Ireland, very few people turned up to take part. That is just my experience of previous consultations. From talking with colleagues in Scotland and the rest of the UK, we know that, if we engage with the sector and use it to help to host and facilitate the events, we will, we hope, bring on board more attendees and, therefore, hear more views, which will help us to inform the revised strategy.

We also have a questionnaire, which is in the document. We have handed out approximately 200 of these at public consultation events: for example, at the Lord Mayor's event on Monday, which discussed tackling poverty in Belfast. There was huge representation from across the sector, and we handed a document to everyone who came in through the door. At the beginning of the event, junior

Minister McCann gave a presentation in which she gave a commitment as Minister on what we will do and how we will move forward on tackling poverty.

We touched on the children and young people consultation. We will bring in experts, who will go out to talk to children and families, and they will produce a report on the feedback. We will be able to use that report to help us to inform our revised strategy. As Margaret Rose mentioned, we will have six "turning the curve" exercises across various Departments. We have met Departments on several occasions, including yesterday. Celine McStravick from the National Children's Bureau has committed to going out with us to the various Departments and taking them and their stakeholders through those exercises.

We have an online survey through Survey Monkey. A few people in the sector feel that it is not necessarily the best tool or the best way to gather information.

Mr Cree: No, it is not an obvious one, is it?

Mrs Smyth: Others have used it very successfully, and we have used it in other consultations. It has been successful, and we have been able to gather very relevant information from it. It is just another opportunity to try to engage with the sector.

As I mentioned, we addressed a wide range of people in the sector at the Lord Mayor's event. This morning, I was at a Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance meeting, which was attended by about 25 people from the various organisations that represent children with disabilities. I briefed them on the 'Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People' paper, and I am delighted to say that they will give us feedback on that. On Friday, I will meet members of the Child Poverty Alliance, a representative forum of about 60 organisations across the sector, to give them an overview and consult them on the document.

Mr Cree: I do not want to labour these points because I could go on all day. It takes time for these networks to work. Four weeks is not an awful lot of time for them to get the paper to their members and motivate them to respond.

Finally, I will make it easy for you. I hesitate to use the term, but what will you consider to be a "satisfactory" response to the consultation? How many consultees?

Ms McNaughton: I am not sure that it is based on the number of consultees. The depth of response that we get will be important for us.

Mr Cree: Sorry, but that is not good enough. If six people were to respond and you said that the quality was good, quantifiably, that would just not work.

Ms McNaughton: Of course, we want to get to as many people as possible and give as many people as possible the opportunity to respond. We are not necessarily seeking written responses from everyone. If we get out to the public through meetings and stakeholder groups, take their views as part of a conversation with them and amend the document to reflect their views — subject, of course, to what their views are — that will be a really good use of our consultation time. It is about trying to make this a much more effective consultation.

Mr Cree: Yes, but unless it is also statistically acceptable, it will not count.

Ms Carey: We have been working with our statisticians on this, and they have helped us to design the paper and online questionnaires.

Mr Cree: Did they say that you need to get, say, 20,000 back?

Ms Carey: They have not said that, but they will, of course tell us if they do not regard the response as statistically significant. We will make sure that we ask that question: in fact, we can go back now and ask what they would regard as being a statistically significant response.

The Chairperson: Will you inform the Committee, please, of their response?

Ms McNaughton: Yes.

Mr Cree: According to NISRA's latest figures, 95,000 children are in relative poverty, so you will need a reasonable return to make your statistics accurate.

The Chairperson: That was a formal request that you come back to the Committee with a response from your statisticians on what constitutes a significant response.

Mr Spratt: I am a bit confused about the document that you referred to, Janet. I thought that we were told that it had not yet been printed but would be printed some time next week. However, you say that 200 documents were handed out at the Lord Mayor's event.

Mrs Smyth: Yes, 200 of these particular consultation documents. I was referring to turning this document into a child-friendly version.

Mr Spratt: Right.

Mrs Smyth: It is currently in the format that was handed out to the sector at the Lord Mayor's event, but we are having that transformed into a child-friendly version. This morning, there was also a request from the Children with Disabilities Strategic Alliance for an easy-to-read version, which we will produce. The front of the document states that should it be required in alternative formats, we will get those out as quickly as we can to those who request them.

Mr Spratt: The other thing that worried me considerably was that you said that you were working on the consultation process, so is that a work in progress?

Mrs Smyth: We have a consultation plan in place.

Mr Spratt: So when you said that you were working on the consultation process, was that to do with a document or something?

Mrs Smyth: No.

Mr Spratt: I am seriously concerned about the short consultation. I do not see why it has to be that short a process. I appreciate what you say about difficulties with attendance, but what are you doing to advertise the events? I go back to Mr Cree's point about consultees: surely you have a list of consultees who you will be dealing with. How will the events be advertised to groups in various areas? You said, I think, that the first one will be in Newry.

Mrs Smyth: No, I did not say where it was going to be.

Mr Spratt: There are four events, is that right?

Mrs Smyth: There will be between four and six public consultations. There will be other events, but those are the purely public consultation events.

Mr Spratt: From a Committee perspective, it is important, Chair, that we get a copy of how the process will take place and a list of the consultees. There is also the issue of having up to six meetings with the various Departments. What consultation will have taken place with Departments before you go out to consult the wider public? Has consultation taken place with the various Departments or are we playing catch-up?

Mrs Smyth: We met the Departments about two months ago, when we had the document at a good drafting stage, and again a couple of days ago. So the Departments are very much aware of the consultation and are committed to being part of it and driving forward the various outcomes listed therein. They are also committed to the 'turning the curve' exercises. Yesterday, Celine McStravick from the National Children's Bureau came to our meeting with Departments and ran through the model for the child poverty outcomes framework with them. We are delighted that she has agreed to work with us. She will go out to the Departments and take a step further to develop what they think will work better. They can then start to identify new actions and look at the actions noted on the current report cards.

Mr Spratt: You mentioned a Ministers' meeting — a ministerial something or other — at which various Ministers meet outside the Executive Committee. What exactly is that, and what stamp have they put on this to ensure that Departments deliver on the consultation, etc?

Ms McNaughton: Structures are set up within Delivering Social Change. The ministerial subcommittee met a few weeks ago. In discussions, each Department is represented on the Delivering Social Change programme board. The outcomes model was discussed with them as far back as last July, I think. The Departments responded by detailing current actions that fitted in with the outcomes model, and the four outcomes developed by that model, and potential actions. That work has been ongoing. The Departments came along to a training exercise that the NCB organised on 11 October on how the outcomes model would work. Mark Friedman took the training, and, as far as I can remember, most Departments were represented, so they have been involved, certainly since last July, if not before.

Mr Spratt: It is a short process, and I am not sure that that is the right thing to do, but we are where we are. I think that you said that the target date for the process to end was 23 March.

Ms McNaughton: 24 March.

Mr Spratt: When will you come back to the Committee? Will you commit to when you will return to brief us on the consultation process?

Ms McNaughton: Yes. I think that that is factored into the timetable. I do not have that here, but there are certain things that we need to do after 21 February and working back from 24 March. We will certainly come back to the Committee. The document then needs to go to the Executive, which also has to be factored in.

Mr Spratt: I have one final point, Chair. There are 108 MLAs in this place, and we need to make sure that MLAs' offices, MPs' offices and, indeed, local government are aware of this. Very often, we hear about the problems with some of these things. How do you intend to make them aware of the consultation process?

Ms McNaughton: There is a standard consultation list, and each MLA should have received a copy.

Mrs Smyth: The consultation list covers all section 75 groups and all MLAs. We noted your concerns about that earlier. It should have gone out at the beginning of the week to everyone on that list.

Mr Spratt: It may well have, I just have not seen it yet. Can the Committee get a copy of the list? Most consultations have a consultee list, and I think it important that we see that.

Ms McNaughton: Sure.

Ms McGahan: On the back of Jimmy's comments on the consultation plan, are you engaging with the chairpersons of neighbourhood renewal areas?

There are also rural networks such as COSTA in Tyrone, which oversees 50 to 60 community organisations. I recommend your having one of the public consultations in a rural area.

Ms McNaughton: Yes, absolutely.

The Chairperson: I have just a few final points. For the avoidance of doubt, I will outline the Committee's three requests from today: copies of the consultation plan; the list of consultees; and the statistical analysis from your experts of what would constitute a significant response. As you seem to work at great speed, we would like those for next week's meeting, please.

Secondly, your consultation opened on 20 January and runs until 21 February. From 21 February to 24 March is the period in which you will compile the report and lay it before the Assembly. Is it reasonable for you to take as long to analyse the responses and write your report as you do to consult?

Ms McNaughton: Within that time, we need to have the analysis done, come back to the Committee and then go to the Executive, so it is not just a case of taking five weeks to analyse the responses.

The Chairperson: I think that you get the mood of the room, which is that we do not think that this is good practice.

Some of us brought up Northern Ireland-specific targets. In February 2012, the Committee submitted a response to the Department on the then draft Programme for Government. Chapter 5 is headed "Gaps in the draft PfG", and paragraph 5.1 states:

"the Committee would like consideration given to producing Northern Ireland specific targets, which would allow monitoring of progress here and contribution towards meeting the targets in the UK Child Poverty Act. These targets could then be incorporated into the PfG".

I make it clear that such consideration was not given.

Ms Carey: As a policy official, I have not had any involvement in that. That does not mean that there were not discussions going on in other places, but I have not been involved in any discussions on Northern Ireland targets in this mandate.

The Chairperson: Is what I have just quoted news to you?

Ms Carey: I was not working on child poverty at the time, so there would have been no reason for me to know about it. Certainly, I have not been apprised of it in the meantime.

The Chairperson: When talking about other consultations, you mentioned — I think four times — the National Children's Bureau. At no point was the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) referenced. Is the commissioner happy with that?

Ms McNaughton: We will certainly consult the commissioner as well —

The Chairperson: Sorry, that is not the question. Is the commissioner happy with what you are doing? Are you saying that the commissioner is not aware?

Ms McNaughton: No. I have had discussions with the commissioner on the thrust of where we are going with the child poverty outcomes framework. She is aware of the framework and of —

The Chairperson: Is she content?

Ms McNaughton: At this point, she has not told me otherwise. She will not have seen the final document until this week, but she is certainly aware of the intention to bring all of these together and use the outcomes framework.

The Chairperson: As I am sure you know, the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 states that the commissioner champions children's rights in Northern Ireland and advises the Government on all aspects of children's policy and legislation.

Ms McNaughton: Yes, I am absolutely aware of that, and I have had discussions with her. That was back in October, following the publication of the outcomes framework. Also, when this document was being drafted, I shared our intention with her.

The Chairperson: OK. Janet, Margaret Rose and Patricia, thank you very much indeed.