



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Together: Building a United Community
Strategy: Update from OFMDFM Officials

5 February 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Together: Building a United Community Strategy: Update from OFMDFM 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
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Alex Maskey
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Miss Donna Blaney	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Fergus Devitt	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mrs Linsey Farrell	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson: We are joined by three officials: Linsey Farrell, Donna Blaney and Fergus Devitt. You are all very welcome. Fergus, I assume that you will make some opening remarks.

Mr Fergus Devitt (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I will, Chair.

The Chairperson: Before you do, why were no papers submitted to the Committee?

Mr Devitt: I am not in a position to answer that, Chair. We are happy to take the Committee through a detailed briefing and answer questions as fully as we can.

The Chairperson: I do not want to get off on the wrong foot, but you are saying that you do not aware of why papers were not submitted. Is it unreasonable for us to expect you, as part of your preparation for coming to the Committee, to encourage papers to be sent or, if papers have not been sent, at least to know that they have not been sent and why?

Mr Devitt: As I said, I am not in a position to answer that.

The Chairperson: You are in a position to answer what I just asked you. Is it unreasonable of me to assume that you would either know that papers had been provided or know that they had not and why?

Mr Devitt: That is a reasonable question for you to ask.

The Chairperson: So why did you not?

Mr Devitt: Why did I not —

The Chairperson: Why did you not make yourself aware of whether papers had or had not been provided? They have not been provided — why not?

Mr Devitt: I am aware that the papers were not provided. I am not in a position to say why they were not provided.

The Chairperson: Why did you not ask why they had not been provided?

Mr Devitt: My intention, Chair, is to give as full a briefing as possible today.

The Chairperson: I understand that, but we expect papers. That is the normal process.

Mr Devitt: I agree with that, Chair. We endeavour as far as possible to get papers to the Committee in advance.

The Chairperson: Yet you do not know why the papers were not delivered.

Mr Devitt: No.

The Chairperson: OK.

Mr Devitt: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the invitation to appear here today with Linsey and Donna to update the Committee on progress with the implementation of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy. I thank the Committee for deferring our attendance to today as a result of the United Youth design day. We had the opportunity to brief the Committee back in September, and we welcome the further opportunity to engage today.

As you are aware, the strategy sets out a range of actions and commitments for Departments, communities and individuals, who will work together to build a united community and achieve change against four key strategic priorities: our children and young people, our shared community, our safe community and our cultural expression. The headline actions range across the fields of education, housing, regeneration, sports, community interaction and interfaces. However, the range of commitments and actions extends well beyond the seven headline actions. In total, there are about 35 other actions and commitments, which, compositely, will contribute to achieving our vision of a shared, united and reconciled community.

With the agreement of members, I propose to focus today on progress against the seven headline actions, developments in establishing the delivery architecture required to monitor implementation and where we are with augmenting the existing Equality Commission to become an equality and good relations commission.

Senior responsible owners for all headline actions have now been appointed by Departments with lead responsibilities. Compositely, they make up the membership of the good relations project board, which has now met twice. The project board will report directly to the ministerial panel on the delivery of the strategy.

First, I will update the Committee on the United Youth programme because I know that that is of particular interest, especially given the recent design day event in the Waterfront Hall. I would like to thank you, Chair, for representing the Committee at that event. The design day on 23 January was the culmination of an extensive period of stakeholder engagement with youth sector organisations and young people. The purpose of the event was to test the proposals that have been developed on the basis of all the feedback received through stakeholder engagement and to help to build the design further towards implementation. The design day attracted an attendance of almost 300, including 60 young people. All the feedback received will be analysed, and a summary report outlining the key emerging themes will be published on the OFMDFM website. A United Youth adviser has been appointed to take forward the next design stage to bring the programme towards implementation. The

Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) has lead responsibility for that action, and we are working very closely with it on the development of the programme.

On 10 January, the Department of Education (DE) launched a call for expressions of interest for the 10 shared education campuses from schools across Northern Ireland. It was announced that applications to access funding for the delivery of the shared campuses would be accepted until 31 March.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) has identified a senior responsible owner for urban villages and a high-level design specification has been developed, the core aspects of which have been identified as creating community space, improving the area and its aesthetics, providing a range of uses in the area and community focus.

Under the summer camps commitment, OFMDFM is taking lead responsibility for the headline action to create 100 one- or two-week summer schools or camps across Northern Ireland. Approval has been given to a pilot year-round interventions programme to be run across the Belfast City Council area from summer 2014, with roll-out across other district council clusters as soon as possible. The pilot will provide a test ground for the commitment in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy for 100 summer schools or camps. The delivery of summer schools and camps across council areas in 2014 is a year in advance of the commitment's target date.

DSD is leading the work on shared neighbourhoods and is at an advanced stage in developing proposals and a funding package. Initial scoping has identified potential sites, an indicative budget and an associated timeline. An initial decision on the schemes to be developed will be made in the near future.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has been appointed as the lead Department to take forward the headline action on the cross-community sports programme and is developing proposals for its design and delivery, which will meet strategic priorities, fulfil the commitment to build on the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games and work across all sports to develop significant programmes for cross-community sporting events.

Design proposals are at an advanced stage to start work towards establishing the 10-year programme to reduce and eventually remove all interface barriers, working together with the local community. A very successful co-design event was held in Belfast Castle in November.

That is the end of the update, Chair, on the seven headline actions. I will now update the Committee on a couple of other aspects of the strategy's implementation.

A transition group, encompassing representatives from this Department, the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council, has been established to manage the setting up of the new equality and good relations commission. A communications working group has been established and has begun work on a communications strategy. Underpinning legislation is required for the establishment of the new commission, and it is anticipated that public consultation on the Bill could take place from March of this year. We will engage and work closely with the Committee on that legislation. If that timetable is followed, an analysis of consultation responses will go to Ministers in around August of this year, and the draft Bill will then be finalised and cleared for introduction to the Assembly around January of next year.

On the review of funding, one of the commitments in the strategy was to commission a comprehensive review of the structure, delivery and impact of existing funding delivery mechanisms. The findings of that review would be used to determine and shape the future funding and delivery model. The Strategic Investment Board has now identified appropriate resources to carry out the review. Work has commenced and will be done in two phases, both of which should be completed by June of this year.

Very briefly, on the delivery architecture, it is clear that a strategy of the scale of Together: Building a United Community requires collective commitment across all aspects of government and society. Significant work has been done over recent months to establish the delivery architecture. The ministerial panel, which is the central component of that structure, met on 16 December, and all Departments were represented at either permanent secretary or ministerial level. It is due to meet again on 27 March. The good relations project board, which comprises the senior responsible owners at deputy secretary level, has met twice already, with the next meeting planned for 19 March. Work is also under way to establish the range of thematic subgroups envisaged in the strategy. Compositely,

these structures will drive forward the implementation of all aspects of the strategy. The Department welcomes the Committee's ongoing interest in the implementation of the strategy, and we look forward to working closely with you as the implementation phase develops across all strands. I am happy to take any queries or questions on points of detail.

The Chairperson: Fergus, thank you very much. A natural starting point is the design event for United Youth at the Waterfront. There was a full house, and it was a busy day. You gathered a lot of information, from what I could see, particularly from the young people, so can you give us your early take on the sort of reaction that you are getting?

Mr Devitt: I can, Chair. We sent out an online survey for people to complete on what they thought about the day. I can give you the figures that we have received so far. Ninety per cent of the people who responded believed that it was a useful investment of their time, and 95% believed that the event raised awareness of the strategy and the United Youth programme. Over 80% felt that the event gave them an opportunity to input to the design of the programme, and over 80% felt that the event would help to further inform the design. We believe that those are very encouraging statistics from the people who have responded to date. The feedback on the day itself mirrors those sorts of feelings and figures.

The Chairperson: Was feedback on the five-stage framework positive?

Mr Devitt: Yes. That was broadly well received. That had already been developed out of the work that had taken place thus far. Part of the day was to test whether people still believed that that was an appropriate way to take the programme forward. The feedback that we have received so far suggests that it is.

The Chairperson: You employed a mentalist to stage the event. Sir Humphrey might say that that was "bold".

Mr Devitt: We employed an individual in the capacity of MC with whom the Department had worked previously. He was not there to do his stage show, as such.

The Chairperson: He seemed to hold the audience well.

Mr Devitt: He did, and I think that the young people in particular engaged with him well. As you might have noticed, Chair, he worked particularly well with Carl, the young people's champion, to try to get information from him.

The Chairperson: Yes. Design work on proposals to implement the actions was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2013. Where are we? Have we succeeded or not?

Mr Devitt: We have now received detailed design proposals from all of the Departments, Chair. We are working our way through those so that we can submit them to Ministers in the very near future. The detailed proposals contain not only information on the project but milestones and proposed budgets. That information will go to Ministers in OFMDFM and then on to the full ministerial panel in March,

The Chairperson: In the document, there is a T:BUC commitment to publish a sexual orientation strategy, a revised gender equality strategy and a racial equality strategy by the end of 2013. Obviously, we need a new timeline. What can you tell us about where those documents are and when they will come out?

Mr Devitt: My understanding is that work on them is at an advanced stage. I do not have the exact detail of the timeline for them, but I can certainly supply you with it in writing, if that would be helpful.

The Chairperson: Are there any other commitments in the document that you can say are delayed?

Mr Devitt: Work is being progressed on all the commitments. The concentration to now has been on the seven headline actions, because those are the ones that have been in the media and attracting the public's attention. We have, however, been taking forward work on all the other commitments.

We have engaged with Departments around how they are going to help take forward commitments that are their responsibility and lie within their departmental remit.

The Chairperson: I was struck by a remark that you made in your opening address about the 10 shared school campuses. T:BUC was published in May 2013, with a commitment to having shared campuses. You are reporting that we are now looking for expressions of interest, with a letter having gone out on 10 January. It sounds as though we are saying, "Let's do this", only to wait eight or nine months before asking whether anyone is interested.

Mr Devitt: That particular commitment is being taken forward by the Department of Education. I think that it is fair to say that it had to go through a process to determine what the criteria might be against which bidders put forward their options. It took some of the time to develop the criteria.

The Chairperson: Are you aware of whether, in the meantime, there have been what we might describe as unofficial expressions of interest? Presumably, the hope in May was that, having said, "This is what we want to do", head teachers and boards of governors would phone up and say, "Hey, I am really keen on that. Keep me in mind". Do we know whether that happened and, if so, how often?

Mr Devitt: I think that there has been some of that type of activity. I am not sure of the level or amount of it. However, I do not think that that would have precluded the Department of Education from launching its call for expression of interest, because any school or group of schools that wants to apply will have to satisfy the criteria set out.

The Chairperson: Yes, that is why I said "unofficial expressions of interest".

Mr Devitt: I think that, very soon after the strategy came out, a group of schools in Armagh went fairly public very quickly on what their thinking was. I am not sure about the extent to which other schools that have done that as well, either behind the scenes or in public.

The Chairperson: What about the definition of "sectarianism"? Are you progressing that?

Mr Devitt: That is one of the issues that may come through in the proposed legislation for the establishment of the equality and good relations commission. That may be a mechanism through which that is tested. From memory, the strategy sets out an option for a definition of "sectarianism". I think that the commitment is to work towards having agreement around the definition.

The Chairperson: Who is responsible for agreeing that? Who is at the table?

Mr Devitt: Sorry, Chair. Which table?

The Chairperson: Who is inputting into agreeing a definition of "sectarianism"?

Mr Devitt: Through a public consultation on any draft legislation, anybody who has an interest will be able to help shape that consultation. The definition as set out in the document was based on a Department of Justice definition.

The Chairperson: Are you confident that the legislation for the new equality and good relations commission will be through before the end of the mandate?

Mr Devitt: Yes.

The Chairperson: Even if the mandate is not extended?

Mr Devitt: We are working on the basis of the mandate being extended.

The Chairperson: Therefore, 2016.

Mr Devitt: As I said in my opening comments, we expect that the draft Bill will come to the Committee within the next couple of months.

The Chairperson: I think that there was a commitment to establish a good relations children and young person's subgroup. Has that happened?

Mr Devitt: That has not happened to date. The subgroup is not up and running. We have been working with other Departments and stakeholders to identify the structures in place at the moment. We do not want to set up a structure that duplicates or replicates anything in existence already. The work has continued. We expect that particular subgroup to be the first one established.

Ms McGahan: Thanks for your presentation. Do you have any further updates on the shared education project in Moy? The most recent report that I have states that the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), as the managing authorities, are working on details. Are you aware of any further updates on proposals that have gone to the Minister?

Mr Devitt: We do not have that level of detail. That will probably go directly to the Department of Education and its Minister.

Ms McGahan: The children and young people's strategy states that there is no need for rural proofing because it is a high-level document, and poverty obviously affects urban and rural areas. Can you explain to me — someone who lives in a rural area — how specific action points, such as one about the nurture units and hubs, will benefit rural areas? Those would probably work better in cities. I do not see such things working in rural areas.

Mr Devitt: I can comment on the work that we are doing under this strategy for rural issues. We recently met the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development specifically on the issue. We have worked quite closely with the RCN, which stands for "Rural Community Network" and not, as I sometimes think, "Royal College of Nursing". The RCN has been involved in the design of the United Youth programme. Therefore, we have been taking rural issues specifically into account in how we take the strategy forward.

I do not have the knowledge or detail to comment on the specific issues around nurture units.

Ms McGahan: Are you satisfied that the issue of rural proofing is being taken seriously?

Mr Devitt: As far as the implementation of Together: Building a United Committee is concerned, we are taking rural issues very seriously, and have done throughout the past few months, in which we have been working with a range of organisations on rural issues specifically.

Mrs Linsey Farrell (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Fergus mentioned the review of funding in his introductory comments. We have built it into the terms of reference that the urban and rural contexts be taken into account when the reviewers are looking at the delivery and provision of funding.

The Chairperson: There has been a huge focus on the peace walls. Peace walls affect a relatively small percentage of the total population of Northern Ireland, although they affect those people 24/7. Rurally, where the same issues exist, they are not as easily visibly identified because of a lack of peace walls. How are you addressing that?

Mr Devitt: Something that was picked up in the development of the strategy is that, in rural areas in particular, as you said, the barriers are not necessarily visible. For example, people may shop in only certain parts of a town, village or locality. One of the intentions of the overall strategy is to overcome those sorts of barriers. Creating shared space could be a way of addressing such issues rather than having specific proposals, such as those for the peace walls. We also have the Contested Spaces programme, which is funded by the Department and deals with those sorts of issues, particularly in rural areas.

Mrs Farrell: The 'Beyond Belfast' report, which was published a number of years ago, highlighted patterns of avoidance in rural areas particularly, as opposed to physical structures. That has been taken into account in all aspects of the strategy development.

Miss Donna Blaney (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Through our work with the Rural Community Network and the 'Beyond Belfast' report, a lot of good practice is being shared with us on developing shared spaces, which we can then bring back to the urban environment.

The Chairperson: Do you now have detailed research on the challenge of turning a contested space into a shared space?

Miss Blaney: We are gathering the information that will inform how we will build the interface programme in the future, because, to date, it has been concentrated to a certain extent within the recognised 100-odd interface barriers. We recognise that, as you said, we need to take the programme to where there are no visible ones and to other areas where the community has not been able to engage in peace-building as much.

The Chairperson: You are currently engaged in that research activity.

Miss Blaney: We are engaged in a number of things with the communities living in that area. It could involve surveying work or engagement with the communities that live at the barriers to seek their opinion of what does and does not need to be done so that we can create the conditions that will allow the barriers to come down. The actual physical removal of the barriers, which are obviously a symptom of the situation rather than the problem itself, needs the creation of conditions in which people feel safe and that they live in a shared community. That is the work that we are doing at the moment, which will allow the community to make suggestions and build a programme of work that will allow the barriers to come down.

The Chairperson: What are the key actions for creating the conditions?

Miss Blaney: In particular, there are a number of issues coming out of the engagement process that we have had with community groups to date: the need for community safety; the need for regeneration; and the need to make sure that there are opportunities for people living in the areas so that they are not seen as being the cause of the problem. We need to address those problems and, once people feel confident that they are being addressed, we can remove barriers — it might be just barriers on individual houses, such as grilles on windows — as a first stage.

The Chairperson: I mentioned in Committee before, on foot of meetings in north Belfast, that there was a fear among some residents who live right in the shadow of the peace walls that consultation would be used in a manipulative sense and that people who lived some distance from the peace walls would have an equal voice to those who are most impacted on by them. They feared that the consultation would be used to say, "Ninety per cent of the people whom we consulted want the walls down". Is that what you are hearing? How are you addressing those concerns?

Miss Blaney: It is, and very much so. Even though, in the original announcement back in May, Ministers stated that nothing would happen without community buy-in, we were not getting that message across clearly enough. That has been part of the learning process, and we need to re-emphasise that. We want to create the conditions and we are using the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) peace walls model. We are bringing the appropriate people and their representatives around clusters of peace walls to discuss the issues that are specific to the people living in the area, getting an unbiased opinion of what can and needs to be done, and then building that into a programme of work.

The Chairperson: The concern that I am trying to reflect, Donna, is a concern about how you define without the consent of the community — specifically, how you define "community". Does somebody who lives half a mile from the peace wall have the same voice as somebody who lives in the shadow of it? I accept that it is going to require a judgement call. It is not scientific and not necessarily black and white. It is difficult, but I am asking whether it is on your radar and, if so, how you are managing it.

Mr Devitt: It certainly is, Chair. Part of the learning from the IFI peace walls programme is around that specific issue. You can use the phrase "gatekeepers", and not ironically. How do you get past the gatekeepers in communities so that individuals believe that they have personally contributed to the solution? Some ways in which to do that have been developed, including very simple things such as providing visual representations of what the area might look like and making those publicly available, thus allowing people an opportunity to see them and comment on them. We are also aware of some groups that, rather than do presentations in big rooms, have gone door to door in communities.

People then feel more confident and comfortable giving information, whereas if they are in a big room, they may be looked at. That type of learning is coming through.

The Chairperson: That is very useful.

Mr Maskey: I want to get a sense of some of the structures and drivers for taking some of the stuff forward. For example, under commitments around cultural expression, I know that ministerial panels, and so on, are to be established, but we have commitments to:

"Use the restructured District Council Good Relations Programme to examine ways in which culture can be celebrated ... Develop through the Arts Council, options around ... shared community relations ... week ... and Encourage the continued use of the arts and sports as means of improving good relations."

Those are all commitments, and you can see some of it being done, but can you give me a bit more information on the structure and how they are being driven? In my opinion, none of the commitments will happen unless it is driven by the lead Minister or a particular panel.

Mr Devitt: Our Department has the lead on the district council programme. Just before Christmas, we held a conference with all the district councils' good relations officers, at which we set out very clearly what was contained in the strategy that would potentially impact on councils, not just as they exist but under the new clusters, and what the requirement would be. At the moment, we fund district councils to the tune of roughly £3 million for programmes each year. From the start of this financial year in April, funding will be tied very closely to delivery of the strategy. Councils will have to demonstrate at a local council level how their activity on the ground is helping to implement the strategy. That is one specific way in which we are doing that.

DCAL will be the lead Department for the Arts Council issue and the arts and sport issue. We have had some preliminary meetings with senior officials in DCAL, and more are arranged, to take the two issues forward. The intention is that every commitment in the strategy will have a lead Department assigned to it and that those Ministers will report to the ministerial panel, on not just the seven headline actions but all the other commitments that fall within the lead Department's remit. Therefore, there is a very clear line of accountability when it comes to which Departments have to deliver which elements of the strategy.

Mr Maskey: That is very helpful, and it is good to hear. Further to that, if we are honest about it, we know that a number of councils have been, let us say, monocultural up until now. After the merger, there will be more diversity. Do all the people involved understand that, in some cases, there will need to be a sea change around how these things are handled? I know that the issues are very sensitive, but it will be a new reality for a number of people. Someone might be a community relations officer on a council today, yet in 12 months their job will be fundamentally different. Do they all understand that?

Mr Devitt: That is a good point. It is why we have had engagement to date with the good relations officers. We will be following that up, early in the summer, after the elections, with the new council chief executives, or interim chief executives as they may be, to get the same points across about how good relations funding will be directly linked to the implementation of the strategy and that new councils can expect funding only if they are working towards implementing the strategy on the ground in their area. Hopefully that will help in that respect.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you for your update. It is good to see you all again. You spent significant time with me on the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy party negotiations in the run-up to the publication of the document. Despite what the junior Minister said, you saw my face for many hours throughout the process.

You will know that I disagree with much of the document and its analysis of the scale of the problem of division and separation in Northern Ireland, the height of its ambition and the urgency of delivery. Can you update the Committee in any more detail on what timescales have been set for the projects? Will there, for example, be delivery plans around individual projects? At this stage, it is proving quite difficult to assess success, or lack of success, in the absence of a delivery plan with clear timescales and targets.

Mr Devitt: OK, Chris, and thanks for your comments, which I appreciate.

We are working towards the collation of the delivery plans. We now have information in from all Departments and are pulling it together into a format that will initially be for our Ministers in OFMDFM. That information will then go to the ministerial panel. The delivery plans set out a range of information, such as key stages in the delivery of projects, including the key milestones and the budgets potentially associated with them, and they will obviously include what opportunities there may be to publicise projects more directly in the future.

Mr Lyttle: The document states that the panel of Ministers will be established to implement strategy. Is it possible for you to share the delivery plans with the Committee in addition to the ministerial panel?

Mr Devitt: The intention, at this stage, is that they will go to the ministerial panel for its meeting in March. We can certainly make the panel aware of the Committee's desire to see the delivery plans, but that will be a decision for the panel to take.

Mr Lyttle: OK. Another key aim stated in the document is that you will:

"Work in Government and with people to achieve our objective of removing all threatening and divisive symbols that are being used in a way to cause intimidation, or to glorify violence, hate or prejudice".

How will that be taken forward?

Mr Devitt: There is a range of potential mechanisms. Some of that may be around the work on peace walls, for example, and the work that Alex referred to earlier on cultural expression, which may include work with the Arts Council.

Mr Lyttle: OK. Is there any timescale for delivering the 10 shared education campuses?

Mr Devitt: The time frame, at the moment, is that expressions of interest have to be in by 31 March. After that, the bids will have to be assessed in the Department of Education, and one can imagine that, beyond that, if planning permission, etc, is involved, it may take a bit of time before diggers are on the ground, so to speak. There is no firm time frame, Chris. It will depend on the individual projects and their states of readiness.

Mr Lyttle: Is there a timescale for the 10 shared neighbourhood projects?

Mr Devitt: Again, it is the same type of issue. I know that DSD is working towards as early an implementation as possible, at least of a small number of projects to begin with. It will then see, over time, what the delivery time frame may be.

Mr Lyttle: Do you not agree that, in the absence of a timescale, it is hard to assess whether that is an adequate target to set for delivering a strategy to tackle division and separation?

Mr Devitt: That is a fair comment. In an ideal world, it would be helpful to have firm timelines for each of the seven headline actions, and we are working towards getting those as soon as we can.

The Chairperson: I hope that you do not mind my cutting in, Chris, but it would also be helpful to have a budget. What is the budget for the 10 school campuses?

Mr Devitt: There is no specific budget associated with that, Chair. It will depend on what sorts of bids come in and the number of schools involved.

The Chairperson: T:BUC is nine months old. Does it have a budget?

Mr Devitt: It does not have a specific budget attached to it, but there is a range of budgetary mechanisms that may well be used to put funding into it. For example, the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) package has £100 million. We are working closely with colleagues in the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Special EU Programmes Body on the shape of Peace IV to make sure that, as far as is possible, it lines up with the implementation of the good relations strategy. That would be significant funding. Obviously, the Executive will have to take decisions on the allocation of

budgets in order for the strategy to be implemented. However, a single figure has not been attached to it at this time.

The Chairperson: Do you accept that there will be those who may think that you are raising big expectations without the certainty of being able to afford to deliver those expectations?

Mr Devitt: I think that what Ministers have said is that, yes, the strategy is ambitious but that funding will be found to implement and deliver it.

The Chairperson: Chris, sorry for cutting across you.

Mr Lyttle: To conclude, I am aware of the hard work that officials in OFMDFM put into community relations. However, in the absence of any timelines or budgets for some of those very modest proposals, I think that the assessment has to be that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister are not serious about tackling division and separation in the way that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want it to be tackled. We are all well aware of the costs of ongoing division and separation, so hopefully we will see more detail in the near future. That is not meant in any way as a criticism of the hard work of officials in the Department.

Mr Attwood: It is also my view that T:BUC is a start, but it is a moderate start. I and my party do not support elements of its content. For example, to give more functions to a public body such as the Equality Commission, which in many ways has lost its way over recent years, does not seem to be the wisest counsel. I am using that only as an example of the moderate and arguably false nature of some of the proposals in T:BUC. That was all made clear at the Executive meeting, where the Executive carefully chose their words in taking it forward.

To go back to the first point that the Chair raised, when did you pass papers to junior Ministers for clearance to go to the Committee?

Mr Devitt: We do not pass papers to junior Ministers. We pass papers to all the Ministers' private offices.

Mr Attwood: When did you pass papers to the private offices?

Mr Devitt: Last week.

Mr Attwood: When last week?

Mr Devitt: Last Thursday.

Mr Attwood: Did you make any enquiries after why the papers had not been approved and released for the purpose of this hearing?

Mr Devitt: Yes.

Mr Attwood: What answer did you get?

Mr Devitt: The answer that we got, which is the answer that we get with any papers, was that they were still under consideration.

Mr Attwood: Is it not the case that this hearing was delayed for a week?

Mr Devitt: Two weeks.

Mr Attwood: Two weeks. Therefore, the Committee was asked to delay taking evidence from you, yet, two to three weeks later, we do not even have papers to rely on when questioning witnesses who are here on behalf of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. It seems to me that all latitude has been given to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with this hearing first being delayed and then not getting the papers that we need to question you.

Mr Devitt: Can I comment on that, Chair?

The Chairperson: Of course.

Mr Devitt: I think that the reason for asking for the delay was that officials were very heavily engaged in the United Youth programme design day. I recognised that at the outset.

Mr Attwood: The Committee still asked you to come two weeks ago, even though you were heavily committed to the design day.

Mr Devitt: We offered to come last week but were told that this week would be more appropriate.

Mr Attwood: I want to ask you about the 35 actions and seven headlines. Given the issues that have been raised around finance and timelines, do you think that it is time for an updated document to capture all that is going on and to outline what the timelines should be? Is it not time for that to be done and published? As you will be aware, there was somewhat of a fanfare when launching T:BUC. Is it not now time for a rerun?

Mr Devitt: As I said in response to some of your colleagues, we now have the detailed project plans in from all Departments. That information will go to the ministerial panel at the end of March, and we will certainly make the ministerial panel aware of the Committee's request to have that information. The information will contain detailed proposals, milestones, timelines and budgets.

Mr Attwood: I look forward to seeing that. It is the experience of this Committee that, when it comes to FM/DFM, timelines and commitments are not achieved. Although there are some doubts about timelines and resources, nonetheless, to be fair to the officials, they have laid down some very specific timelines in their advice to the Committee today. For example, they have said that a Bill will be before the Assembly in January of next year, that the review of funding will be concluded by June this year and so on and so forth. You could argue that there is more certainty coming from the officials in respect of T:BUC than might be the case in respect of many other aspects of policy in OFMDFM.

Given that you have said that the funding review will be finished by June, are you satisfied that the outcome of the review, and decisions arising from the outcome of the review, will not create any difficulties for groups that are delivering community relations work, mindful, as you indicated earlier, that some of them will be looking for Peace IV funding and there has not been a consultation on that yet? Will you reassure the Committee that, when it comes to the review and a timeline for the review, no issues or difficulties will be experienced by groups with the work they do, given that the review of funding is ongoing and the consultation on Peace IV has not even started?

Mr Devitt: The review of funding will be in two phases. The first phase is up to the end of March. That will be, for want of a better phrase, a desk-based piece of work, that will look at the evaluation of programmes that the Department and other funders have funded in the past, such as the contested spaces programme, the district council programme, the north Belfast programme and others. It will also include funding that has gone into the sector from the likes of the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies.

The second stage will be to analyse that information and bring forward proposals and recommendations on how the totality of funding, not just through this Department but others like DSD and DOJ, can be best used in the future to help implement the delivery of the strategy in totality. We expect that by the end of June; that is the timeline that we are working towards. That clearly would not have an impact on any funding in the next financial year — 2014-15 — however, there may be lessons to be drawn out for the funding beyond that. I think that the intention is to make sure that funding is aligned as far as possible with the strategic direction of the intent of the document.

Mr Attwood: So, to answer the question, do you anticipate that there will be any issues of concern for those who are looking for funding thereafter, given that there has not been a consultation on Peace IV yet and the timelines that you are working to in June. There is a review of funding ongoing and the consultation on Peace IV has not even started. Do you think that when all that works through the timeline, you will be able to create certainty for the funding of groups rather than having further doubt? Clearly, there is some doubt at the moment given the lack of a consultation on Peace IV and the review that you are undertaking.

Mr Devitt: We understand the difficulties that some groups are in with their Peace III funding coming to an end.

Mr Attwood: And AP funding coming to an end.

Mr Devitt: And AP funding coming to an end as well. We are working closely with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) on the development of Peace IV. I think that the view that may be taken is that Peace III funding is for specific projects and is not necessarily a guarantee of core funding. It is certainly our intention that the programmes that are funded by the Department will continue. I cannot make any comment on what Peace IV funding might look like or what groups or projects might be funded under it. The aims and objectives of Peace IV may be different to Peace III.

Mr Attwood: As things stand at the moment, can you reassure us that you do not think that any questions will arise for various groups that deliver community relations work, as you can see it at the moment and based on the uncertainties that exist at the moment?

Mr Devitt: Certainly not for 2014-15, no.

Mr Attwood: I presume that you are aware of an ongoing review of the VSS. On the far side of that, one of the outcomes should be that third-party groups deliver some of the VSS function, because they are best placed to do so. Will you give an indication of whether the legislation that you are bringing forward around the Equality Commission and the community relations function might be a model that Ministers are considering for the delivery of the community relations function in the future?

Mr Devitt: It is certainly set out in the strategy that funding may, in the future, be on a thematic basis. I am not sure that it will feature in the legislation, but it may be that, following the review of funding, recommendations will come out. I think that we are all aware that funding for a range of policy issues under good relations may be viewed by groups as a bit piecemeal because they may have to apply to different organisations and bodies for different types of funding. That creates the sort of uncertainty that you have alluded to. We want to have a funding regime and policy that gives greater certainty and clarity to what that funding is to be used for and how it can help to deliver good relations policy intent. I am not sure, however, that that would be, as I said, through the legislation for the new commission.

Mr Attwood: Given what you said earlier about the Chair's question on a definition of "sectarianism", are there other areas of the legislation in which Ministers might be minded, as far as you are aware, besides dealing with the structural work arising from whatever might or might not be agreed, to grasp the opportunity to address in legislation other issues around community relations other than structural ones such as issues of definition?

Mr Devitt: The draft legislation is still going through the process of what the shape of the Bill might look like and what might be contained in it with our legal advisers, so I cannot answer that question directly. Clearly, through the legislative process, the Committee's scrutiny of the legislation and the public consultation, people will have an opportunity to shape what may be contained in the final Bill that goes before the Assembly.

The Chairperson: Alex, I do not want to cut across you, but we have three other members.

Mr Attwood: That is fine.

The Chairperson: Do you have one more?

Mr Attwood: No, I will hold it there.

Mr Spratt: I have a couple of quick questions. You mentioned the peace walls. The chart shows that 58% would like to see the walls coming down, and 69% said that they were still needed because of the potential for violence. Probably the most worrying aspect of that is that 63% would like to know more about initiatives and discussions on peace walls. What has happened since you got the results of that survey?

Mr Devitt: I am not sure of the exact date of that survey, but I can certainly give you an outline of what we have been doing to engage with people most impacted.

Mr Spratt: It is to let the people most impacted know exactly what is happening.

Mr Devitt: There are a range of — pardon the phrase — structures around this. Donna can give a lot of the detail. At a high level, there was a co-design day in Belfast Castle on 15 November. I think that about 50 or 60 people from a variety of community groups and people who operate daily in interface areas attended that. We made it very clear that we wanted to work with them to try to allay any fears that a solution would be imposed on them. As Donna alluded to earlier, there are two very distinct phases in the removal of any structure. The first one is almost the critical one, which is creating the conditions in a community to allow work to happen. We were trying to give reassurances around that. Donna, you might want to say a little bit about the mechanisms that exist.

Miss Blaney: Prior to the engagement with the community groups back in November, we worked with the International Fund for Ireland, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, DOJ and Belfast City Council to look at what was working on the ground and to try to build on that model. We took that out to the community to see whether it worked for them and what was working well and what was not. The feedback very much said, "Don't build up our expectations and then not deliver the structures to deliver this. They must happen."

So, that was positive feedback about the structures that we are going to put in place. DOJ has now come back — just at the end of the month — with proposals on what that design might look like and how we maybe can make some early progress and win some confidence in the community that this actually works. DOJ hopes to roll that out in 2014-15, and then we will have an ongoing process of engagement with the communities that live there. OFMDFM has representatives with the seven cluster groups that IFI runs, and, if IFI can continue beyond 2015, that is a good model that we want to see continue. Or, if we can lift that model and transplant it into something else, we will do that.

Mr Spratt: The other area, Fergus, is on a question that the Deputy Chair asked you in relation to the urban villages. How close are we to making announcements on those four areas? Will it be a couple of areas first?

Mr Devitt: I know that a significant amount of work has been going on with DSD to identify potential areas. I am not in a position to say exactly when announcements may be made or on how many villages, but I know that Ministers are keen that information be given out as quickly as possible. I imagine that that will be within a matter of weeks.

Mr Cree: I want to return to the budget situation and the availability of funds. As you know, we are now in the spring Supplementary Estimates process. Have you anything earmarked or included in that and also in the Vote on Account, which comes immediately after it?

Mr Devitt: As I indicated earlier, we are in the process of trying to finalise exactly what budgets may be needed, not only for the seven headline actions but across all of the actions and commitments. For this current financial year, we believe that whatever work needs to be done by Departments can be done within their existing budgets. The broader question arises then for years beyond the current financial year, and, as I indicated earlier, there is a variety of mechanisms of funding that could be used, perhaps around the reinvestment and reform initiative, Peace IV, IFI and, maybe, Atlantic Philanthropies funding. So, we are looking at the totality of funding that may be available, not just that from the Northern Ireland block.

Mr Cree: I was thinking particularly of that, because there must be a fair amount in the social investment fund (SIF) what was. Do you have any handle on that?

Mr Devitt: I do not have the specific details of that, but, clearly, with any money that is available, we will be looking to see how best that can be used to implement the strategic priorities of the Department, whether that is through Together: Building a United Community, SIF, Delivering Social Change projects or others.

Mr Cree: I understand that there is a built-in overhead this year. Do you have any money covered by that, so that, in fact, it would not end up having to go back to the Treasury?

Mr Devitt: I am not sure of the specifics of that point, so, I am sorry, I cannot give you an answer. If you want to write to us about that, we can try to deal with it.

Mr Cree: I have a final point on the social investment fund moneys. Obviously, a lot of this is aspirational and there is progress on various fronts at the same time and it takes time to get it all sewn together, but do you think that money spent, for example from the social investment fund, on improvement in those areas, albeit maybe on a small scale, would be vital and could, in fact, positively help all of the other work that you are undertaking?

Mr Devitt: Again, I do not really want to get into the specifics, but I certainly know that, in the development of thinking around potential sites for urban villages, that is coming into play over how any investment through the strategic investment fund might also help to allow the urban villages to be set up as well. So, we will try as far as possible to create that synergy across our funding programmes.

Mr Cree: I was thinking more of unemployment, poverty, those things that people live with every day.

Mr Devitt: As part of the overall strategy, we clearly want to improve life for people. Chair, you will have heard from Carl, the youth champion, about how youth programmes have given him an opportunity to improve his life and the lives of others as a young child. So, collectively, I think that we aim to deliver funding in the most positive way to make a difference to people on the ground.

Mr Cree: But perhaps with some urgency ahead of the rest of it.

Mr Devitt: Well, as I kind of indicated earlier, we are working on the timelines and Ministers are very keen that funding appears on the ground out of the united communities' strategy as quickly as possible.

Mr G Robinson: My thanks to Fergus and his team. I have a couple of questions. How will the 10,000 people who are not in education, employment or training be recruited to the new United Youth volunteering programme?

Mr Devitt: That is a good question and it is one of those that we tried to tease out at the design day in the Waterfront. Recruitment is one of the key elements of that programme. A variety of mechanisms exist by which individuals may be recruited. They may be on the radar of programmes or services at the moment. They may be just about to leave formal education or be able to access support from the likes of youth workers and others. We are keen to identify as many mentors as possible to work in their local areas to try to encourage people who may benefit from this programme to take up the opportunities that it provides. So, we think that a variety of mechanisms could be used.

Mr G Robinson: Will they come from throughout Northern Ireland?

Mr Devitt: Yes, very definitely. The intention is that this will be a Northern Ireland-wide project, which goes back to the point that Bronwyn made about the rural element as well. We are also keen that the United Youth programme is inclusive in every sense, particularly with regard to individuals with a disability, whether physical or mental. The programme will be open and accessible to them as well.

Mr G Robinson: And where would you like to locate the four urban villages?

Mr Devitt: Those decisions are going to be taken by Ministers.

Mr G Robinson: So, they have not yet been taken.

Mr Spratt: *[Inaudible.]* Limavady. *[Laughter.]*

Mr G Robinson: I would like to think that some of the urban areas will be in the north-west.

Mr Devitt: As I said, Ministers are looking at a range of options. I cannot go any further than that, at the moment.

Mr Maskey: I want to go back to the earlier remarks by the Deputy Chair. It is all very well and right for people to critique or even criticise the substance of the commitments, although it would be helpful

when people are criticising to maybe put forward some positive and constructive ideas. However, I resent the suggestion by the Deputy Chair about Martin McGuinness. I can only speak for Martin McGuinness as the deputy First Minister — it is up to the DUP to speak for Peter Robinson — but any suggestion around this table, especially from the Deputy Chair, that Martin McGuinness as the deputy First Minister is not serious about tackling division is disgraceful. I resent that, and I would like the Deputy Chair to withdraw that remark. It is totally and utterly ridiculous.

The Chairperson: OK. You have made your point, and that is fine. Chris made a statement. I will put that back to Chris and not —

Mr Spratt: Well, I would make a similar point, Chair, before you put it to anybody. I resent the remark as well, but it is typical of remarks that come from the Deputy Chair.

The Chairperson: OK. Well, look, I am simply going to put it back to Chris. I am not asking you, Chris, to withdraw; I just offer the opportunity for you to respond.

Mr Lyttle: Thanks, Chair. I have no intention of retracting what I said, but I acknowledge that other members are entitled to make their comments as well.

The Chairperson: OK.

Mr Maskey: That says more about you than the deputy First Minister.

Mr Spratt: Absolutely, and the First Minister as well.

The Chairperson: The comment has been made and has provoked a significant and solid response from the two parties, and that is on the record.

Mr Maskey: I ask the Deputy Chair to reflect on his remarks. It is more important because it comes from the Deputy Chair and is what I consider to be a very serious allegation against the deputy First Minister.

Mr Lyttle: All I can say in answer to the request to be substantive is that my comments were based on the content of the strategy and the progress to date on delivering what are modest targets in the document. That is what my comments were based on.

Mr Maskey: There might be an argument around modest targets, and I am not necessarily accepting that at all. There is a difference between what might be described as "modest targets" and the motivation of impugning the integrity of the deputy First Minister. That is what is happening with the Deputy Chair of this Committee. I resent that in this Committee meeting.

The Chairperson: That is exactly mirrored —

Mr Spratt: In the case of the First Minister as well. Absolutely.

Mr G Robinson: I support Jimmy's point.

The Chairperson: I think the Deputy Chair is in no doubt —

Mr Spratt: It is not surprising that he makes such remarks.

Mr Maskey: We will return to this if the Deputy Chair does not reflect on his remarks.

The Chairperson: You are formally asking the Deputy Chair to reflect on —

Mr Maskey: We will return to it at this meeting or at a further meeting.

The Chairperson: Fergus, I have one last question about good relations indicators. Do you have an agreed set of indicators?

Mr Devitt: We are coming to brief the Committee on that next week. I am happy to go into detail then. A consultation paper has been issued. I apologise to the Committee for not being given appropriate advanced sight of that. I say that in advance of appearing next week and will repeat it then. We want to engage with the Committee on how those indicators are finalised. So, to answer your question, the indicators will not be finalised until after the consultation has closed.

The Chairperson: Will you come back to us on a point that Leslie Cree brought up about whether there are any plans to implement or use social investment funds in areas of poverty and unemployment? Will you do that with the urgency to which Leslie referred?

Mr Devitt: I am happy to liaise with the Committee Clerk on that.

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