



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Peace Monitoring Report:
Community Relations Council

9 April 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Leslie Cree
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr George Robinson

Witnesses:

Ms Jacqueline Irwin	Community Relations Council
Dr Paul Nolan	Community Relations Council
Mr Peter Osborne	Community Relations Council

The Deputy Chairperson: I welcome Mr Peter Osborne, the chairperson of the Community Relations Council (CRC), Miss Jacqueline Irwin, the chief executive of the Community Relations Council, and Dr Paul Nolan, the research director for the report. You are very welcome. Do you want to make some opening remarks?

Mr Peter Osborne (Community Relations Council): Thank you very much for the welcome and for your time. We very much appreciate it. I will say a couple of words about the context of the report and touch on Together Building a United Community (T:BUC). Paul will then discuss the substance of it, and Jacqueline will pick up on some issues that come out of it in the work of the Community Relations Council.

Contrary to any other impression you may have, the Community Relations Council and I have had very little involvement in discussing legislation around T:BUC and a new equality and good relations commission. For myself, there was one meeting of the transition board about three weeks ago. It did not touch on the legislation; it touched on its terms of reference and a few other technical matters. How to shape the legislation is something that we want to discuss thoroughly with the Department, but we have not had the opportunity to do that in any real sense. However, that is something that we want to do in future. The two organisations involved — the Community Relations Council and the Equality Commission — embrace the idea of a new commission. We have set up a working group comprising the boards of both organisations, which has met three times. We are due to meet officials from the Department for the first time in early May to talk about what the two boards believe should go into the draft legislation.

There are a number of principles that the two boards have agreed. First, there should be a long-term commitment from government to support equality and good relations work, given the needs in the community. Secondly, there should be adequate resourcing to deliver good relations and equality development work, regardless of the resourcing provided by or for the new commission. Thirdly, good relations and equality functions need to be enhanced, and there should be no reduction of them in practice. Fourthly, the duties and functions of a new commission should reflect standards set down in international law for equality and good relations. Fifthly, there should be a definition of good relations and sectarianism within the ambit of racism that equates to international standards. Finally, there should be effective enforcement methods, including legal, financial and other monitoring and regulation potential.

The two boards believe that those principles are extremely important when we look at the new legislation. Moreover, the Community Relations Council would say that it is more than desirable, as set out in section 75, to promote good relations and reconciliation in this society. There is a fundamental need to do that, and we need to enhance the recognition of that need. Any system that in any way allows good relations to get in the way of equality or vice versa is not something that we would support.

T:BUC is limited in some ways, but it is ambitious in others, as shown by its goal to remove interface barriers. However, any target, ambitious or otherwise, needs to be adequately resourced in the medium to long term; we are also aware of issues in the short term around funding and resources being made available as quickly as they should be.

In essence, some of the critical points are around resourcing, the parameters of the duties and functions of a new commission, the definitions, the need to adhere to international standards, the need for more robust monitoring and a regulatory framework and ensuring that equality and good relations are both enhanced in the legislation. Those needs are clearly reflected in the peace monitoring report.

In that context, I ask Paul to give you a brief summary of the peace monitoring report.

Dr Paul Nolan (Community Relations Council): Thank you very much, Peter. Chair, how much time do I have? This is a very long report, and I could go on for a very long time, but I suspect that you do not want that.

The Deputy Chairperson: It is also extremely important, Paul; therefore we are keen to give you the best opportunity possible to draw out your key findings. So take reasonable time to go through the key points.

Dr Nolan: I notice that some of you have a hard copy. We left hard copies up during the week with a summary of the 10 key points. I will start with them. I invite people to interrupt me, challenge me and ask questions as we go along.

I will start with the one that got a bit of media attention last week: educational underachievement. I looked at the attainment gaps in Northern Ireland and used the standard measure: the attainment of five good GCSEs, defined as GCSEs at grades A* to C and including English and maths. The overall average in Northern Ireland is reasonably good, although not perhaps as good as we like to imagine. The real problems, however, start when you go beneath the averages to see where the gaps are. The inequality gaps are pretty extreme in that, if you look first at those who are doing best in the current system, you will find that they are Catholic girls who are not in receipt of free school meals, ie they are not socially disadvantaged. Those who are doing least well are Protestant boys who are in receipt of free school meals. Whether free school meals are a good indicator of social deprivation is itself a matter for debate, but, since it is the only one that we have, it is the one that I have used. At the very bottom of the table, we find Protestant boys, with 19.7% achieving at that level. How big is the gap? It is a huge 57 percentage points. I wanted to get a measure of that because, although 57 percentage points sounds like a lot, how big is it actually? You need to measure it against something. Therefore I looked at it in comparison with attainment gaps across the water between the different social groups and found that it is pretty astonishing.

If you look at the position of Catholic girls — bear it in mind, incidentally, that this is a very imprecise measure because it draws from two different data sets — the core reality is pretty clear that Catholic girls who are not socially disadvantaged perform remarkably well compared against pupils across the water. They come out close to the top. The social group that performs best in England are Chinese pupils. Catholic girls outperform them, but they are pipped at the top by Chinese girls. The

performance of Protestant boys is right down at the bottom. For the year that I looked at, they were below white boys on free school meals and only just above Roma and Irish Travellers. That is a shocking result.

The worrying thing in looking at our peace process or public order in Northern Ireland is that, if four out of five are leaving school without the basic employability qualification, it does not augur well for the future of those boys in particular, the communities that they come from or society in general. So I looked at what is happening with youth unemployment. This year, in the labour force survey religion report, for the first time, the percentage of Protestant boys unemployed is higher than that of Catholics. You can see that working its way through the labour market. I have traced it through the numbers applying for and being given jobs. You can see that there has been significant improvement, and this is a long-term thing, for the Catholic population. That has unsettled unionism, as, if you see this as a zero-sum equation, a gain for one is a loss for the other. I do not see it that way, but I understand that it has had that effect.

Percentage terms are not the only reality. If we say that Protestant boys have the lowest level in percentage terms, that is not the same as saying that the greatest number of people leaving school without qualifications are from a Protestant background because, in that age cohort, there are, in fact, more Catholic boys. If you look at the raw numbers, the number of Catholic boys leaving school without that basic qualification was about 1,500 against 850 Protestant boys. It is significantly more — almost double. It is fair to say that when you look at the kind of disadvantage created by that in respect of accessing the labour market and in respect of social exclusion, it affects both communities, but, at this stage, you would have to have a particular concern for what is happening in communities of Protestant social disadvantage, particularly with young males. I will pause there to allow discussion on that point.

The Deputy Chairperson: It is one of the starkest findings in the report. I am keen to make sure that we have structure to the conversation. There are 10 key points. Do members have questions or comments at this stage? Is it possible, in your five- to 10-minute briefing, to make some brief comments about those 10 key points and then for us to come back? Perhaps at the start, you could explain exactly what the report is and its purpose. That would be helpful. Are members content with that approach?

Members indicated assent.

Dr Nolan: OK. The purpose of the report is to provide a sort of X-ray of society to see where the problems might occur. For example, we looked at the roots of last year's public order issues to see where the real problems lie. You can make a fairly safe generalisation: where you have inequalities and unemployment, you have the potential for such public disorder. It is not an inevitability and there are no iron laws, but, when you see youth unemployment above 20%, you know that the dial has moved into the red and you have to be concerned. When you see differentials built on the historical fault line between the two communities, you have to be concerned. The report says that we have structural problems that relate to the economy and access to labour markets. It states:

"Failure lies in wait for young working-class Protestant males".

I re-emphasise that that does not mean that young working-class Catholic males are not also in danger of social exclusion. The problems that we have seen over the past year seem to show that the neuralgic point has been in loyalist areas, which seem to have shown the greatest sensitivity.

The public disorder has led to increased polarisation, although I do not want to exaggerate that. For example, the number rehoused under the Housing Executive's special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme — through intimidation — increased significantly last year from 300 to 400. 'The Guardian' newspaper made much of that, but if you look at that in the longer term, we get those fluctuations year on year. In fact, last year, the total number was less than in 2005 and 2006, so I would not want to make too much of that.

There has been some evidence of harassment in the workplace, and cases have been brought to the attention of the Equality Commission. Again, however, if you see that in the longer-term perspective, it is nothing on the scale of the early 1990s when flags and emblems were taken out of the workplace. More positively, perhaps, the flags protests did not affect the workplace in any significant way. That is because people in Northern Ireland have come to accept the value of neutral or mixed workplaces and do not want to see them threatened. I present evidence that the reconciliation impulse remains fairly

strong. We would have been aware of that in the Community Relations Council because we are aware of the amount of cross-community traffic and that there has been no diminution of it.

There was some temporary suspension of particular networks during the flags dispute, but the news on that is more encouraging than the media normally allow for. The main positive to emerge from last year was how the City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry managed almost to model what a post-conflict society might look like in its happiest form. We had some remarkable exchanges, such as the Apprentice Boys playing their tunes in the Fleadh Cheoil or the PSNI band being applauded as it came into Guildhall Square. That would have seemed unimaginable 10 or 15 years ago. Although, overall, the year was fairly negative, there are significant positive points that we need to hold onto.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you. Perhaps we can draw out a couple of the key points and get some response from all of you today. The report, which is very helpful indeed, makes some general conclusions around the point that significant progress has been made on the levels of violence in Northern Ireland, yet society remains deeply divided, with fault lines through education, housing and other aspects of daily existence. In particular, I realise that it is a state-of-the-community report, not necessarily with recommendations. However, I am keen to see if you think that government response to the issues is adequate or whether you have suggestions for how it might be better done. The main community-relations strategy is towards building a united community, and you made some opening comments about that. In its current design format, is it an adequate strategy to respond to the issues that have been identified by the peace monitoring report? Can any of you respond to that?

Mr Osborne: You start and I will add to it.

Ms Jacqueline Irwin (Community Relations Council): Thank you, Chair. Paul has given a summary of the environment in which the united communities policy response is trying to sit. In one way, the simple answer is that it is too early to tell because so much is still awaited in relation to that policy. One thing that I will draw attention to is the collision of other issues that are likely to affect the community relations response in the short and medium term.

We face a couple of years of significant change at local authority level, and local authorities are viewed as an important delivery mechanism for much of the local support for community relations and peace-building activity. Moreover, there is a falling away of financial support that we had in the past from international funders, valuable as that has been. We await the outcome of the review of community relations funding, which is one of the tasks to be undertaken under the united community strategy. We are getting reports from across the region of concern about the uncertainty in the short and medium term for much of the vital work that goes on at local community level.

To be charitable to the policy, there are many issues in it that are very familiar to community relations practitioners, particularly in relation to young people and work in the summertime. Some initiatives have been available for more than 20 years. The issue in relation to united communities is the sheer scale that is anticipated in the policy. We await the impact of that. Measuring the impact will be very important, and I know that Committee members will be familiar with that as well, but, in the immediate term, the uncertainty about the support for day-to-day peace-building and good-relations work is the issue that we hear most frequently when we speak to groups.

Mr Osborne: May I add a couple of comments and, on one or two occasions, if I may, be blunt about some aspects? It is very positive that the T:BUC strategy was produced; parts of it are good and parts of it are extremely limited. Society here deserves more than those parts that are limited.

There are parts where the ambition is very clear and certainly not limited, such as the removal of interface barriers within 10 years. That is an outcome that, I think, all of us round the table would support. I have some reservations about the time frame, but let us be blunt about it: those barriers will not be removed within 10 years unless there is adequate resourcing identified and committed to doing the work that needs to be done. In the short term, over the next two or three years, there is funding. International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and Peace money's will, I am sure, be committed to it. The short-term measures over the next few years will be making those interfaces look more environmentally attractive, and that is very positive, but the actual business of taking the barriers down will be done after difficult, complex, challenging work that people will undertake at risk in communities. That will be done from years three and four onwards. None of us can identify where the resourcing will come from during those years up to year 10 to make that policy a reality. If you are going to develop a strategy with ambitious targets, you also need to be clear to the communities doing it that you will resource that work, because that means that you identify the need to take it seriously.

Moreover, it is a time in the strategy with the legislation that we have not seen yet and have had little, if any, input into. The legislation must take the need for equality and good relations to another level. Again, we need to take it seriously. Therefore, the legislation needs to reflect definitions of sectarianism to international standards, it needs to be more robust about the duties and functions of good relations and equality, and it needs to add more about regulation on equality and good relations, because that area is weak, or weaker than it should be.

There are things in the strategy that should be much more robust. However, those doing the work need to know that they will be resourced. Apart from the longer-term needs around resourcing, I am hearing — I need to reflect this as a member of an organisation that works with communities — people say that they want to do work in a financial year but are not getting a decision about resourcing until close to the end of that financial year. It is impossible to do such work in that time frame. It cannot be done on a year-by-year basis on a minimal budget; it needs long-term resources and commitments.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am keen to draw out the funding issue. There are some specifics there that I will return to, but there seems to be a developing theme. As you are the body with statutory responsibility for policy advice and scrutiny, is OFMDFM seeking your advice on design, delivery and planning for the T:BUC strategy to an acceptable level?

Ms J Irwin: The process, at least as we understand it, is that officials in the Department are working in co-design processes with other Departments. CRC is not involved in that process. We have supported officials in engagements with communities on some issues — interfaces and with young people, for example. We have been glad to do that, and we would be very happy to help in any other way that we can. Beyond that, we are not directly involved in the initiatives as they come forward. We have no statutory responsibility in that regard, but you are right that, up until this point, we would have been involved in providing information to government on best practice in public policy.

Mr Osborne: We would like to be more involved. The two bodies around the equality and good relations commission — the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council — have set up a joint working group to look at the legislation. We have ideas that we both think should go into the legislation. We will be meeting officials for the first time as a working group in early May. So we would like to see more involvement in the design of the legislation.

I want to be clear that, at a personal level, because I know that this has been mentioned at the Committee, there was one transition board meeting three weeks ago. I was at that meeting, and it discussed terms of reference: it did not discuss legislation, and we have had very little input into any potential legislation.

The Deputy Chairperson: How will the Department take the report on board? It is obviously based on a detailed indicator framework. Perhaps you could say something about how the framework is developed. Is there an opportunity for OFMDFM to take on board such indicators, given its review of good relations indicators in the Department?

Dr Nolan: When we set up the project, we had to find a way of doing it. That meant looking at indicator frameworks to see how you monitor peace; it is a very elusive concept. We broke it down into four constituent parts, the first being equality, which seemed to be central to the Good Friday Agreement and to any notion of peace. We then decided that we needed to look at cohesion and sharing. That is also seen as crucial to building a stable society. We looked at political progress under a number of headings. We did not set any definition of what political progress might look like; ie, it is not progress towards a particular constitutional goal like a united Ireland or greater integration with the UK or whatever. It is more seen as the ability of the society to resolve its issues through a parliamentary forum and through reason and debate.

The fourth point is the sense of security which is, if you like, is the most basic criterion. That is how most people understand whether they are living in a peaceful society: do they feel secure in their own bed, home, neighbourhood and workplace and in the public space? So we look at all those, and try to find out what we can discover by looking at, for example, attitude surveys, to see what people think. We look also at behaviours: how people vote and their participation in cultural events, festivals and that type of thing. We look at the labour market to see what is happening there, and patterns of housing and residential segregation to see where people choose to live. We put all those together and try to see the links between them, to try to see how, for example, changes in the labour market will affect changes in housing, how changes in housing can unsettle the public mood, how that can

affect the statistics for public disorder, and so on. We try to present a holistic analysis of the society, year on year. That is our approach.

The Deputy Chairperson: Those are four helpful themes to focus on. You have covered a fair amount of the equality issue, and it remains a significant issue on many of the grounds that you have set out. There are still significant issues in cohesion and sharing. In terms of political progress, there are a few stark comments. The report says that:

"A culture of endless negotiation has become embedded and, without a vision of a shared society to sustain it, the peace process has lost the power to inspire."

Have you any comments in relation to that particular line in the report?

Dr Nolan: That is the comment. I wonder whether anyone might disagree with it. It would seem to be an expression of the settled view of Washington, London and Dublin. Only yesterday, a senior politician from within the Assembly said that he was embarrassed by it. That is a regular occurrence now: to find someone saying that they are embarrassed by the performance of the Assembly. What we find is that, if you look at attitudes outside the Assembly — for example, the 'Belfast Telegraph' survey published just yesterday of the attitudes of young people — I think that to say that

"the peace process has lost the power to inspire"

is possibly an understatement.

Mr Osborne: Can I add another comment to that? Paul also says in the report that a lack of trust has led to a lack of progress. I am not sure whether those are the exact words, but it is along those lines.

Dr Nolan: Yes, those are the exact words.

Mr Osborne: There is a very important issue there for us all to consider — not just elected representatives, but anyone in a civic leadership position — around trust issues and delivering change. I also say, with a great amount of respect to everyone involved in political life — because I think that there has been some incredibly positive and good political leadership right across the community over the last number of years in Northern Ireland within all parties — that making a political deal is one thing and is a huge achievement, as it was in 1998 and subsequent years. However, the more difficult, complex and challenging work is building peace on the ground, beyond the political agreement. We need, as a whole, to acknowledge the need that there is within communities to build the peace. That is affected by perceptions of a lack of trust or delivery, and trust in institutions — not just the Assembly, but other institutions too — and we need to support that work on the ground properly. It comes back a little bit to resourcing, but also to understanding and walking with those people who do that peace building work, sometimes at personal risk and certainly with degrees of community risk.

The Deputy Chairperson: The report also makes an interesting key comment that no one picks up the tab. It references a disconnect between taking responsibility for actions. That is my interpretation. It refers to the fact that the marching season cost £18.5 million in additional policing costs in 2013, compared with £4.1 million the previous year, yet budgetary reductions in education and health continue to be of serious concern to people in the wider community. Is there any comment or direction in relation to that finding?

Dr Nolan: That is a generalisation, and it is based on a number of specific things. The policing costs, which you referenced, spiralled enormously last year, up to an additional £18.5 million. Occasionally, you will hear statements in the media from the police or local traders that public disturbances or public disorder are creating that problem. When figures are used, it is as if those who are responsible, if they heard them, might desist, but that is not the case, because the costs do not return to the people who may be the principal actors; the costs return to the society as a whole.

If you look at situations where people have tried to make policy interventions to deal with that kind of problem, like, for example, in the 1980s when English football hooliganism was a serious problem, you see that when football clubs were made responsible for the policing costs associated with fans' behaviour, it radically changed the culture, and we do not have that level of problem any longer with the English soccer clubs. It is not always as simple as that, but certainly there is a problem here of a

disconnect between — as I put it in the report — those who have to pick up the tab, ie the society as a whole, and those who might otherwise be deemed responsible.

When I talk about the cost, it is not all just financial costs. Let us stay on the policing issue: 680 officers were physically injured last year. That is one in 10 of the workforce. What strikes me about that is the fact that people in Northern Ireland seem to accept that simply as the new normal, that it is the reality and is not a matter for comment. Of course, in any other society, if you had one in 10 of the police force being injured each year, that would be thought to be quite remarkable. Sometimes — maybe this is the value of doing this report as an annual health check — you have to step back and say, "Well, can we continue like this? Is this a reasonable way to proceed?" And so the generalisation about no one picking up the tab is also about what the promise of devolution was, which was that under a devolved Administration this kind of decision-making — this making decisions and living with the consequences — would be brought closer to the people, and that does not appear to have happened.

The Deputy Chairperson: The report says that the police have become

"human shock absorbers for failures elsewhere"

and that a cultural war is being talked into existence. It cites some data around significant investment being made and grant aid for the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys, and that marches and bands are on the increase. Will you elaborate on those comments?

Dr Nolan: Taking them in turn, the one about the police becoming the human shock absorbers is the one that I dealt with there. In a way, when we put our police force in the front line like that and ask them to deal with the problem, do we not sometimes have to ask ourselves whether that problem could not have been dealt with somewhere further up the line so that it does not end up with a line of men between two communities, which is the way that it has become?

In relation to the cultural war, it seems to me — I use this phrase "talked into existence" — we do not need to talk about culture and war in the same sentence. I do not see that there is any particular threat to British or Orange culture in Northern Ireland in this period, in that the number of Orange marches is actually larger than it has ever been. We had more marches last year than we ever had in the history of marches. Grants have been given to promote Orange culture through Orange museums. Schomberg House received a very large SEUPB grant, and the Apprentice Boys in Derry received very large grants for the museum and the interpretive centre. People should take encouragement from those. Those are intended to provide encouragement to people that their culture is not being threatened, and I would like to see people take that encouragement. Europe has been remarkably generous to Northern Ireland. Some of the grants that we are talking about — in the case of Schomberg House, you are talking about over £3 million, and the same in Derry. These are considerable amounts, and people should take encouragement from that.

Let me go back to the example that I gave before of what happened during the City of Culture year. Culture was seen, then, to be a unifying force. So, when people use the phrase "cultural war", I worry that if you keep using such a phrase it almost takes on the reality, as if this thing existed. I do not think that we need to see a cultural war as being the reality. People could look through the other end of the telescope and see that there is lots of support for cultural activities on both sides.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am keen to return to one or two issues, but I am keen to bring members in as well, obviously.

Mr Cree: First, I confess to having read this report only once. There is quite a lot in it, but I have concerns about some of the detail in the report. As you know, detail is important, but I will give you three examples from the first section, "The Sense of Safety". On page 42, you talk about loyalist paramilitaries, and, in the third paragraph, you make this point about respectability:

"This new respectability allowed the PSNI to include those publicly associated with paramilitarism to join them in the sessions of the 'Cardiff group'."

What evidence have you for that statement?

Dr Nolan: Simply the membership of those who went to the Cardiff summit and who were subsequently associated with paramilitary organisations.

Mr Cree: You think that that gave them respectability, then — the small number who happened to be there.

Dr Nolan: I think that it does, yes. Their involvement with the groups listed here — academics, politicians, civil servants and community leaders — tends to give them a legitimisation, yes.

Mr Cree: At the end of that same paragraph:

"If there is something incongruous about police sitting down with members of illegal organisations to discuss law-and-order matters, it is an incongruity that has lost its power to surprise because the peace process has long accepted it as a modus operandi."

That is a direct contradiction.

Dr Nolan: Sorry, why do you see that as contradictory?

Mr Cree: Because you are saying here that this is a "new respectability" and then, in the second part of the same paragraph, that this has been going on for a long time and is accepted "as a modus operandi". How, therefore, can it be accepted as a "new" respectability?

Dr Nolan: The essential point being made is that having illegal organisations involved in situations where matters of law and order are discussed, there is an obvious contradiction about that, and it might surprise outsiders. However, the nature of the peace process has been to have a form of dialogue ongoing with people who were or are involved in organisations deemed illegal. It may be the case that, in one period, that kind of engagement was progressive and necessary for the peace process to work, but, if continued for an extended period, it perhaps ceases to be helpful or progressive in that way.

Mr Cree: Yes, but the "new respectability" pales if it has long been the "modus operandi".

Dr Nolan: It is not new that there has been dialogue and discussion with people from paramilitary organisations. We know that this goes back; the whole peace process, in a way, was predicated upon that kind of dialogue. However, I think there was a step change when, for example, the Unionist Forum was set up and members of paramilitary organisations were involved in those early discussions. There was an acceptance of that, and the leadership of the unionist parties at that time said that they were quite willing to work with anyone from organisations that have that history, so long as they were working towards peace. The issue, I think, is whether or not those organisations are working towards peace.

Mr Cree: We will probably leave our difference there, Dr Nolan. I will move on to page 44, where you talk about the size of the PSNI. The thing that startled me is that that particular section completely ignores Patten.

Dr Nolan: It does reference Patten. It goes back to what Patten had said should be the target size for the police force.

Mr Cree: Where does it mention the size that Patten gave — the 7,500?

Dr Nolan: Let me just see if I can find the reference.

Mr Cree: You will find a reference on the top of page 44, but the point is that the comparison —

Dr Nolan: Yes:

"The Patten Commission had recommended significant downsizing, and the workforce has been reduced from 16,000 in 1999 to just under 7,000 in 2014. Patten tended to use police officers (as opposed to total staff) as the measure".

The Patten report had recommended 7,500 as the number. Just to give that a little bit of context, the assumption at the time of the Patten report was that we would be living in a peaceful society and that 7,500 would be sufficient.

Mr Cree: I was just going to make that point to you, because what he actually said was that it was:

"rash to go ... much lower unless and until Northern Ireland can be judged with confidence to have become a permanently peaceful society."

Yet you are drawing a comparison with other UK forces and the ROI, which is on a ratio of 1:200 whereas Patten was 1:220. That was based — I was involved at the time — on New York Police Department figures.

Dr Nolan: I think what I am arguing here is possibly the same point that you are making. Those were based on the assumption that the police would be operating in a peaceful context. We are clearly not operating in that context. What we discovered, particularly last summer, was that we did not have sufficient police to deal with the problems that were manifesting. Because of that, we had to rely on mutual aid. We had to bring in police from the other police forces in the UK. If that is going to be a recurring problem, do we have sufficient numbers? Is that a realistic total for the police? What the report is trying to do — it is done graphically on page 47 — is to show that you have to look not just at the number of police officers but the fact that we had the British Army acting to maintain public order in Northern Ireland.

Mr Cree: Does that mean, Dr Nolan, that you are really arguing for more police?

Dr Nolan: What I think is pretty obvious is that we did not have sufficient police numbers last year to deal with the problems that presented themselves. We hope that we do not have a continuation of those problems but can continue with a smaller police force operating in situations that allow for that reduction of numbers. This is a point that the Chief Constable has made repeatedly: those figures are not realistic to deal with the situation that we find ourselves in.

Mr Cree: We are agreed on that point, then. The third and final one is on page 55, where you refer to the Historical Enquiries Team (HET). I have to say, I really was quite surprised about this. It states:

"in the original plan, it was to work alongside the proposals of the Consultative Group on the Past (otherwise known as Eames-Bradley)."

The Historical Enquiries Team, as you correctly say, was set up in 2005, but Eames/Bradley was not set up until 2007 and, in fact, did not produce a report until 2009.

Dr Nolan: Yes, that is correct, but —

Mr Cree: Is that not nonsense?

Dr Nolan: No, I do not think so.

Mr Cree: The timeline surely proves that, does it not?

Dr Nolan: No, the context is that the broader issue of how we deal with the past has been under discussion since 1998. We have had various ideas on what structures might facilitate both truth recovery and the interests of justice. It had never been thought that the HET, when it was first set up, would operate as the sole instrument for dealing with the past; there would be other accompanying initiatives. Eames/Bradley was set up to try to tell us what they might be.

Mr Cree: Doctor, does that not mean that, surely, in the original plan, it could not have been to work alongside the consultative group, because it was not there?

Dr Nolan: No. It was to work alongside other societal initiatives to deal with the past —

Mr Cree: Should that be changed, then? Is it incorrect?

Dr Nolan: Possibly, yes, we could have made that a little more clear, just in the sequence.

Mr Cree: It makes a difference.

Dr Nolan: However, I think that the essential point is that, when people criticised the HET, they were asking an awful lot of it. They were asking it to do things that, in the original thinking, would have been done through other processes, particularly truth recovery, not associated with justice.

Mr Cree: Thank you for that clarification.

Ms J Irwin: I will just say something going back to the very first point, in relation to representation. I will take it more from the point of view of community relations, rather than directly from that of the report. One of the things that was fed back to us very frequently around the time of the Cardiff discussions was, why are there are some people in the room and others are not? Now, there was a perfectly logical and practical reason why everyone could not be in the room at one time. However, there was a great hunger, at local level, for people to be engaged in looking at how we could positively come up with solutions to this question of sharing space at all levels of culture.

The multi-party talks were then welcomed, I think, because it seemed to be a much more structured approach to this question — a much more broadly inclusive approach to what those solutions might be. We know where the Haass discussions have got to since then, but, certainly, one of the things that the Community Relations Council would like to leave in the minds of this Committee and others is the need to have, at a societal level, a much more open discussion about how we can find positive ways to share the space when it comes to cultural issues. Last year in Derry/Londonderry was a very good example of how we can do that and everybody gets a win out of it. Now, that took work; you know as well as I do that it did not fall out of a clear blue sky. But nevertheless there were very important ingredients to it which I think we can apply to the broader context. It is very important to remember — this is also something that we hear very frequently from the groups that we work with — that the more emphasis that is put on where the problems are, and only where the problems are, the less we pay attention to good examples and lessons that we can learn and apply, and maybe have public policy come in behind that in support of some really good efforts that are going on.

So, I think that the Cardiff thing, from a practitioner's point of view, was really a matter of saying how we all get into an inclusive discussion and find a solution to this, so that there is a more generous and welcoming approach to each other's culture.

Mr Cree: I am not complaining about that. My concern is that, when you go to a lot of work to produce a report like this, with recommendations which deserve to be treated with the utmost respect, you have to have the detail of the report correct. I was always taught that, if you are writing a report, a person from Mars should be able to read it without applying any local knowledge. So it must be fair and balanced and, above all, it must be accurate. That is my comment.

Ms J Irwin: I do not take away from the author's opportunity to answer those questions. CRC published —

Mr Cree: Do you take my point? If there are some small points that are not correct — it is easily done — it can spoil the overall effect of the report.

Ms J Irwin: One of the things that the advisory group that supports Paul in developing the report said, right from the very start, was that feedback is really important. This is a living document. It is produced annually, but actually the information that underpins it changes day and daily. And accuracy —

Mr Cree: Sorry, but the historical information cannot change. I am always cautious about people rewriting history.

Ms J Irwin: Sure. Absolutely, but it is in everybody's interest that we have feedback, such as you are giving us, as clear with respect to the evidence as we can get it. That sort of feedback — on accuracy — is very welcome indeed. Then also, on the ideas that are coming through, at an earlier point, there was some discussion about how we came up with the index that we used to develop the report. In international terms, this is relatively groundbreaking work. Along with some colleagues in Club de Madrid, Paul organised a conference last autumn — in November — to bring together colleagues who are actually working on this kind of peace monitoring process in other parts of the world to make sure that we learn from that and make the best effort that we can whenever we carry out that work.

Sparing the author's blushes, I will say that there was a great deal of feedback to say that this is very progressive. There is very little going on in the world that goes beyond what we have. In fact, other places wish to learn from the model that we use. It took a very long time to come up with the four pillars that there are at the moment. However, everybody who was involved in the process views this as a developing area of expertise for everyone. So, any feedback about both method and accuracy is welcome.

Mr Osborne: I have to say that, in the five or six days since this report was published and as with the previous two reports, all the feedback that we have received from people about its accuracy, information, logic and consistency has been extremely positive.

Mr Cree: Was that until today, Peter?

Mr Osborne: I do not think that you have raised anything of significance, really. I understand the points that you made. Over the past few days, we have actually had international as well as regional feedback about how important this is. It is an example of good practice that has been produced here and that we can use to reach out to other communities in conflict and in divided situations to demonstrate how best something can be done. We are very proud of the publication. I think that it is important to take the conclusions seriously, because part of Paul's role, independent of the Community Relations Council, and the role of the council itself is to reflect back and challenge in some of those areas. We are very happy for that to instil debate, because people may have different views on those issues. However, I think that we also have to take very seriously what is actually a very substantial piece of work for that.

The Deputy Chairperson: Have you seen the proposed new good relations indicators from OFMDFM? Have you responded to the consultation on those?

Ms J Irwin: I will maybe deal with that. We have indeed. Departmental officials involved a wide range of stakeholders in a series of meetings. Paul and some of our colleagues in the CRC were involved in that process, largely to see where and how the work that was going on with indicators would sit in relation to that sort of work. At the moment, they occupy two very different spaces. This is, if you like, a sort of state-of-the-nation review of peace building as it stands. The indicators that are emerging out of the united community policy, although they are referred to as the good relations indicators, in fact fall into two categories. One is the category of indicators that relate very specifically to that particular policy as opposed to wider good relations in general. They also collect a lot of data that are already available there. When it comes to good relations, we also said that it will be very important, even if it is narrowly defined under the united community policy, to follow the impact of those initiatives in the long term to see whether they actually make a difference. We indicated that, although it was worthwhile and we were very happy to be involved in the process, there was a long way to go to get those indicators to be absolutely perfect. At present, they are wrongly named. They really are the united community indicators at some level or other. They certainly do not occupy the space of this report.

The Deputy Chairperson: Just to be clear, what is your assessment of the state of the proposed good relations indicators?

Ms J Irwin: Our feedback was that they are not good relations indicators; they are indicators that relate to this particular policy area. Even at that, they lack some of the areas of measurement that would be essential if we were to review the impact of that particular policy. So, as you know, the old indicators on the one hand collected data that were already there, but on the other hand, there were gaps in the information. I think that those who devised the current set of indicators would also recognise that that problem remains — for the moment, anyway.

The Deputy Chairperson: Is it possible for you to provide the Committee with a copy of your initial comments, Peter, on the strategy in general and the proposed good relations indicators? As you rightly say, Jacqueline, assessing whether the strategy actually achieves outcomes is the most important aspect of it. The indicators will be essential to doing that.

I am also keen to touch on present and future funding. I have received concerns about the good relations fund. I stand to be corrected, but it is my understanding that, for the financial year 2013-14, applications for OFMDFM's good relations fund opened in October and people were notified of the outcome of their application in February, with two months left in that year to deliver projects. Indeed,

applications for the financial year 2014-15 opened in February, and allocations have yet to be made. Are you aware of that information?

Ms J Irwin: I am not so clear on the details for the 2014-15 financial year. We have received some feedback from some groups on the 2013-14 financial year that largely aligns with what you indicated.

Mr Osborne: I touched on this, and in the role that I have held for the past two months, I have made an effort to meet with a lot of different groups and have had conversations with people at the various conferences and seminars that the CRC has run. That has certainly been a recurring theme in those conversations. Representatives of organisations have said that they want to do this work and that they regard it as hugely important. It is about local people taking risks in their communities for the good of everybody in that community, and they feel that they are not being supported by decisions being made quickly enough to allow them to get on with it. I am aware of some people having to turn down offers, because they could not deliver in the time frame that was left and available.

I think that there is a wider importance, and the review of community relations funding in general needs to be done systematically. For me, it is the most important social policy area in Northern Ireland. There needs to be confidence about the robustness of that review, it needs to be done with an evidence base and it needs to be mindful of the needs in communities so that this work can be delivered. Therefore, whatever structures or criteria are used in the future, they need to be responsive to the needs in this incredibly complex environment.

The Deputy Chairperson: In the absence of any information about how they will be additionally resourced, we are asking to feed in to significant changes such as those in the Community Relations Council and the creation of an equality and good relations commission. Do you know what the timescale is for the review of community relations funding?

Mr Osborne: We are told that there will be two stages. The first stage will, I assume, be a very scientific and structured exploration of what has been funded across all funders, whether they are OFMDFM, CRC or a number of the other organisations, including those that deal with Peace funding. That review was to be completed by the end of March. I believe that it has been completed, but I do not know that for sure, because we have not been formally told. The second stage will look at options for how it could be delivered in the future. That is due to be completed by the end of June. It is probably a useful thing to do, but it needs to be done in a way that reflects the seriousness of the issue. There also needs to be a really robust process for doing it, because this is an incredibly complex environment.

The Deputy Chairperson: I want to return briefly to the administration of the good relations fund for the financial year 2013-14. How extraordinary is it that applications opened in October but people were notified in February?

Mr Osborne: I do not think that we can comment on that, because we were not involved in the decision-making process. I think that OFMDFM did that.

The Deputy Chairperson: What has been the impact on groups that are attempting to respond to some of the challenges that this work has outlined? For example, your report suggests that there is an impulse for reconciliation that remains strong at a grassroots level, yet OFMDFM good relations funding is being opened in the October of a financial year and released in the February.

Mr Osborne: I think that there is both the specific issue with the groups and a broader issue. I have been told that some of the groups said no to offers, because they could not deliver in the time frame involved. I think that there has been some significant frustration in communities. I have certainly heard that very directly, and I know that others have as well. I would have thought that you would want decision-making to be done quicker than that to allow people to get on with the job that they want to deliver on the ground in a very complex and challenging environment.

There is a second broader issue. We have issues with some of the targets in TBUC and strongly embrace others; some are quite ambitious. However, as I said, if you seriously want to take down the interface barriers within 10 or even 20 years, you need to not just set a target but identify how you will resource the work that is involved. That really goes to the heart of how we live together in small local communities where the feelings are very intense. It takes a lot of courage to do that work on the ground, but it also requires a lot of support, and there is an issue if we do not know how that will be

supported in the medium term — in three, four, five or six years — for the 10-year strategy. Other funders in other policy areas look at three-, five- and even up to seven-year funding for programmes.

This is an area that will benefit from long-term funding allocations; it will not benefit from year-to-year or hand-to-mouth funding. People do not know whether they will be resourced to do the work that they want to do in six months' time, and that is not the right environment to support the sort of work that needs to be done. It needs a long-term commitment and long-term resourcing. That is one of the principles that we agreed with the Equality Commission should be in the framework and legislation for taking TBUC forward.

Mr Attwood: Thank you very much for the report and your evidence. I thank you not least because I think that the report's clear-headed and forthright character is something that, at a political and societal level, we just have to come to terms with.

You use language in the report that says that the

"moral basis of the ... peace accord"

has evaporated, and you report that there is an "absence of trust", a "culture war" and so on and so forth. We have to acknowledge both how our politics has degraded itself or has been degraded, and how things are deteriorating. That leads me to the conclusion that a transfer of functions from your organisation to the new proposed hybrid organisation is folly. If the shape of our society is not what it should be and if all the fault lines that you identified exist and may be deepening, you have to intensify the work in the best model. Therefore, I think that that is evidence against what FM and dFM are proposing with the transfer of functions to a body — you lot commented on it — that, in my view, has increasingly lost its way since the days of Bob Cooper and the Fair Employment Commission (FEC). Why would you want to pile a new function into a body that is not fulfilling its function in the way that I think that it should?

I look at your report and ask what we are doing about young, working-class Protestant males. What are we doing? It is the Equality Commission's function to do a lot about them.

I think that the report is a commentary on an emerging failed strategy of FM and dFM of transferring functions to a body that, in my view, does not do its work in the way that it should or that it did in the past. In that context, they should take forward some of these matters. That is a political comment, but you may not wish to engage with it because you are subject to political authority. Therefore, you may also not want to comment on whether you think that, in the light of that report, in general and whatever about FM and dFM's ambitions, what they propose is the right way to address the fault lines that you identified.

Secondly, we were given heaps of reassurance by officials in the past two or three weeks that the presence of the chief executives of the Equality Commission and the CRC on some working group that is taking forward the transfer of functions would fix any problems that might arise. However, you told us today that, although you may have been at some preparatory meeting, there has not even been a meeting yet. There may have been one at which you, working with officials, are taking this work forward. So, aside from my policy and political concerns about what is happening, the legislation is meant to come forward pretty quickly now, given the limitations and timelines of our mandate. The record will confirm what officials told us. Was it Mr Devitt who gave us that reassurance?

The Deputy Chairperson: That is right.

Mr Attwood: I will not comment on that. However, that was a very up front and bullish commitment and comment from Mr Devitt about FM and dFM taking the work forward, yet we learn today that there might not have been much so far on it.

Mr Osborne: There are a lot of things to comment on. I will do that initially and then ask Jacqueline to comment on any part of it that you want but particularly the second part.

Is it the right policy? I will say one or two things in a context first. I have been involved with the Community Relations Council in different ways, but I have been its chair for two or three months. I have to say that I think that what the Community Relations Council does within a fairly limited budget is very substantial. The CRC as a whole has, for 20-odd years, made a really significant contribution to how this society works and has supported a huge number of very positive activities on the ground,

again with some personal and community risk attached for people in the CRC and outside it. Over that period and now, the Community Relations Council has deserved and does deserve more respect and recognition than it has got for the work that it has delivered. That does not mean that everybody needs to agree with everything that it says or does, but it has played a hugely critical role in this society through the conflict and beyond, and it continues to do so by challenging in certain respects.

That said, I think that we approach the proposed legislation without any issue of protecting organisations. I do not think that that is the right way to go. It is about the right structure and the right policies that we need to address, and out of that will come whatever structure emerges. It is not about protecting any particular organisation. That is why we would embrace the notion of an equality and good relations commission. However, that would be conditional on certain things: getting the legislation and the structures right. I am not sure whether you were here when I went through some key principles that we have agreed with the Equality Commission. Those include long-term commitment to resourcing; the equality and good relations function needing enhanced in a new commission; the standards set down in international law under which we should be reflecting the definition of sectarianism as a subset of racism; good relations needing to be really robust; and more robust and enforcement methods in monitoring and regulation. Those are principles that we have agreed with the Equality Commission. We hope that that means that the legislation will come forward. This is an opportunity to move forward in some of those areas.

The legislation will come forward, but it will not say anything about greater enforcement or regulation, and it will not have a good, robust definition of those terms. It will not say that something a bit more than good relations is desirable. Good relations and reconciliation in Northern Ireland is a lot more than desirable; it is necessary. We need to be robust about saying how important that is. We also should not have legislation that in some way augments processes that undermine equality or good relations. We are totally committed to equality and to good relations, and we will not support anything that undermines either of those. We will look at a number of areas in the legislation. So, could it be a way forward? It could be, but it requires us to be really robust and ambitious in setting those targets.

Mr Attwood: Can I press you on that point? I did not hear the principles earlier, but I welcome them. Either the First Minister, the deputy First Minister or both will not agree with those principles about the ambition, which is the word that you just used. They will not. You know that, even if you will not say it. We know that, because, whatever is in there, one, other or both do not have the ambition. Robust enforcement? Come on. So, my question to you is this: in the event that the principles that you have agreed with the Equality Commissioner will not be honoured in legislation, will you confirm now, in principle, that you are prepared to say to FM and dFM that this will not get us over the wall?

Mr Osborne: That brings me to the second point that you raised, which Jacqueline can also comment on. I will directly answer that question in a second. I just want to be clear with the Committee. A review was done, with, I think, OFMDFM, that established a transition board. There has been one meeting of that board, which I attended. It dealt with terms of reference; it did not deal with legislation. The Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council has set up a working group of joint board members to look at what they would like to see in the legislation. That working group has met three times. We are due to meet the officials, I think, in a month's time, in early May, and that will be the officials' first engagement with that working group to talk about the legislation.

The Deputy Chairperson: Do you know the membership of the working group?

Mr Osborne: It is made up of five board members from CRC, five board members from the Equality Commission and the two chief executives. We see that as a process that allows the expertise and specialism in the two organisations to help to inform the legislation. That is what we would like to do. We have had little input into the legislation to date, and we would like to have more. I think that there has been one meeting where we have been able to say, "Here are some of the things that we think should go into the legislation", but that is it. Now, before that, I think that the chief executives and other members of staff had some input into procedural meetings on the establishment of a new commission, but not about legislation, strategy or direction. However, I will leave Jacqueline to comment further on that.

The direct answer to your question about when or whether we should is that this is a political decision about what this legislation looks like. That is for the Chamber and members here to decide. If, when I see the legislation — we have not seen it yet — it does not meet what we would regard as necessary at this time to set the structures, guidelines and frameworks of what we need in enhancing equality and enhancing good relations in our society, we will certainly say that publicly.

Mr Attwood: You will not want to answer this question, but do you think that the Equality Commission would be as forthright at that time as the CRC?

Mr Osborne: That is a question for it. I know that there are very good people in the Equality Commission who are doing very good work, but I think that that is a question that you need to address to them.

Ms J Irwin: If I could just clarify something about the project board. Officials in OFMDFM established a project board and invited the chairs of the two organisations to sit on a transition board, as they referred to it. It got as far as putting together terms of reference and structure documents about how this project would run. At that point in time, OFMDFM carried out a conventional review process whereby they brought in an independent reviewer on projects that they run. I reported to that reviewer that there was something wrong with the governance structure of the project, in that the boards of the two organisations needed to be involved, as opposed to the actual staff of the organisations. That recommendation, among others, was taken on board, and out of that came a new project board on which the chairs of the two organisations sit. There are also legal advisers on that board, and officials from the Department and special advisers on both sides also sit on it. The independent board member of OFMDFM is also part of that structure. That is different to the structure that Peter is describing, which is a joint meeting of the boards of the two organisations.

Mr Osborne: That is an initiative of ours.

Ms J Irwin: The other one comes from OFMDFM.

Mr Attwood: At an institutional level, you and the Equality Commission seem to be applying your minds to the task. As well as my concern about the parallel model here of trying to create a structure that brings together various functions, my main concern is about the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS). If there is any piece of work that has preoccupied this Committee since last October, it is the VSS. It created a structure that did not work, and we will see whether the implementation of the recommendations will make it work better. OFMDFM does not have a good track record of getting it right with a new body to do vital work in our society. The Committee knows that from the past six months. I am sure that OFMDFM will learn from that experience, but a very senior official told the Committee that, with the VSS, OFMDFM applied a lot of effort to make sure that it got the financial governance right. It worked really hard on that, yet the review of the VSS by the Victims' Commissioner and her team was withering and explicit about how financial governance had not been dealt with. On the one hand, we were told by an official that OFMDFM worked really hard on that aspect before the VSS was set up, yet, on the other hand, the review of the VSS was arguably most withering about that aspect.

We are just going down a dead end. The legislation will not happen in this mandate because there is not enough time. The right threshold, which you named, will not be fulfilled. There is not enough time to achieve that, and I do not think that the will is there anyway. It is not a wise course of action, so it would be wiser to pull back now and ask what the right model is for dealing with the issue, informed by your narrative in this third report.

Mr Osborne: I am not going to comment on aspects of that; those are political discussions and issues. Our priority is to embrace what needs to be embraced to get the structures right. From our perspective, this is the most critical social policy area that we have to deal with. How we live together informs how we do everything else in society: whether we create sustainable jobs, get people into training, deal with educational disadvantage and improve social cohesion. All that is impacted on by whether we get our good relations — our reconciliation and healing policies and structures — right. From our perspective, it is critical that we get it right. Along with the Equality Commission, we will do what we can to inform people what we think. There will be some consensus between the two organisations about what needs to happen, and we will see what comes through in legislation. If the legislation is right, we will embrace it and congratulate people. However, if there are deficiencies and the bars are not high enough, we will say that. The peace monitoring report, many other reports and our own experiences bring that home. We all know that there is a time to raise the bar and to be ambitious. We certainly have that ambition, and we urge everyone else to have it.

The Deputy Chairperson: One of the most concerning recent findings is about young people's views on peace in Northern Ireland. A 'Belfast Telegraph' poll found that 65% of young people surveyed did not think that there was peace in the country. Does the peace monitoring report engage with the views of young people and, if it does, in what way?

Dr Nolan: We took account of all the attitude surveys that had been done, and some were referred to as having been taken specifically on the interface, but there were none on that more general question, "Do you think that peace has been achieved?". That was published by the 'Belfast Telegraph' only yesterday, so I am afraid that we were already in print. However, it is not a surprising report at all, in that it seems consistent with all the other attitude surveys by LucidTalk for the 'Belfast Telegraph', which show fairly negative attitudes towards the Assembly, and it is consistent with the Northern Ireland life and times surveys, which show a tailing-off in the belief that community relations have improved over the past five years. We see fewer Protestants and Catholics holding that belief, so there is some depressing evidence from the attitude surveys. The 'Belfast Telegraph' survey is consistent with all the others that we used.

The Deputy Chairperson: Is work ongoing on that in the Community Relations Council, or can best practice at the Community Relations Council advise as to how we can improve youth engagement on those issues?

Ms J Irwin: We are involved with young people on lots of levels. In fact, as you know, we have also supported the Committee in having engagement with young people, and we will continue to do that. Our assistance to you on that work remains open, so please feel welcome to come back to us.

This is not a matter of engaging with young people; it is more a matter of them feeling that politics is working. It is not an issue of whether they are engaged, although that in itself is an important issue, even more so because they are future leaders.

At our launch of the peace monitoring report yesterday, one of the speakers commented that, 16 years after the formal agreement was signed, we have a whole generation of young people who have no real history with that. They do not particularly remember the roots and where we were before the agreement. That is dangerous because they are able to engage with myths and not have the lived experience of what it was like to be involved in the conflict. For that generation, the future needs to work, and they must understand what got us to where we are. That is where a great deal more work is needed.

Mr Osborne: I will add a couple of points. It is not directly answering your question, but it is important to understand that the Community Relations Council has a limited budget for its overall work. You would probably be surprised to learn how small its budget is in the context of others, and you have some of that information in front of you. Apart from supporting groups directly working on the ground, the council provides an overview of Northern Ireland support for organisations at a regional level. It also does the sorts of things that the peace monitoring report does in highlighting issues, challenging and trying to shape policy and practice in government and beyond the public sector.

There are two or three conversations that we all need to have on educational underachievement. We congratulate Paul for stimulating this through the report. First, as a society, we need to acknowledge and accept that there is a big issue here for a number of people around educational underachievement. We have to say that there is a problem. Sometimes, the narrative around education is more about how wonderful the system is rather than recognising that, although it is good in many ways, it is also letting down a lot of young people on both sides of the community.

Secondly, we need to talk about what we do about that. In other areas — in England, for example — a pupil premium is paid. There is greater investment in schools that have higher numbers of young people from areas of social disadvantage. We need to get over ourselves and accept that that is one of the policy responses that will help kids from working-class communities in those schools.

The answer lies not only in schools. It is partly about the schooling system, leadership and the unitary nature of how the system responds in different schools. However, it is also beyond the schools; it is in communities and is concerned with how families relate and support their children in schools. That touches on areas of criminality or paramilitarism in some of those communities, as well as on a range of other social factors. A debate needs to be had on how we respond. That will partly come down to accepting that there has to be a good social policy outcome, which goes back to the equality and social cohesion issues on investing more money in areas in which there are a higher number of kids from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Deputy Chairperson: I agree. Some funding streams will end in the near future. What is the future of the peace monitoring report? Will it happen again?

Ms J Irwin: As you know, the report is supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This year marks the end of a three-year funding cycle. We will carry out a quick review of the report to make sure that there are not some things that we should be tweaking, look at the frequency of the report and some other items. We then hope to secure funding to continue with the work. We will look for other independent funders at that time. At this stage, I cannot say that the report's future is absolutely secure, but the Community Relations Council is 100% committed to seeing that vital work continue.

Mr Osborne: Let me make two points. The Community Relations Council has demonstrated that it produces extremely robust reports, compiled independently by Paul. We are home to the report and its challenges, and I know that people may be challenged by the issues that it raises, but that is part of the CRC's role. Whether or not people agree, it is critical that that continues to happen in a way that can be done only by an organisation such as the CRC or a new commission. Certainly, from our end, there is a real determination to ensure that that carries on. We are not talking about a huge amount of investment. A limited amount of money is needed to make it happen. If I had my way, without prejudging the review, it would continue to happen every year. I hope that we will put more resource in to be able to have the sort of conversations that we are having in communities. We need a debate on those issues. That is how we understand some of the issues and move forward in communities.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. Peter, you have just put great emphasis on educational underachievement — rightly so. We recognise that it is a problem. Do you also acknowledge that that is why John O'Dowd is using the common funding scheme to address the issue? I live in a rural area, and we have issues with the way in which poverty is measured there, which I think is totally unfair. Obviously, that is not covered in your report. I do not think that it is. I simply wanted to flag that up.

Mr Osborne: Let me comment briefly, and Paul can comment on the detail of the report. I certainly understand that the Education Minister has policies on that and greater investment in areas of disadvantage. Those are to be welcomed. We have asked the Minister if he would like a private briefing on some of the report's findings so that we can explore whether the CRC has a role in looking at how to communicate those issues and develop conversations with some of the key stakeholders on the education side. There are big debates, as you know, and political disagreements on some of those issues. We are not entering into those political disagreements. However, as for the general principle of whether it means that schools need greater investment in areas in which kids underachieve, I think the fact is that it does. That is partly what I am talking about. If we acknowledge the problem, we can, hopefully, reach consensus on how to tackle it.

Dr Nolan: I have two points. In the report, we provide evidence for what is happening in society. Hopefully, that will create debate about what needs to be done in the future. Yesterday, at the seminar to launch the report, there was a very interesting discussion. Professor Tony Gallagher from Queen's talked about the very issue that you raised about how to engineer that to the right effect because the unintended consequences of attempts to address the problem sometimes serve to make it worse rather than better. He talked about the need to look very carefully at how we construct models. There was agreement that the present system does not appear to deliver in a fair and equal way for all children, so we need new policy initiatives that will deliver better results and help to offset some of the problems that come from socio-economic disadvantage. If, for instance, kids from working-class areas or socially deprived areas, as measured by the uptake of free school meals, are performing as badly as they appear to be, there needs to be some way in which other resources are directed there. That was the main point to emerge from the discussion.

In all three reports, I look at all the different measurements of poverty done by DSD, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the End Child Poverty campaign, and so on. In this report, one section is headed "How reliable are poverty statistics?" In many ways, the debates about poverty in Northern Ireland have become debates about method: how to measure poverty. There are advocates for particular methods. I happen to think that the one that is most realistic is the family resources survey, because it measures real things such as whether you can afford to attend a family wedding, have one week's holiday a year, and so on. Those results are pretty stark. No matter which way you measure poverty in Northern Ireland, it is clear that poverty levels here are very serious. They need to be addressed. I do not get into the correct way to do that. The report simply tries to provide the measures and does not rely on any one single measurement. It says, "Here is the evidence from the DSD poverty bulletin, the family resources survey, the End Child Poverty campaign and so on".

Ms J Irwin: Our work is community relations-focused, but, in the past, we worked with schools, generally with the support of the International Fund for Ireland. We discovered that the most effective models are what are described as whole-school approaches. We worked not only with a school but with families and the wider community to get a combined effort and result. It came up in discussions yesterday that much the same needs to happen with educational achievement issues. Schools have a big part to play in that and in making sure that the important principle of Every School a Good School is applied.

Money on its own will not make the complete difference. There are other issues such as ambition, valuing education in the first place, role models for young people, support for struggling families so that they can support their children through education and all the issues that you might imagine. We strongly support a whole-school and whole-community approach. In policy terms, that is an argument for a big connection between what happens through the Department of Education, what goes on at other levels in anti-poverty strategies, and so on, and for looking for common purpose.

The Deputy Chairperson: The Full Service Community Network in north and west Belfast is based on that whole-school approach, and, in east Belfast, we are looking at how that whole-school model can be applied. Even though people argue that nothing at all is being done at times, quite a lot of work is being attempted in the background.

I must bring the session to a close because time has beaten us. Sorry, George, do you want to come in briefly?

Mr G Robinson: The Protestant and Catholic schools in Limavady sit side by side and now work closely together. They are building a bridge between the two schools, and there is greater working between one school and the other. We were over there two or three weeks ago, and an incredible amount of collaborative work is going on. The principals practically live in each other's school at the moment. It is so good to see that working relationship between the two religions being fostered at such a young age.

Mr Osborne: That is very encouraging, George. I am aware of that, as, I am sure, are Jacqueline and Paul. The more that happens, the greater the understanding is, without any risk to anybody, of the diverse nature of the community there. There is a question about integrated as opposed to shared education, but that is possibly a debate for a different day. The Community Relations Council also provides an officer for the OFMDFM district council programme. For the record and given that you mentioned the work in Limavady, I congratulate Limavady Borough Council on its work. The council and the officer do much positive work — a lot of it quietly — that makes a significant impact. The impact is much greater than you would imagine from the budget that they have.

Mr G Robinson: In particular, you have to keep targeting young people and bringing them along with you.

Ms J Irwin: I strongly support that. It is stark to realise that children aged 16 and heading towards 17 were born after the agreement, so, although we have been working through these complicated issues, a whole generation of young people has grown up. That is a sobering thought.

Mr G Robinson: Exactly.

Ms J Irwin: We should deal with and think of that every day.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks very much for your time. The report is detailed, and it is vital that we continue to have a challenge function on the Government's good relations policy and vision. We have a lot of work to do, and we appreciate the work that you do to contribute to achieving better outcomes.

Mr Osborne: Thank you, Chair and Committee.