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Contents

Assembly Business

Committee Membership	1
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Ministerial Statements

Public Expenditure: 2013-14 October Monitoring Round and 2014-15 Capital Reallocation Exercise	1
Prison Reform: Owers Report	19

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice.....	24
Culture, Arts and Leisure	33

Assembly Business

Topical Questions.....	42
------------------------	----

Ministerial Statement

Prison Reform: Owers Report (<i>Continued</i>)	43
--	----

Executive Committee Business

Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013.....	45
--	----

Private Members' Business

Job Creation	47
--------------------	----

Written Ministerial Statements

Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Organ Donation.....	68
Regional Development: Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation.....	68

Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the Editor.

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to arrive not later than two weeks after publication of this report.

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 21 October 2013

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, the motion on Committee membership will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Mitchel McLaughlin replace Ms Sue Ramsey as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. — [Ms Ruane.]

Ministerial Statements

Public Expenditure: 2013-14 October Monitoring Round and 2014-15 Capital Reallocation Exercise

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to present the Executive's conclusions on the October monitoring allocations for 2013-14 and the capital reallocations for 2014-15.

Before I get into the detail, I first wish to present some information that sets the wider economic context for those public expenditure allocations. I do so because this stage in the financial year is an opportune time to take stock of the key economic and financial indicators. Indeed, it is my intention in future years to use the opportunity that the October monitoring round presents halfway through the budgetary year to update the House and the wider public on the economic and fiscal position in Northern Ireland by way of a mid-year financial statement.

When making Budget allocations, I believe that it is important to factor in the strategic positioning of our economy, thereby allowing an assessment of which sectors are currently in most need of assistance. It will be useful to set out for all Members what I believe the current position to be, as it will help develop a better understanding of my announcements today and of the key issues that we will have to address in the coming months as part of the 2015-16 Budget process.

Looking at the economy first, it is clear that many key indicators are showing positive trends and that the local economy has shown signs of improvement since the turn of 2013. The labour market is improving, with the number of people claiming unemployment benefits falling for seven consecutive months. This is the first time that we have witnessed such a prolonged reduction in unemployment benefit claimants since August 2007. The unemployment rate has also fallen to 7.3%, which is 0.4 percentage

points below the UK rate and significantly below the rates in the Republic of Ireland and the eurozone, which are at 13.5% and 12.1% respectively.

The lower unemployment figures are also reflected in the employment trend, with an additional 4,000 people now in employment compared to the same time last year. However, this is no time to become complacent, since the number of people who are in employment reduced over the past quarter, which indicates that the recovery is by no means secure.

There are also signs of increased activity in the housing market. The latest residential property price index produced by Land and Property Services for quarter 2 of 2013 shows that residential property prices increased by 2% compared to quarter 1. Property sales were also up by an encouraging 10% compared with a year before, which is another positive indicator. However, the housing market recovery is in its early phase, with house prices still more than 50% below their 2007 peak.

Private sector activity is also picking up, with the latest Ulster Bank purchasing managers' index (PMI) recording a further rise in private sector business activity such as new orders, employment and exports across all sectors — including retail, manufacturing and construction — during September, extending the current sequence of growth to three consecutive months.

The latest PMI data also pointed to a fourth successive increase in new business for Northern Ireland companies, with private sector firms increasing their staffing levels for the third successive month. The fastest rises were seen in retail and construction companies, the two sectors which, we all know, have endured a lot during the downturn. This economic recovery is also reflected in local tourism numbers. Quarterly figures show that, over the year to March 2013, external visitor numbers were up by 4% and associated tourism expenditure was also up by 10%.

The readout from the recent international investment conference is also very positive. The growing number of job announcements made by Invest Northern Ireland show that Northern Ireland has the core requirements needed for growing a competitive private sector. This was also reflected in the recent UK Trade and Investment report, which highlighted that in 2012-13 Northern Ireland achieved an increase in new investment projects of 41% compared with the year before. We are the second most attractive destination for foreign

direct investment per head of population in the whole of the United Kingdom, second only to London. Investments in our telecommunications infrastructure are fast making Northern Ireland, and Belfast in particular, an international capital for information and communication technology financial services transactions.

Unfortunately, growing that competitive and dynamic sector of the economy will have to happen in parallel with the Executive working to address some structural economic constraints. Northern Ireland's gross value added (GVA), which is a measure of the whole economy, stands at £29,870 million for 2011, representing £16,531 for every head of the population. This is 79.2% of the UK average, although it is up from 78.7% in 2010.

Recent data shows that this region is still heavily dependent on fiscal transfers from the national economy, with a net subvention figure of £5,850 per capita in 2010-11, which is more than double the equivalent figure for the UK as a whole. Although our overall net fiscal deficit of £10.5 billion, or 38% of GVA, is down from its 2009-2010 peak of £10.8 billion, it is transparently obvious to all except those who do not wish to see that this region remains reliant on the rest of the United Kingdom for a significant amount of our public spending.

Growing the private sector will increase the regional tax base, which will help to address that fiscal deficit. The other side of the fiscal deficit question is the level of public expenditure that is made available to Northern Ireland. In that regard we, too, benefit from our place in the United Kingdom. The total identifiable expenditure on services in 2011-12 shows Northern Ireland's per head spending at £10,782, which is higher than the UK average and the other two devolved regions.

The public expenditure outlook is undoubtedly challenging, but it also provides me, as Finance Minister, with opportunities to promote economic growth and improve how we deliver public services. I believe that there is significant scope to drive forward reform and promote innovation in our public sector. My recent discussions with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted a number of areas such as collaborative procurement, widening shared services functions to embrace the wider public sector and local authorities, and engineering genuine governance reform. Those are issues that we need to pursue if we want to have lean and efficient delivery of public services to a standard that benchmarks well against

international best practice. I intend to make an announcement about how we can progress that in the weeks ahead.

The UK spending review announcement in June confirmed that our 2015-16 resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) would increase by 0.6% in cash terms, while total capital DEL would increase by 3.3% in cash terms. The change in emphasis by the United Kingdom Government whereby current spend is constrained to fund capital investment is perfectly understandable if, perhaps, challenging. Capital investment adds to the long-term economic capacity of an economy by improving competitiveness and generating positive returns. That, I think, presents us in Northern Ireland with an opportunity to genuinely focus policy attention on growing our economy not by paying lip service to that aim but by making tangible investments in our economic future.

While the UK Government continue to afford budgetary protection to schools and health, Northern Ireland will benefit because we have full comparability under the Barnett formula. Therefore, the Northern Ireland block is relatively protected. However, as I said earlier, the resource budget side will continue to be constrained, with the latest Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts suggesting that resource DEL at a UK level will decrease by 10.4% in real terms by 2017-18.

We will, therefore, have to consider carefully how we can continue to provide high-priority public services at a level that is acceptable to the public. Note that I said "high-priority public services", because we will undoubtedly have to stop doing some things that we are doing. The critical task will be to ensure that Departments deliver only the core functions that the public need and the outcomes that people desire. Spending on services that do not produce results is simply a waste of money that we do not have to squander. That will automatically force Departments to consider an efficiency agenda. To some, efficiency is the same as cuts, but not to me. Although that may involve reductions to low-priority services, for me efficiency is really about delivering key quality services with the minimum necessary level of inputs and obtaining outcomes.

The benefit of having our resource budget envelope constrained in that way is that we, as an Executive, have relatively high amounts of capital to invest in our economic future. In particular, a large tranche of the capital received from Her Majesty's Government is what is known as financial transactions capital,

which has to go — as loans and equity investment — directly to private sector entities. That is a positive development because, of necessity, it requires the Government to partner with the private sector to invest in our infrastructure and it requires the private sector to produce innovative investment opportunities. That will assist in growing our private sector capacity. Furthermore, that need to engage with our private sector in enhancing our capital stock will increase over the coming years as the UK Government are likely to make ever greater use of financial transactions capital.

Having set the scene, I want to turn, first, to the October Monitoring round and then to the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise. As usual, the Executive's focus in the monitoring rounds is on the non-ring-fenced resource DEL. The non-cash ring-fenced resource DEL element is handled separately since it is strictly controlled by Her Majesty's Treasury and cannot be used for any other purpose.

The starting point for this monitoring round was the June Monitoring outcome, which resulted in an overcommitment on the resource DEL side of £16.8 million and an effective overcommitment on the capital investment side of £10.5 million. That capital overcommitment included a pre-commitment to fund the £17 million purchase of the Invest NI headquarters, which has now concluded.

There were also three centre items, which impacted on the funding available in this round. The first was the regional rate income, with the latest forecast suggesting that income in this financial year is £4 million below the level included in the budget position. That is entirely due to lower than expected increases in both the domestic and non-domestic tax bases.

Members will also recall that, in the June monitoring round, the Executive agreed to an amended asset management unit capital receipts profile. That new profile allocated £19.4 million of additional capital receipts to Departments in this financial year, which is some £5.6 million less than the original target of £25 million. That, therefore, left a capital DEL pressure to be addressed in this monitoring round.

12.15 pm

The latest position on the Delivering Social Change projects and childcare strategy also had an impact on the funding position. There were a number of resource DEL transfers under the Delivering Social Change banner processed in the October monitoring round and those

included £2 million to the Department of Education; £0.8 million to the Department for Employment and Learning; £0.33 million to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM); and £0.04 million to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). Since that funding is accessed from the social investment fund set aside by the Executive for this purpose, those transactions were handled as technical transfers rather than allocations.

OFMDFM has confirmed that £15 million of capital DEL held at the centre will not be required in this financial year, and this was, therefore, made available for allocation in this monitoring round. The Department has further indicated that all of the residual resource DEL funding in respect of both the social investment fund and childcare strategy — some £4.8 million — is likely to be utilised in this financial year. I will provide a further update on that in January.

Of course, there were also reduced requirements surrendered by the Departments in this monitoring round. These amounted to £42.7 million resource expenditure and £31.1 million capital investment. Full details are provided in the tables accompanying this statement.

It is good practice that Departments seek to manage any emerging pressures within their existing allocations before bringing forward bids for additional allocations. The public expenditure control framework stipulates that internal departmental movements across spending areas in excess of the de minimis threshold require the Executive's approval. The movements agreed by the Executive in this round are also detailed in the tables.

Departments may also, for a number of reasons, seek to reclassify expenditure from resource to capital or vice versa. All such reclassifications need Executive approval, and these are also shown in the tables provided with the statement. Furthermore, Departments may also, subject to Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) approval, seek to move budgets between the ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced resource DEL categories. The impact of those moves is shown in the table detailing the ring-fenced resource DEL position. All those issues impacted on the total amount of resources available to the Executive in this monitoring round. Once those were all taken into account, the Executive had £24.1 million resource DEL and £28.7 million of capital DEL available for allocation.

Against the funding available, Departments submitted bids totalling £152 million in respect of resource expenditure and £72.7 million in respect of capital expenditure. The individual bids are also included in the tables attached to the statement. The level of allocations made by the Executive was informed by a judgement on the level of overcommitment that should be carried forward to the January monitoring round and the quality of bids submitted.

The Executive agreed allocations totalling £43.5 million on the resource side and £36.8 million on the capital side. The individual allocations are detailed in the tables, and I will, therefore, highlight only some of the main ones here.

There was £41.2 million allocated to the Department for Regional Development (DRD). That allocation included an additional £15 million towards roads structural maintenance; a further £5 million towards other road improvements; and £1.5 million towards the Magherafelt bypass project. It will also allow DRD to address a pressure of £2 million in regard to land compensation costs and fund a £1.7 million loan to Londonderry Port, which will enable the port to carry out improvements having secured an investment in an £80 million renewable power station. It will also provide £6 million for street lighting renewal works and safety testing. Finally, it includes the residual £10 million towards the DRD budget shortfall in relation to the release of value from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

The Executive also agreed to provide £14 million to DHSSPS, reflecting the high priority that the Executive continues to attach to the provision of quality healthcare. I am very pleased that this allocation will allow our hospitals to address thousands of elective care pressures in a range of specialities and seek to reduce waiting lists.

There was also £6.3 million allocated to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). That provides £5 million towards addressing a pressure in respect of TB compensation. It also allows DARD to fund an additional pressure of £1.3 million in respect of the hardship funding provided for in the June monitoring round.

There was also £5 million to the Department for Social Development (DSD) to fund additional investment in the co-ownership scheme, which remains oversubscribed. That will assist a further 100 first-time buyers and provide a further stimulus for the local housing market.

The allocations made in this monitoring round were skewed heavily towards improving our roads and transport infrastructure. That will reap economic returns in the long term and provide a short-term boost for our construction sector.

Before turning to the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise, I would like to update Members on the latest position in respect of financial transaction capital funding. Members will recall that in June monitoring, the Executive allocated £10 million to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) for the agrifood loan scheme. That scheme has now been announced. Further funding may be utilised in the last quarter of this financial year if demand exceeds the initial allocation.

I can now also announce that the Executive have allocated £5 million for the DSD affordable homes loan fund and £3.7 million towards the empty homes loan scheme. That still leaves some £20.9 million of residual financial transactions capital available in this financial year. My officials have been in discussion with Her Majesty's Treasury on potential end-of-year flexibility in respect of the financial transactions capital. Indications are that some limited flexibility may well be available, although that has not yet been confirmed by Treasury Ministers. I will update colleagues on that issue and any further allocations at January monitoring.

October monitoring concluded with an overcommitment of £19.4 million of resource expenditure and £8 million of capital expenditure. I believe that that is perfectly manageable at this stage of the financial year.

I will now turn to the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise. The capital reallocation exercise was commissioned by my officials over the summer. Its aim was to reallocate funding that was likely to be available in 2014-15 following delay in major projects such as the A5 road scheme. That reflects the critical importance that I attach to sound strategic capital budget planning. We need to make the most of our scarce resources. That exercise will help us to achieve that.

Before I detail the 2014-15 capital allocations that have been agreed by the Executive, I will touch briefly on some of the key funding assumptions that shaped the indicative financial envelope that is available for disposal. The starting position was the existing capital DEL overcommitment for 2014-15 of £18.5 million. The Executive also face a significant overcommitment on the resource DEL side next

year. I will say more about that later. To help to address that resource DEL overcommitment, the Executive agreed to reverse a previous resource-to-capital switch of £6 million next year. Two Departments also identified easements. They were £115 million from DRD due to delay in the A5 road project and £7.8 million from DARD in respect of its headquarters relocation project. That funding will be surrendered as part of next year's June monitoring round.

An additional £50 million of spending power also arose from the reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) borrowing reprofiling that was previously agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury. A further £6 million was freed up from the Department of Education baseline as a result of a successful United Community bid in 2014-15. The Department of Justice (DOJ) also previously agreed to surrender £10 million of capital funding in 2014-15. There will also most likely be some carry-forward of capital investment from this year and into the next. For planning purposes, that is expected to be some £10 million, which is broadly in line with the experience in the past few years.

Against those additional pressures, there was also a capital DEL pressure of £23.9 million in 2014-15 following the Executive's decision in June monitoring to retain a number of income-generating assets that were previously earmarked for disposal in 2014-15. Of course, the retention of those assets will benefit the resource side next year and beyond. Finally, the Executive were due to receive £25 million in 2014-15 in respect of the A5 road scheme from the ROI Government. However, due to the ongoing delay to that project, it is not yet certain that that receipt will materialise in 2014. I will discuss that issue with my counterpart in Dublin in the near future.

All of those planning assumptions provided the Executive with an indicative capital funding envelope of £125.5 million. However, that was without any overcommitment. The Executive agreed that, based on previous years' underspends, we would overcommit by around £40 million. That would then increase significantly the funding that is available.

Departments submitted 2014-15 capital bids worth £502.6 million. A summary of all of those bids is included in the tables that are attached to the statement. It was clearly not possible to meet all bids that were submitted. The Executive attached highest priority to discrete infrastructure projects that could deliver considerable spend in 2014-15. Such projects not only improve our infrastructure and

contribute to long-term economic growth, but provide an immediate boost to the local construction sector. The capital allocations are detailed in tables. I will highlight the most significant ones.

The Executive allocated £75.2 million to DRD. In terms of road infrastructure, that will allow DRD to continue the construction of the A8 Belfast to Larne road scheme and commence work on the much-needed A31 Magherafelt bypass project. I am extremely pleased to announce an allocation of £8.1 million in 2014-15 that will allow the commencement of work on the A26 Glarryford road scheme, where an additional eight kilometres of dual carriageway will be built, improving access and road safety on that key route. Furthermore, the funding will help DRD to deliver planned road structural maintenance and other road improvements. It will also ensure that DRD can complete bus procurement orders initiated in 2013-14 and begin replacement of, I am happy to say, the Strangford to Portaferry and Rathlin ferries.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hamilton: A very popular one.

DRD will also commence early design and preparatory work for the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson road scheme. Importantly, the A6 preparatory work does not commit the Executive contractually to that project. The Executive took the view that, until there is clarity on the A5 project, we cannot afford to commit contractually to the A6 project, since delivering both in parallel is unaffordable without there being a serious detrimental impact on all other departmental capital budgets.

The Executive also agreed to allocate £33 million to the Department of Health. Two weeks ago, I accepted an invitation from the Health Minister to visit the children's hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. I was shocked by what I saw: dedicated health professionals going beyond the call of duty to treat some extremely ill children but doing so in surroundings that, I am ashamed to say, are far from fit for purpose. Therefore, I am immensely pleased that that allocation enables the Department to begin construction on a new children's hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital site in Belfast.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hamilton: It will be a new state-of-the-art regional hospital to care for sick children from all over Northern Ireland.

The allocation allows the Department to manage health and safety risks proactively throughout the health estate and progress other estate improvements. It also provides the DHSSPS with additional funding to take forward a number of capital projects under the Transforming Your Care (TYC) reform programme and the construction of a new bespoke logistics and support centre for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Mitchel McLaughlin] in the Chair)

There was also £19.9 million allocated to DARD. That provides additional funding for axis 1 and axis 3 of the Northern Ireland rural development programme, which offers capital funding to farmers for areas such as improved competitiveness and greater access to high-speed broadband services in rural areas. The allocation also provides funding for further flood alleviation works in east Belfast and Beragh. There is also funding to support the aims and objectives of the Agri-Food Strategy Board's recently published Going for Growth strategy and to provide an upgrade to three areas of the facilities at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute's Hillsborough and Stormont sites.

There is also £16.1 million to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to address a significant pressure next year for the regional stadium construction programme.

A total of £11.8 million was allocated to the Department for Employment and Learning. That will fund a new faculty block at the University of Ulster in Coleraine; redevelopment at Queen's University; essential asbestos removal at Stranmillis University College; and a newbuild further education college in Banbridge.

The Department of the Environment (DOE) will receive £3 million for heritage-led development, on top of the £1.1 million that it will receive for the same in the October monitoring round. Members may recall that I brought a motion to the Assembly earlier this year acknowledging the economic value of Northern Ireland's outstanding historic buildings, so I am pleased that that allocation will see assets such as Carrickfergus Castle and Dundrum Castle enhanced.

In total, the Executive agreed allocations of £177 million, resulting in an indicative capital

overcommitment of £51.6 million in 2014-15. Although very challenging, I believe that that should be manageable through the in-year process. However, it will most likely mean that there will be little capital funding available for allocation through the monitoring rounds next year. I view that as a positive development, since it reflects the fact that the Executive have now taken a more strategic approach to capital budget planning.

Before I conclude my statement, I take this opportunity to update the House on United Community projects and the 2014-15 financial transactions allocations. Members will be aware that, as part of the economic pact, the Executive secured additional borrowing power of £50 million in 2014-15 and 2015-16 for shared housing and education projects. I can confirm today that the Lisanelly project, involving a shared school site in Omagh, will be funded from that additional borrowing power to the amounts of £6 million in 2014-15 and £9 million 2015-16.

My officials continue to work with the Departments and Her Majesty's Treasury on identifying further projects that may benefit from that additional funding source.

12.30 pm

The Executive have £59.3 million of financial transactions capital available in 2014-15 and £104.3 million in 2015-16. As part of the capital exercise, Departments submitted bids totaling £68.9 million for 2014-15, and those are shown in the tables attached to this statement. The bids submitted generally appeared perfectly viable, although with some uncertainty around the amount of funding required. That is because the schemes are generally demanded, and actual funding requirements, and the exact timing of them, will only be known when the schemes are fully operational. Therefore, the Executive agreed initial allocations to those schemes that were considered viable at this time, with a commitment to consider the position again in June next year.

Three financial transactions allocations were agreed by the Executive at this time. The first was £10 million to DETI for the agrifood loan scheme in the 2014-15 financial year. The second allocation was £13 million to DSD to advance two further housing schemes, including an affordable homes loan scheme and an empty homes scheme. Both those schemes will boost housing market supply and assist hard-pressed first-time buyers. Finally, the Executive agreed to allocate £5 million to

DHSSPS to take forward loan schemes for improvements and equipment purchase by GPs and dentists. Those allocations mean that there is still £31.3 million of financial transactions funding available next year, and that can then be allocated to those schemes that experience high demand or, indeed, alternative schemes that may materialise at that time.

The allocations of £177 million resulted in an indicative 2014-15 capital overcommitment of £51.6 million. That includes the £6 million capital DEL to resource DEL switch, which will result in a 2014-15 resource DEL overcommitment of £94.5 million. Addressing those overcommitments will be a significant challenge for the Executive next year.

The allocations that I have announced today will leave a lasting economic impact on Northern Ireland and help our economy as the recovery gathers momentum. One of the real benefits of our budget reallocation process is that we can use easements in some Departments to fund good projects that will deliver an economic return in the long term. The gathering economic recovery that I spoke of earlier will be further supported by investment in our roads and public transport network of some £91 million across this year and next year. I have also announced some £12 million of additional investment in our further education and higher education estates, and that will improve facilities for students here. Those investments will not only provide extra construction jobs in the short term but support long-term economic growth. Our health sector has also received a significant boost this year and, in particular, with the additional capital investments next year. A key project to highlight is the new children's hospital, which will commence next year and, when completed, will offer a modern care environment for children in Northern Ireland. All sides of this Assembly have called for that project, and I am more than happy to give it the green light today. There is also a much-needed boost for our farming and agrifood sector, with an additional £15 million for the rural development programme and Agri-Food Strategy Board, and a further £10 million of financial transactions funding committed to the agrifood loan scheme for next year.

In short, the allocations that I have announced today for this year and next will sustain and create jobs. They will aid our recovery. They will develop our infrastructure and give us a competitive edge. They will generate opportunities for all, and they will provide help for the vulnerable. I am determined to play my

part in supporting economic recovery across Northern Ireland, and I strongly believe that the allocations announced today will do just that. I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will call Daithí McKay, the Chair of the Finance Committee, next and give some latitude to you, as the Chair. However, this statement has attracted considerable interest amongst the Members present, and I have a significant list of Members who wish to speak. I appeal at the start for Members to come straight to the point in their questions, and that will allow everyone to get in.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I will take full advantage of your latitude this afternoon. I thank the Minister for his statement, and may I be the first to welcome the fact that the Executive have agreed to fund the A26 to the tune of £8.1 million. That is long overdue, and I am sure that all Members from North Antrim and elsewhere will agree with me on that. The increase in capital is good for construction and it will be good for growth, which also has to be welcomed.

The October monitoring round is obviously important to ensuring that the Executive remain within the Budget exchange scheme limits and that we avoid a situation in which we return money across the water. How confident are you that Departments will not declare further significant reduced requirements in the January monitoring round, when there will be less opportunity for reallocations?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Chair for his question and his welcome for the commitment to capital in the October monitoring statement and the reallocation exercise for 2014-15.

How confident am I about Departments not declaring returns through reduced requirements in January? We have to expect some, because pressures will develop over the year, which mean that Departments simply cannot deliver on the allocations that they have been given in the Budget. Sometimes, because of a variety of circumstances, they cannot deliver on some of the allocations that they have been given in monitoring rounds.

The lesson of the past number of years is that Departments are much better at managing their budgets as a result of the pressure that local Ministers, Committees and the Assembly are putting on them and the pressure that the scrutiny that we get from outside this place puts

on them. As a result, since 2010, when end-year flexibility was replaced by the Budget exchange scheme, we have not sent a single penny back to Treasury. That is something to be welcomed. Our more prudent and sensible fiscal management over that time is something that we should be warmly welcoming because it means that we are able to retain that money here to invest in the sort of services and capital projects that I outlined in the statement.

Mr Campbell: I join in welcoming the Minister's statement. What will the financial impact on the economy be, particularly with regard to the roads infrastructure projects to the north-west, including the A26 to the north coast and the A6 from the M2?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He was one of the first to lobby me about the A26 when I came into post. My backside had barely hit the seat when an invitation to visit his part of the world hit my desk. I was very pleased to visit Coleraine. One of the events that we held was a meeting with a local haulier, who pointed out to us the detrimental effect of the slowness of the A26 on his business. He said that if more of that road could be dualled, it would be a great boost to his business. It is not just his business that would benefit; there are other businesses, including manufacturing businesses, in the north coast, east Londonderry and north Antrim areas that would benefit from it. It will also reduce commuter times to and from Belfast. Of course, it will significantly improve road safety on that stretch of the road. As the Member is aware, the stretch of the road that will be affected by the investment of some £60 million over the next number of years ending in 2017-18 has unfortunately taken far too many lives down through the years. So, mercifully, that money will improve road safety standards there and, hopefully, ensure that events like that do not happen in the future.

The economic value of investing in infrastructure is clear. We have a great proposition in Northern Ireland with our skills and our highly educated people, and we have some of the best telecommunications infrastructure in the world, as I highlighted in my statement, but if you do not have the roads infrastructure to back that up and do not have other elements of infrastructure, those things do not attract people to come and invest in your economy. I am glad that there is some £250 million of investment in today's statement, the vast bulk of which is going in a capital direction. It will greatly improve our infrastructure and will serve only to improve Northern Ireland as a

place for investment and to grow companies and create jobs.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the announcement about the children's hospital, which is super news for families of the most vulnerable children and will be good for the wider North and, of course, for south Belfast.

The Minister mentioned the social investment fund in his statement. Can he confirm that any moneys from that will be allocated solely on objective need?

Mr Hamilton: This is the first formal opportunity I have had in the House to welcome the Member to his new position. This is as much an adaptation for me as it is for him; I have been well used to being interviewed by him down through the years, but I suppose it will be a different type of questioning that I will now receive from him. I thank him for his welcome for the children's hospital, which I am sure will meet with universal praise around this House and beyond.

The details of the social investment fund are not a matter for me; questions on it are better directed to colleagues in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I will not go into any issues about how or when the fund will be allocated. Some allocations have been made from the social investment fund. They include money for family support going to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the very good scheme for graduate teachers to try to lift standards in our primary and secondary schools. So, money is being spent and there is money still to be spent. I am confident that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is working through all the various projects, both capital and resource, that will benefit from that money. Any questions about the details of how that money will be spent are probably better directed to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr Swann: I, too, thank the Minister for the A26 announcement.

Does he have any indication of any bids coming forward to provide new services in the new children's hospital that is to be built so that we do not just retain the provision that is there but provide a centre of excellence that can prevent our having to send some of our sick children across the water and that will allow us to use that facility to treat them?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The short answer is no. It is very

early to determine exactly what services will go into the facility. Again, his question is probably better directed to the Health Minister now that he has the confidence that this money — some £160 million — has been allocated to the project. That gives him greater confidence, and it gives the Belfast Trust and the Royal Victoria Hospital greater confidence about what they can put on the site. From my visit to the site two weeks ago, I know that what is being done there is quite frankly miraculous, given the circumstances and the surroundings in which people are working.

What is great about this allocation today is that we will shift the hospital from where it currently is and integrate it much more into the rest of the acute hospital. So, some of the awful circumstances in which acutely ill children had to be moved by ambulance within the existing site will end, and children will be able to get a far better service. It will be less traumatic for their parents and a better experience all round in what are very difficult circumstances.

With the money that the Minister of Health has been allocated to spend on this vital strategic project for the whole of Northern Ireland, I imagine that he will seek to ensure that the maximum number of services are delivered in a modern state-of-the-art facility.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his statement. A lot of very positive decisions have been taken, particularly on flood alleviation in east Belfast, given the rain that we had over the weekend.

To stick with health, will the Minister indicate how far the £14 million allocation for the Department of Health will go towards addressing waiting lists for elective procedures?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her welcome. Given the rain that is falling, one thing that I did not highlight was that money is allocated for the roof of this Building. I know that she is a member of the Assembly Commission, and I am sure that she is grateful that, as a result of that allocation, there will not be any flooding in the Chamber.

I think that the £14 million Health investment is a great welcome for the Health Minister. I have had direct discussions with him about the pressure that he, his Department and the trusts are under, and we all know from our constituency work that there is significant pressure across a range of specialisms. The £14 million that has been allocated in the monitoring round for this year will help to alleviate pressures on inpatient and outpatient

procedures in a range of specialisms across the board such as ENT, orthopaedics, paediatrics and gynaecology. It obviously depends on the type of procedures that are brought forward, but the estimate is that around 10,000 to 12,000 additional procedures will be able to happen this year. That will obviously be great news for those who benefit from it, and, from our perspective, it will reduce waiting lists and ease some of that significant pressure that the Health budget continues to be under.

Mr Weir: I also warmly welcome the statement, but I will not incur your wrath by going any further than that. Is the Minister confident that all financial transactions capital funding in this year will be utilised?

Mr Hamilton: It is not like the Member not to try to incur somebody's wrath. This is obviously a Treasury innovation to try to increase the capital budget right across the United Kingdom in a way that does not score against national borrowing levels. It presents a challenge for me and my Executive colleagues because, by necessity, we have to partner with the private sector and investors outside the public sector to bring forward some schemes. We have had some early successes with the agrifood loan scheme, which this year will give £10 million to allow poultry processors and producers, in the first instance, to try to capitalise on the fact that supermarkets are trying to source more of their products from the United Kingdom. That money will help with that. Some money has been granted to DSD to try to stimulate different areas of the housing market.

12.45 pm

Some £21 million is left in financial transactions capital this year. The challenge that I continually put to my Executive colleagues is that they have to be more imaginative and innovative about schemes that can be brought forward. They may have schemes on their list of desired capital projects that, although not quite forgotten about, have not had the concentration that some of the other schemes have had.

Conventional capital is going to be limited in future. Financial transactions capital will make up a greater percentage of capital. It is up to Ministers to be imaginative and creative about the sorts of projects that they bring forward and, where possible, partner with the private sector to ensure that we all benefit. Our society as a whole should benefit from getting on the ground much earlier capital projects that might otherwise not have come forward.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement and particularly welcome the announcement on the A26 scheme at Glarryford. However, will he acknowledge the despair of people along the A6, which has been a project much longer in the waiting for and carries the main road between the two major cities in this part of the world?

Mr Hamilton: I share the Member's support for the A6, perhaps for different reasons, as the Member represents the area. It is critical that the two major cities be better connected, by rail — there has been significant investment in rail down through the years — and by road. As the Member will appreciate, the A6 is a large road infrastructure project to take forward. It would certainly be too large to do so while the A5 project is somewhat in abeyance. The Executive are still committed to the A5 scheme, and my concern, in looking at allocations for 2014-15, is that if I were to make more of a commitment to the A6, it would contractually oblige us to move that project forward. If the A5 scheme also started to move forward, we would have two of the biggest road schemes in Northern Ireland's history moving forward simultaneously. Although we might be able to afford to do that out of our total capital budget, it would mean that there would be no investment in things such as the regional children's hospital or in some of the capital projects that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and other Ministers are bringing forward. Therefore, a judgement was made to allocate £1 million to allow some preparatory work that did not take us beyond being contractually obliged to the A6. That was the sensible and prudent thing to do at this stage. Should the A5 project not move forward for whatever reason, we will be in a better position to start taking forward the A6.

To give the Member some indication, the stretch of road between Castledawson and Randalstown would cost £130 million and take some five years from now to do. You would therefore be committing yourself for a long period and to spending a large amount of money.

However, those most directly affected by the A6 scheme should seek some comfort and solace from the fact that we are allocating small amounts of money to allow the project to at least move forward, rather than let it sit on a shelf and not have anything done. If the money becomes available for whatever reason and by whatever means, the project can, like the A26 scheme, which can be delivered in the time and

is not as costly as that small section of the A6, be taken forward.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for his very comprehensive statement. In this monitoring round, additional money has been given to DCAL for the UK City of Culture. Has a business case been approved for that?

Mr Hamilton: Anybody to whom I have spoken and who has been a part of the first UK City of Culture in Londonderry considers it to be a success, in that it has generated more interest in the city and developed the infrastructure. We are seeing a lot of the investments that the Executive made in previous years pay off, and we can see that from the events that we are able to attract to the north-west, some for the first time. The Turner Prize is being launched this week, and it is the first time that it has ever been held outside London. That is a real success for the city. One of the lessons that we learnt from the Olympics, although this is not, by any means, on the same scale, is to ensure that the legacy from the investment that we put in is sustained. It is important that DCAL does that. I look forward to progress being made by DCAL in producing a business case to capture the critical aspects of the City of Culture legacy programme. Obviously, allocations have been made to that, but I await the business case, which will have to be revised to ensure that they can be spent appropriately.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the capital allocation to the children's hospital, and I hope that it provides a renewed focus on the children's heart services issue. I ask specifically about the £14 million allocation to the Health Department. All that money is for elective care. A number of bids were unsuccessful. The Department informed the Committee just last week that its priorities were: clinical negligence; Transforming Your Care; and, thirdly, elective care. Has the Finance Minister taken the Department's priorities on board?

Mr Hamilton: The initial position we come at Health from in monitoring rounds is that it should not be bidding or receiving anything in monitoring rounds. Funding for the Department of Justice (DOJ) is similarly ring-fenced. The Health Minister has considerable flexibility in his budget, which he enjoys as a result of the settlement for the 2011-15 Budget. However, the Executive accept and acknowledge that his budget is under constant and continued pressure.

The Executive are deeply concerned about elective care as there is almost endless pressure because of people who need inpatient and outpatient procedures. Some £10 million to £12 million of the money will allow those to happen. Obviously, it is not as much as the Minister bid for; he bid for £26 million. However, perhaps £14 million is more than he should have been permitted in monitoring rounds because of the agreement reached at Budget time. The Executive recognised that because there was such significant pressure for the Health Minister looming on the horizon, it was better to attempt to nip that in the bud now rather than him coming back in January, when things might be in a much worse position.

I accept that other bids with respect to Transforming Your Care were not met in this monitoring round, but a substantial amount of capital Transforming Your Care bids have been met in the 2014-15 capital reallocation exercise. I am aware as well that there is a backlog of outstanding cases of clinical negligence that the Department is losing because a judge is bringing those forward. I have assured the Health Minister that it is an area that we can examine again in January if those pressures have not been relieved elsewhere within his existing budget.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement by the Minister and the general thrust of trying to grow the private sector of the economy. There were about five references to the A5 in the statement. The Treasury allocated money that was project-specific and earmarked for that project. Is it still the commitment of the Executive to realise that project?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I think that he is somewhat confused: the money that comes as part of our Budget was not specifically earmarked for the A5 project. The Executive remain committed to what was agreed to be taken forward with the A5, which was a reduced but still fairly significant road project in size and distance.

As the Member knows, it is better for the Minister for Regional Development to take forward consultation on the outstanding environmental aspects of the project. The Minister has said that he does not believe that those will be resolved in time to spend the money for next year, so he has released around £150 million this year for the A5. I am glad to say that we are able to recycle and reuse that money for other significant strategic road projects elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

I am sure that the Member and people in the local community that he represents will be disappointed that the A5 project is not moving forward, but we are able to at least progress some other strategically significant road projects elsewhere in Northern Ireland as a result of the prudent and strategic financial capital management that we have undertaken as part of the exercise.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement. I thought that the economic overview was helpful. However, if he could improve on the 10-minute provision of the statement before the sitting so that we could do it justice, it would be much appreciated. My question is on capital at the macro level. There are many switches been resource and capital, and vice versa. We are halfway through the year, and I like the idea of that mid-term evaluation. However, there are some areas where capital is at risk. For example, we are talking about an overcommitment this year of some £8 million, and next year of some £50 million. Under financial transactions capital, £20.9 million is available this year, which I believe is at risk. Minister, is there some way in which we can rationalise the overall capital envelope somewhat? How sure are you that that £20.9 million will be saved this year?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The statement should have been in your pigeonhole around half an hour before the sitting. I did my best to slow down when reading it, so if you had it right at the start, it would have given you about an hour to digest it. We will attempt to do better in future.

As far as I am concerned, capital is critical to developing and growing our economy and assisting and aiding our recovery. We in this House have been attempting to make that clear to the Westminster Government since before the 2011-15 Budget came forward. That Budget initially cut our capital allocation by around 40%, and we sometimes forget how significant that cut was. Although the Government would not probably use these precise words, it is clear that they now regret the fact that they went too far too fast in cutting our capital budget. That had a significantly detrimental impact on a sector that was already struggling, namely construction. We have tried to ameliorate that as best as we could over the past number of years through some current to capital switches and through accelerating some capital asset sales, which have generated some income that we can redeploy to capital projects. However, that in no way closed the gap from where spending was to where it started in this Budget period. I am glad that the Government

have started to reverse their position and that they are now investing much more in capital. We are utilising that as best we can, and I hope that today's statement highlights that, with the likes of the children's hospital and the A26 moving forward.

There is no point having access to additional spending if you cannot spend it, and I must say that I have issues with how we procure and take forward significant capital projects. I want to concentrate on that as an area of work. We have already allocated about £29 million under FTC, and we have around £21 million left in FTC this year. As I said to Mr Weir, a growing aspect of our capital budget will be that different type of capital. I am confident that we can get that expenditure taken forward. I am continually putting pressure on other Departments to come forward with schemes that will absorb that money and I am asking officials to do likewise.

We have a large overcommitment for next year of around £50 million. Next year will be challenging, and we should not overcommit capital this year for next year. Next year, I do not think that you will see me come to the House with large amounts of capital allocations. Looking at previous experience, we can ensure that that overcommitment is well managed and that we spend every single penny at our disposal on capital because of the boost that it gives in the short to medium term to our construction sector and, in the longer term, the improvements that it means for infrastructure to assist, aid and develop our economic competitiveness.

Mr McCallister: I, like others, welcome the statement, particularly the announcement about the children's hospital. Let us hope that we have something to put in it. The Minister painted quite a rosy picture with his answers about the reduction in capital expenditure in this budgetary period. Is he basically engaged in a cleaning-up exercise and trying to help the Executive out of the mess of the A5?

Mr Hamilton: I will ignore the Member's fairly churlish remarks at the start. I am tempted not to get involved in some sort of domestic squabble between him and his former party.

If he believes that the handling of the A5 has been a mess — I tend to agree that aspects of it were not handled particularly well by the Minister for Regional Development — I suggest that the Member takes it up with his former colleague the Minister for Regional Development.

1.00 pm

The A5 is a strategically important project, which the Executive are committed to. For reasons about which questions are better directed to the Minister for Regional Development, that cannot go forward. The foolish thing to have done would have been to sit back and say that we cannot move forward so we will not do anything about it. The sensible thing to do is what I have done today, which is to announce to the House that we are taking the money that cannot be spent on that — and, indeed, other capital money that cannot be spent, including some of the capital money that has come from Treasury, following on from some of the questions that Mr Cree asked — and investing that money wisely in other roads across Northern Ireland, such as the A26, which is a strategically important road as well and would improve journey times and road safety, and the A31, a much-needed bypass around Magherafelt.

As well as those important road projects, we can invest money in the children's hospital, which is in need of significant investment, as the Member will well know. Instead of being churlish, I would have thought that the Member might want to welcome good, sensible, sound investments to improve the infrastructure, which will deliver better services for the people in Northern Ireland and will assist us in our economic recovery.

Ms Brown: I also welcome the statement from the Finance Minister and very much welcome the positive announcement in relation to the new regional children's hospital. What is the timescale on that very significant project?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for the question. I know that she, as a member of the Health Committee, and others have been pushing for the commencement of that project for some time. Although there is only a small amount — some £15 million for the project this year — it is a big project. That allows it to get the green light and to start going ahead. It allows the Health Minister and the trust to plan for the development and to take it forward. The scheme is not due for completion until 2017-18, and its total cost will be some £161.1 million. I am sure that the Member will agree with me that that is money well spent on a service that will provide assistance when it is required for children and families from all across Northern Ireland.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim

buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers so far. I welcome his commitment to the A5 and the announcement of money for the City of Culture. I am sure that that will be the first tranche of many for the City of Culture legacy programme.

I want to ask the Minister a question in relation to the legal aid budget. As he will be well aware, the Legal Services Commission has never accurately predicted the budget for legal aid. Now that the Department is doing a focused piece of work on trying to make its predictions accurate, will your Department play any role in assisting it?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his welcome for the statement. I am well aware of the criticism of the legal aid process that the Member has highlighted. I recently attended the Law Society's annual dinner, and, had I been asleep, I probably could not have missed what was said fairly loudly and clearly. I support the Minister of Justice's attempts to reduce a very sizeable legal aid bill in Northern Ireland. He has done work that is worth praising to reduce the criminal legal aid bill, and I would be wrong if I did not encourage him to do likewise with civil legal aid, given the significant pressures that we are under in respect of resource expenditure.

There is no specified role for my Department in working with the Minister's Department to overcome those issues, but, as this Minister, and any Minister in the Executive, will know, I have an open door in wanting to work with Departments. If they have issues and pressures — notwithstanding the fact that the Minister's Budget is ring-fenced and he has significant budget flexibility within his existing allocations to deal with problems such as the one that the Member raised — early engagement with my Department is more beneficial in the long term than sitting and thinking that the problem will go away or will not materialise.

Mr Ross: I also thank the Minister for his statement. In particular, I am drawn to the £3 million allocation for heritage-led development and the potential positive impact that could have on Carrickfergus Castle. What schemes does the Minister envisage the money being used for? Could the financial transactions capital funding that he referred to in answer to Mr Weir's question be used for that type of development?

Mr Hamilton: I have long believed — in fact, I mentioned it in my statement — that, earlier in the year or at the tail end of last year, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency produced a very valuable report which outlined its estimation that our built heritage and historic environment was worth around £250 million a year to our economy, but, significantly, that it had greater potential beyond that quarter of a billion pounds that it generated for our economy. It had the potential to increase that figure and to employ more people across Northern Ireland.

In bringing forward that motion in January or February, I was being mindful of the job that I was going to get at some time in the near future, and I was aware that I might be writing something of a blank cheque in respect of this policy area, but I am glad that I am able to support it with £1.1 million in this monitoring round and £3 million in the 2014-15 capital exercise. I have had discussions with the Environment Minister in respect of projects such as Carrickfergus Castle in the Member's constituency, which, we would all agree, is a fantastic facility, but it has potential to develop further.

There are commercial opportunities in a lot of the visitor attractions that we have across Northern Ireland, which have not been realised because that simply is not what the Department of the Environment traditionally does. So, to take up his point about financial transactions capital, I think that there are other areas of our built heritage and our historic environment where partnering with organisations outside the public sector such as the National Trust, have facilities that could be invested in to be developed, which have revenue-raising potential that can then be used to pay back the loan element of financial transactions capital. This is an area that I am very interested in and quite excited about the potential of, and I hope that the £4 million that has been allocated to the Department of the Environment in the next two years will allow us to test out and to see exactly what the potential is. If it works and money is available, we can invest more in the future.

Mr Dickson: Minister, thank you for your statement. The underfunding in the DSD budget is disturbing. Can you comment on how you perceive DSD's management of the Housing Executive?

Mr Hamilton: If the Social Development Minister were here, he would be fairly clear about what he thinks has, historically, been the management of Housing Executive resources. Although there is a reduced requirement in the

October monitoring round of £23 million for DSD, it is disappointing that what that was initially targeted for — repairs and maintenance of existing Housing Executive stock — is not able to go forward. The result of that means that there are people who need those repairs and need that maintenance of their property who are simply not going to get that.

On the positive side, in terms of the good, sensible management of public funds, because that has been released, rather than simply sitting in the budget and maybe not coming back to us until January when it might be difficult to spend it, we can sensibly redistribute that — primarily, in this case, to roads maintenance — which will sustain and create other jobs in the construction sector, albeit not doing what was originally done.

I share the Member's disappointment, and I share the disappointment of the people who may have thought that they were getting work done. In terms of the management of funds, I would far rather that the Minister for Social Development was saying to me that he was not happy with the contracts or, in particular, the specification of certain aspects of those contracts, and releasing the money so that I can spend it and allocate it to others to spend, rather than it being wasted and being spent on overspecified contracts, and we would all come back in a number of years and ask why we spent so much more on that when we could have spent significantly less.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his good news statement this morning. Can he inform the House why we have not had more successful United Community bids?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question, not least because it allows me to preempt and clear up any confusion that there might be about the spending of the money. The Member will be aware that, in June, the Prime Minister and the First and deputy First Minister agreed what has been referred to as the economic pact, which included a provision to allow us to extend our RRI borrowing facility, which stands at £200 million a year, up by an additional £50 million this year and next year. That was specifically tailored for shared future, education and housing projects.

As a Department, we do not sit as the arbiter of those funds in any way. We simply receive the bids that come in from Departments, which then have to go to the Treasury for its assessment. The Treasury makes the ultimate decision on whether or not the bids qualify for the borrowing. It is not a matter of DFP saying that

this, that or the other bid is not good enough; it is quite the opposite. We encourage Departments to come forward with more bids. We think that there is potential for more bids that will be successful with the Treasury. However, the ultimate arbiter on whether or not it goes ahead is not the Department of Finance and Personnel but Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the announcement about the Royal Victoria Hospital site. There is no money in this quarter for decay and dereliction scheme funding. Will that oversight be rectified in the January monitoring round? If the funding that you have allocated to the heritage-led development scheme proves your point that there is heritage-led development in Northern Ireland, is it your view that that should become part of mainstream funding on a rolling basis beyond your tenure? Will you confirm whether the reduced requirement of the Housing Executive includes a reduced requirement for newbuild social housing funding? If so, does that concern you?

Mr Hamilton: The Member may have left ministerial office, but he has not lost his touch in stretching the tolerance of the Chair.

As the Member will know from having administered a departmental budget, there is only so much money to go around. In monitoring rounds, there is always a balance to be struck. Many of the bids that have not been met are good bids. The fact that they have not been met does not mean that they are bad bids. Some of them are new bids that have potential, and some are bids for existing or previous schemes that have been shown to work.

I support dereliction funding in principle. I have not been able to allocate additional money to it in this monitoring round. However, as far as I am concerned, it is not a policy that is completely finished. We will require the Member's colleague the Minister of the Environment to continue to come forward with bids for that. If it can be met, we are not averse to meeting it in the grand scheme of things. As I said, in allocating money at this stage of the financial year, we have to be very mindful about issues such as overcommitment. I appreciate that something such as a dereliction fund has the potential to get money spent very quickly. So, January may have better potential than October; I say that without making any commitment to do it.

As the Member will know, in the past, he and I had useful exchanges, in the House and outside, on heritage-led development. As I said in answer to Mr Ross, I am committed to it and

think that it has huge potential. We have some underappreciated, undervalued and underused historical buildings across Northern Ireland. I hope that this money can start to develop the potential that I believe that the sector undoubtedly has.

It is as much a matter for the Minister of the Environment to come forward with bids to mainstream that budget for the years beyond 2014-15, in the 2015-16 Budget process that we are about to start and in future years. It has potential, and I am glad to be able to announce funding for it today. I hope that it is successful. Whether it is successful through conventional capital or financial transactions capital, as I outlined to Mr Ross, I think that it has huge potential.

Mr Beggs: I also welcome the announcement of a newbuild children's hospital for Northern Ireland. In health, under the addressing serious risks programme, only £5 million of £15 million has been allocated. Under Transforming Your Care key enabling projects, only £7.3 million of £26.5 million has been allocated. Why did the Minister decide to underfund those programmes significantly, in particular the TYC transformation programme, when the Department indicates that a failure to fund those will impact on future savings and lead to a change in expenditure patterns away from our hospitalised care, which will risk increasing waiting times at our A&E units and hospitals?

1.15 pm

Mr Hamilton: The Member has picked out a couple of things. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I had £500 million worth of capital bids for 2014-15, including quite a lot of cheeky bids from some Ministers who were chancing their arm. They included his colleague at the Department for Regional Development who seemed to put every single bid —

Mr Beggs: Answer the question.

Mr Hamilton: The Member will have a bit of patience. He seemed to bid for every road project that he wanted to take forward, regardless of whether it was ready to move forward. I had to contend with £0.5 billion worth of capital bids for what, ultimately, turned out to be £170 million worth of capital expenditure at my disposal and that of the Executive.

As the Member will know, you cannot spend the £500 million if all you have is £175 million or £177 million, so, you have to make choices. That is what this place is all about. We have to

make choices with the evidence that is before us and with the money that is before us. The Member is having a go at an allocation of £89.1 million, out of £177 million, to the Department of Health. That is a significant investment for the Health Department. It allows significant aspects of the Minister's Transforming Your Care programme to be taken forward. Is it everything that he wants? No, it is not. However, if you were to go round the Executive table and ask all the Ministers whether they got everything that they wanted, you would hear that they did not. That is the nature of the game that we have to play, Mr Beggs.

We have to make choices; we have to spend money where we think that it is best to do so. I think that spending £89.1 million, including significant TYC bids, is a good expenditure of the money that we have. It is particularly good that we are spending £15 million to give the green light to a new regional children's hospital for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): May I be associated with the words of congratulation in relation to the A26? It is not a case of the Minister winning the argument; it is a case of this Minister being responsible and delivering for the benefit of the people in north Antrim. I also acknowledge the additional money for DRD to move ahead with procurement for the Rathlin ferry and bus procurement for the provision of public transport.

As Chair of the Education Committee, I, first, thank the Minister for the money relating to Lisanelly and for the £2 million for the maintenance of the estate. However, will the Minister comment on the continued use of contingency funds by the Minister of Education, despite the fact that, in a letter to the Education Committee some days ago, his Department specifically said that that was not a good financial management practice?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his welcoming of the statement and particular aspects of it. With buses, ferries and roads, it is certainly a good day for north Antrim.

In respect of contingency funds, I know that we have corresponded, as a Department, with the Member in his capacity as Chair of the Committee. As a rule, I am not a fan of contingency funds, because Departments or, indeed, the centre can set aside money in a contingency fund, and, if the rainy day never appears, we have a mad, headlong rush at the end of the year to spend that money on sensible, prudent projects. I find that the later

in the year that you get, the fewer projects there are that can spend that sort of money. So, as a rule, contingency funds are not good practice.

The Member will be aware that there are strict rules about the reallocation of money within budgets. All Ministers have to declare amounts above the de minimis threshold of £1 million. The Executive usually allow reallocation; it is hard to think of a single example where they have not allowed for reallocation within Departments to happen. It is good, sensible management of the money that has been allocated by the Executive and the Assembly to flag that up, so that people can see where money has been moved to and where it has been moved from.

Mr Wells: I also welcome the announcement on the children's hospital; it is excellent news. I hope that, some day, the Minister will be able to stand up and announce the Ballynahinch bypass. Indeed, I think that we could do a deal that we will name it after him, if he releases the funds for it. In the statement, he has also indicated that £5 million has been allocated in the 2014-15 budget for local road schemes. Can he outline where those schemes are?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. With a deal like that, I am almost tempted to reallocate the reallocations. The Ballynahinch bypass would start in my constituency and end in the Member's constituency. It is something that I am very committed to. He brought an Adjournment debate on the issue to the House when he was a young whippersnapper, and I did likewise a few years ago. It is probably the only subject that has been the topic of two Adjournment debates in this House. Anybody who has to travel that road, whether they are going to Newcastle and the Mourne for leisure, pleasure and enjoyment or going home after work, knows that it is in much need of investment. However, no bid came forward from the Minister for Regional Development for that project as part of the 2014-15 exercise. However, I am glad that we have been able to support many road projects, including £5 million for what is detailed as local transport measures and network improvements.

The Minister for Regional Development and I had a discussion before the Executive meeting some weeks ago about some issues that were crystallising in his Department. This issue came up, and I pressed him on the sorts of projects that would come forward. The only one that he suggested is the A7 Saintfield to Crossgar project, which I am sure the Member will welcome. Again, the improvement to a

small stretch of that road will benefit his constituents in South Down as well as constituents in Strangford. I look forward to the Minister for Regional Development bringing forward concrete plans for that road in the near future.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his statement. As Chair of the Committee for Regional Development, I welcome his announcements on the major road schemes. Why are we seeing so many reduced requirements for major roads schemes at present?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. As I said previously, I have issues with how we take forward major capital projects such as roads. There are some very good examples where we have not done well, not only on roads but on some other areas of capital expenditure. There are lessons to be learned from the way that other jurisdictions take forward major capital projects, and I think that we can transplant those for the Northern Ireland context.

We are, obviously, well aware of the well-publicised delays to the A5 project, which I mentioned. That has freed up a significant amount of money, which I am happily able to reallocate to some other strategic road projects across Northern Ireland. I do not need to go much further on that, but as part of October monitoring there were reduced requirements for the A8 and the A2. The A8 reduced requirement is as a result of the cost and profile of spend on that project being reviewed. When compared with the original profile, less was needed this year and more was needed next year, so we have managed to balance that out as part of the announcements that I made today.

There was a reduced requirement of £11 million for the A2, which was the result of two factors: first, £8 million of that was as a result of the cost of the scheme coming in lower than expected, which is good news; secondly, the remaining £3 million was as a result of the reallocation of EU funding to that scheme. That has freed up money which, again, goes back to the centre for reallocation. Although on the face of it that probably looks bad because of the significant volume, in monetary terms, of reduced requirements for roads, I am sure that the Member and the rest of the House will agree that those reasons mean that the news is not as bad as it maybe first appeared.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Like others, I welcome the allocation to the new children's hospital.

There was a bid of £17.6 million from the Department of Justice for the Northern Ireland prisons exit scheme. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Minister of Justice about the impact that there will be on Prison Service reform if that bid is not successful, or was it what the Minister would include as one of the cheeky bids?

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any discussions with the Minister of Justice, but he and I are keen to arrange a discussion very soon. Although his budget is ring-fenced and he has considerable flexibility within it to move money around to deal with pressures, I want him to proactively manage that budget before we look at some of the bids that are there. I accept that he is a man of his word and that there are pressures within his budget; therefore, I am content to have a discussion with him about those pressures. I will convey the message that I am conveying to you, which he is obviously hearing, but I will do that in private as well.

I think that the scheme that the Member referred to is a good scheme. I know the invest-to-save principles behind it, and it is so good that the Department of Finance and Personnel backed it in previous monitoring rounds. I think that some £20 million was given to it last year, which allowed the Minister to take forward his plans for the early exit of some prisoner officers and to replenish them with different and new staff. The bid is not a bad bid. If it was a bad bid, it would not have been acknowledged with allocations in previous years. I am pretty sure that the Minister of Justice will be back, if not in this year, in future years, to look for money for a scheme that has invest-to-save principles at its core.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Paul Girvan. We are into the last 10 minutes of questions to the Minister on his statement. With the cooperation of Members, I am going to do my best to get as many Members in as possible.

Mr Girvan: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his very positive statement to the House. Is the allocation of £10 million from DRD to Belfast port to deal with a shortfall in receipts an indication that the Executive have given up on pursuing some value from the port?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. It is a good question. That obviously stands out in the tables that are attached to the statement as something that had to be allocated this year but that we obviously intended would not have been the case at the start of the Budget period.

I am disappointed that we have not been able to release value from the Harbour Commissioners. In principle, the port is a publicly owned asset. I have to say that it makes a valuable contribution not just to the Belfast economy but to the whole of Northern Ireland's economy, and I very much welcome some of the projects that are being brought forward, such as a terminal for cruise ships that are coming into Belfast. I also welcome the City Quays development, which will release more commercial office property for the foreign direct investment that we are trying to attract into Northern Ireland as a result of the likes of the investment conference and other work that Arlene Foster is doing. So, the commission does some good work. However, it has a significant amount of money in its reserves and the potential to release value back to our government so that we can spend that money on other capital projects that are equally of benefit to the Northern Ireland economy.

The issue has proven complex. The Minister for Regional Development would be in a better position than I to give you some of the detail, but taking it forward is fraught with legal and other difficulties. The fact that we have allocated money in this monitoring round is simply a recognition that we will not be able to crystallise that allocation from the Harbour Commissioners and make it happen this year. However, we have not given up on getting that value, which we believe we can get. We will continue to pursue that, and it is an issue that the Executive's Budget review group is taking forward.

Mr McQuillan: I also want to be associated with the opening remarks on what I would call phase 1 of the A26.

Will the Minister give the House an update on where we are with welfare reform? I see that some moneys have been returned to the centre from DSD under that heading.

Mr Hamilton: Again, the tables that are attached to the statement illustrate a noticeably reduced requirement from DSD for welfare reform. That results from the fact that because we have yet to legislate for welfare reform in Northern Ireland and have been unable to bring it forward, money that had been allocated to the

Department for Social Development to do things such as IT training and skilling up staff so that they can implement the changes have not been able to happen.

I am glad that the Member raised that, because it gives me an opportunity to reiterate to the House the absolute, critical importance of ensuring that that legislation is passed as quickly as possible. My predecessor received a letter from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in late June or early July that told us that we were costing the Treasury £5 million to £6 million a month because we had not moved forward with some of the elements of welfare reform. We were also told that that was going to grow to a position whereby, by the end of this year, we were going to cost £50 million to £60 million. According to the letter, that £50 million to £60 million will be taken out of our Budget if we have not legislated by January 2014. Worryingly, that bill is likely to rise to £200 million by 2017-18.

In the context of what I announced earlier about a switch from resource to capital and significant pressures on our resource budget in future years, £200 million taken out of our Budget to pay for something because we have not legislated for it is a price that we cannot afford. We need to move forward, and I know that the Minister for Social Development is unanimous with me on that. He is seeking approval to legislate on welfare reform so that those very punitive penalties that I am speaking about do not materialise and do not start to hit some of the very vulnerable people in Northern Ireland, whom some of those who oppose welfare reform think that they are helping.

1.30 pm

Mr Allister: I welcome the progress on the A26.

On the allocations in October monitoring and the 2014-15 capital budget, how does it just happen to be that the various Sinn Féin Departments have been most successful? In the allocations in the October monitoring round, they got 75% of what they asked for in capital bids. In the 2014-15 reallocations, they got 60% of what they asked for in capital bids, in contrast to other Departments. Is that part of the Minister's party's mending of fences with Sinn Féin, as we saw a few days ago with its love-in with the GAA? Is this part of the same process of the Minister rolling over for Sinn Féin?

Mr Hamilton: It would be easy to forget that at the very beginning — for about one second — the Member welcomed the allocation for the

A26. However, it is very clear for the Member that every silver lining has a cloud. There is always bad news. This is a statement. This is a reallocation of over £250 million, which is going to projects in all Departments — right across the board. The money will be of great benefit in creating and sustaining jobs. It will improve our infrastructure so that we can have a competitive edge when we compete with other economies. It will assist us in our recovery. It will create opportunities for people right across Northern Ireland, and it will protect some of the most vulnerable in Northern Ireland.

That will be done through projects such as the A26 and the A31 Magherafelt bypass; through allocating £14 million to the DUP Health Minister's Department to provide elective care that is desperately needed by his constituents and by other people right across Northern Ireland; and through having a new regional children's hospital that goes to a DUP Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. There are projects that are greatly assisting our recovery, creating jobs and protecting the vulnerable in Northern Ireland. As to where allocations go, it is not a matter of sitting down and carving up allocations for this Department and that Department. As the Member knows well, some Departments spend more on capital than others, and some of the bids that have come forward are more critical in their timeliness than others.

If the Member wants to take the money that we have and allocate it on the basis of some sort of sectarian headcount, that kind of suits his approach, but it does not suit my approach. I want to send money from this Department when it is given up by others to where it is most needed. If that is for the A26 in his constituency or the new regional children's hospital in west Belfast, I will do that.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Allister: You did not answer my question.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions on the statement.

Prison Reform: Owers Report

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on prison reform. This Thursday marks the second anniversary of the publication of the report by the prison review team, which was led by Dame Anne Owers. I will update Members on the progress that has

been made since publication and outline the work that is taking place to make a positive impact on prisoners to reduce their risk of reoffending.

The report calls for end-to-end transformational change across the prison system in Northern Ireland. Its 40 recommendations were challenging, but I believed then, and I believe now, that it set the road map to deliver an effective, efficient and sustainable service. I said at the time of publication that implementing the recommendations would be a long-term process and that we would have to put in place solid foundations if reform was to be embedded throughout our prisons. The service established a reform programme to put in place the foundations for delivery and to drive the necessary changes.

The reform programme is at the halfway point. Good progress is being made. To date, nine recommendations have been approved as being complete by the prison review oversight group, which I chair. The group provides oversight and scrutiny of the programme and includes a robust and challenging independent element. I anticipate that a further nine recommendations will be brought forward to the group for sign off at its next meeting in December. If those are signed off, almost half of the recommendations will have been implemented. That demonstrates steady progress.

From the outset, I have said that implementing the reforms will be a process and not an event. That remains the case. As with any major reform programme, the pace of change can feel frustrating at times. The next year is a critical period, when many of the recommendations from the Owers report will become reality. A clear plan for delivery is in place. However, some of the major projects that are part of the plan will not be realised until nearer April 2015. This is normal in a complex reform programme: they take time to get right. It is not just about ticking off each recommendation. That is why, in June, I announced a number of initiatives that would make a real difference to the way in which prisons operate and how we support people through custody and back into the community. Today, I can announce that the two reviews that I commissioned into the prisoner incentive scheme and the categorisation of women and young people have been completed. The next stage is to ensure that they are put into practice. Discussions are ongoing with governors on how that will be achieved.

Last month, I published an employability strategy. I can inform Members that, as part of that strategy, a new passport to employment has been developed and will be piloted in Maghaberry soon. Prison Service staff will also work with NIACRO to link that work into the job track initiative.

In June, I highlighted the issue of addiction in prisons and announced that a new dual approach would be implemented to tackle the issue. The first part of that was the initiation of intelligence-led searching to replace the standard routine search policy. That is now in place. There is also a Prison Service/PSNI initiative at Maghaberry where they have joined forces to reduce the supply and demand of drugs in the prison. I also wanted to see support put in place for those with addiction issues. Prison staff are being selected to work on the new cutting-edge addiction programme, which will be piloted in Maghaberry in the new year. That will be a complete programme regime, which will support prisoners to break the cycle of addiction. It is the first of its type in the British Isles and demonstrates the innovative approach that prison staff are willing to take to deliver change.

Since my announcement in June, a new directory of services has also been developed that will provide prisoners with details of the support services available. It will be launched later in 2013 following consultation with prisoners and key partners. One key area in delivering for prisoners will be the outsourcing of learning and skills, which, it is anticipated, will happen around this time next year. That will increase overall levels of prisoner participation in employment and education across the three prisons. However, I am not content to wait until 2014 for progress in that area. Therefore, I can inform Members that work to award an interim contract for learning and skills is being finalised. I expect letters of award to be issued next week. Awarding the interim contract will not only deliver an enhanced service in the next year, but it will allow the service to move to the next stage to establish the Hydebank college. That will be achieved through a college task force that will be responsible for designing, developing and delivering the college ethos and results. I can also announce that the concept college prospectus will be launched at the end of November.

Another area that will interest Members is the latest position on the prison estate, particularly future plans for women in custody. Our focus is a prison estate that is fit for purpose, which provides safe, secure and decent

accommodation for all prisoner categories and addresses the specific needs of young offenders and women prisoners. Work to further define the future direction of travel for Maghaberry is ongoing and the future of Magilligan prison has been set. As I have outlined, the Hydebank college will deliver positive interventions for young people in custody.

Today, I want to focus on the needs of females. I wish to put on record that I remain committed to having a separate prison for women. However, that will not happen in the near future. To address that, a four-stage approach will take place, which will deliver positive change for female prisoners. The first stage is the development of Ash House, which will deliver an enriched regime, freer movement and greater access to services. The second will be to couple that with the development of our "prisons inspire" concept in Alderwood House. The third phase will see residential units also being developed. All of that will be subject to the normal planning processes. The final stage will be the development of a new women's prison, and I anticipate high-level plans for that by the end of the year.

Another key part of the reform will be how offender management policies are embedded across the service, and we have spoken at length about the need for an integrated approach to that. Unlike other jurisdictions, prisons in Northern Ireland already have in place a policy to ensure that every offender has a sentence plan. That is being achieved through the reforms and through our offender management hubs, which bring together staff from the Prison Service and the Probation Board to ensure an integrated approach in that area. That is by no means the limit to our ambition because we want to create an effective end-to-end resettlement process.

I could not update the House on prison reform without acknowledging the major changes that have taken place in the workforce over the past 18 months. Many experienced officers and managers have left under the voluntary early retirement scheme, and we have seen the recruitment of hundreds of new officers. Many staff have also converted from support grades to become custody officers. That has been challenging for all concerned, but I believe that we now have in place the right balance between new and experienced staff, which will serve our prisons and the wider community well into the future.

One of the areas that has attracted attention from Members is the new operating model for

prisons that was introduced last October. The reason for that was to ensure we had the right people in the right place at the right time, doing the right things. The operating model encompasses four key elements: the staff deployment agreement; the staffing structure; the staffing profile; and the shift patterns. In combination, that will deliver a sustainable model for our prisons that is efficient and effective. The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) profiling team has reviewed the implementation of the operating model at each prison establishment over the past six months. NIPS will continue to develop, modify and enhance the shift patterns as part of business as usual.

It is also important that operational staff have the skills to deliver a Prison Service that will create positive interventions that address offending behaviour. That means making sure that all grades have access to the right training, which gives everyone the opportunity to build a career in the service. To deliver that, a series of training programmes have been developed for all staff, from main grade officers to senior officers, right through to management grades. That will include a year-long series of masterclasses that will address many issues from financial planning to incident management. Last month, it was announced that the University of Ulster has been awarded the contract to accredit the certificate of competence for our new officers. That was good news for officers because it will give them the opportunity to demonstrate the new skills they have developed through their training and in the workplace.

I can also inform the House that promotion boards are being held for functional head grades, and there will be promotion opportunities to the senior officer grade by the end of this year. Alongside that, former principal officers have become unit managers, and work to finalise the role of offender supervisors is almost complete. Those are very positive developments for staff and they demonstrate the service's commitment to give everyone the skills they need to do their job.

Reforming the prison system in Northern Ireland is the biggest change programme in the public sector since the formation of the PSNI in 2001. It is a huge project. The recommendations from the Owers report were not straightforward. As I said, the vision of the report was to deliver end-to-end transformational change. That means changing the structures, ethos and culture of the people who work for prisons and how they work with those who are in custody, all of which has to be

delivered within today's financial restrictions. The Prison Service is an organisation in transition, and many people are working to make the changes a reality. I am greatly encouraged by the work that is being done and the progress that has been made.

As I have set out, the reforms are delivering for women in custody, with a four-stage plan to provide a bespoke infrastructure and regime for female prisoners. They are delivering for young people in custody, with the establishment of Hydebank college. They are delivering for all prisoners, with the new interim learning and skills contract now in place and outsourcing to be completed next year, and with the goal of sentence planning for every prisoner. The reforms are also delivering for our staff, with development plans for every grade to build their skills and career in the service.

Reform of our prisons will ultimately be about making the community safer. That will be achieved by creating positive interventions to address offending behaviour, which will reduce the risk of reoffending. That is what I want the reformed Prison Service to deliver, and I am confident that that is what the reformed Prison Service will deliver.

1.45 pm

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): The Minister will know that we discussed some of those issues, and it was highlighted that relationships are key. I impress upon him again to make sure that relationships between management and staff are working properly, as current indications are that they are not. The statement refers to the voluntary exit scheme. Can the Minister give an absolute guarantee that the 27 officers who remain on the letter 3 option but have been accepted into the scheme will be allowed to leave the service? It would be grossly unfair, having allowed up to 500 officers to leave, if that small element of 27 officers was kept in the service despite them having signed up to the scheme. Can he give the commitment that he will find the money in his Department or through a bid so that those 27 officers will ultimately be allowed to leave the service?

Mr Ford: I thank the Chair for his comments. I am committed to ensuring that we get the best possible relationships between staff and management in the Prison Service, allowing for all the difficulties that arise from such a programme of reform. Unfortunately, I cannot, at this stage, give him the guarantee that he asks for: that all those who have applied under

the voluntary early retirement scheme will be able to leave. I am sure that he heard the question that was asked of the Minister of Finance a few minutes ago. He indicated his keenness to see the scheme proceed and acknowledged that there was assistance from DFP last year in funding towards that. I hope that it will be possible to obtain funding in this year, but the Chair of the Committee is well aware of some of the pressures that we face on issues such as legal aid costs that are creating significant difficulties this year. I trust that we will be able to see towards the end of the year that there is some way of allowing that final batch of officers and, indeed, some governors to get their leaving date, but, at this stage, I regret that I cannot give the guarantee that he seeks.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answer to the previous question. The Minister will be well aware that the Owers report presents an opportunity and, indeed, a challenge. I look forward to the oversight group coming to the Committee to tease out some issues further. This is the halfway mark, and the Minister said that it is not an exercise to tick off the recommendations. Is he satisfied, at the halfway point, that he is well on target to reach the final outcome and have all the recommendations in place on time?

Mr Ford: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for his question. He correctly identifies that we are talking about an extremely challenging process, and, at more or less the halfway point, we are close, as I said in the statement, to having 18 of the 40 recommendations signed off. That signing-off is not a simple case of box-ticking. Reports come to the oversight team and it agrees them, and they are then passed to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) for validation. As he would expect from the independent members of the oversight group, they have robust discussions with me and with officials from the Prison Service to see that that is done. We are seeing significant progress, but we cannot expect that some of the more complex issues will be resolved until near the end of the process in spring 2015. However, with the team that is in place and with the good work being done in the three prisons, but particularly by the leadership team at headquarters, we are seeing significant progress at this time, and I believe that all the reforms will be in place by the expected closing time in spring 2015.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement. In a sense, the statement was pre-empted, to some extent, by the debate last week on prison reform. The Minister has acknowledged in the statement that the pace of reform can be quite frustrating, and I agree with him on that. Where is the logjam that is preventing the prison reform being fully implemented? Is that logjam, as Mr Givan identified earlier, the relationship between staff and management?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for the question. I hope that the statement was not entirely pre-empted by last week's debate, which was a debate on a negative report on a situation that existed in Hydebank Wood in the early part of this year.

I hope that this statement shows the significant progress that has been made, but I take the point. Shortly, we will have some questions during Question Time which will probably cover much the same ground.

The issue with the pace of reform is the complexity of the overall process, which made it quite difficult to get matters under way. There were significant issues around staffing and the time it took to get the senior team in place. The team that Sue McAllister now leads will be capable of leading through all of these reforms, as well as the changes that are being made in staffing in the three individual units.

Whether there is a logjam in relationships, I am not sure. We saw a withdrawal of goodwill by the Prison Officers' Association (POA) earlier this year on working overtime, which has ended. However, maintaining good working relationships with a workforce that is going through such significant transformation is always a major challenge. It is not easy, as we know, in any part of the public sector to ensure that staff are always brought along with that level of change. However, we have at least seen, through the recent ending of the withdrawal of goodwill, that there is an option for moving forward in a more constructive way.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the update. In his statement, he said:

"There is also a Prison Service/PSNI initiative at Maghaberry where they have joined forces to reduce the supply and demand of drugs in the prison."

Can the Minister give us any more detail on that project at the moment, or at a later stage if

required, and on how progress on that project will be both measured and monitored?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Elliott for highlighting what is quite a significant issue. Tackling drugs is actually a two-pronged issue. The first part is the point that he highlights, namely the work being done, which involves the PSNI in a joint initiative at Maghaberry, to detect and deter the smuggling of drugs. I need to be cautious when talking about matters that are sub judice, but it was interesting to note that there were three arrests related to an attempt to smuggle drugs into Maghaberry just before we publicly announced that the initiative had started. That is one part.

The other part is around education and ensuring that we see that prisoners are aware of the dangers of illegal drugs and, indeed, the dangers associated with inappropriate prescribed drug use. So there are issues there.

It is absolutely clear that we need to fight the issue of drugs in prisons at a number of different levels. The partnership with healthcare on prevention is extremely valuable, as is the partnership with the PSNI on detection. Certainly, it appears that, at this early stage, moving away from routine regular searching to intelligence-led searching is having significant benefits.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your statement. As you said, this is ongoing work and work in progress. One area that has concerned us is improvement for women prisoners. Can the Minister tell us more about the four stages that he intends to take to improve the delivery of services and, ultimately, improve outcomes for women prisoners?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Dickson for the question, which highlights an area that has been a significant concern for some time. The first of the four stages, to give a little bit more detail on what I was able to say in the statement, is to seek to improve the physical situation within Ash House in Hydebank Wood, acknowledging that it is likely to remain the residential unit for some time. So work is going ahead to create slightly different physical space, which will enable the development of vocational work on things like hairdressing and kitchen and laundry work alongside access to IT, and improve the facilities that are offered in that building.

The second stage is to use Alderwood House, which is currently used by the Probation Service and is on the Hydebank Wood site but is outside the wall, to create something of a

step-down and working out facility. In the first part of that, simply providing some educational classes will be a possible use that will enable people to move into a different atmosphere. We will then work towards the work that is being done by the Inspire project in the city centre on working with women offenders.

We then hope that we will see some step-down residential units being developed alongside Alderwood House as the third phase for those women who require a degree of supervision but not significant custody as they move towards the end of their sentences and further on out. Finally, there is the major challenge of getting the right size of full women's prison off the Hydebank Wood site, or at least outside the young offenders centre's wall, to ensure a proper facility for women prisoners in Northern Ireland, which has been denied them for many years.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he mentioned training programmes. My colleague the Chair of the Committee mentioned the key issue of relationships, and you will be aware that the Prison Officers' Association representative said that there is a recruitment difficulty in the Northern Ireland Prison Service. Given that there was a leadership and management void at Hydebank Wood for over a year, when there was no governor or deputy governor and the new governor was English, as were three of the senior management team who were in front of the Committee last week, is there an issue about Ulster people being recruited at senior management level in the Northern Ireland Prison Service?

Mr Ford: I get slightly surprised at the number of complaints from the unionist side of the Assembly about the employment of British citizens who happen to live on the other side of the water. We have an open competition employment process, and we seek to employ the best person for the job. Whether the best person for the job happens to speak with an accent that suggests that they come from one side of the water or the other is not a relevant consideration. The consideration is whether they are the best person with the experience for the job.

Although I acknowledge that Mr Humphrey talked specifically about senior Prison Service officers, the reality is that a very small proportion of Prison Service staff come from outside Northern Ireland. If we have a process in which some people move one way across the Irish Sea and others move the other way at different times, that is a benefit that enriches

the services on both sides of the water and not something we should complain about.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire inniu. I welcome the Minister's statement. Will he elaborate on the "high level plans" for the women's prison? Will that bring forward the date for the provision of that facility? In the interim, will the improved services for women include making it freely available to women to avail themselves of day release to partake in work?

Mr Ford: I thank Ms McCorley for the question, although I am afraid that I cannot elaborate any further on the long-term replacement for Ash House. I hope to say more about that, probably early in the new year to the House, and I certainly give a commitment to inform the Committee, if not the full House, at the earliest stage possible.

The important issue in how we seek to make the changes is to ensure that women get the opportunity to avail themselves of a variety of opportunities, depending on individual risk assessment. We know that many of the women in Ash House are perfectly capable of leaving the wall of Hydebank Wood to engage in some form of training or day activity. That has been happening for some time, and some women have gone to the Inspire project in the city. The issue is whether we can develop schemes in Alderwood House that allow greater numbers to benefit from doing that. We should be doing that, based on individual risk assessment, to prepare women for release from custody. We will see more of that in the coming weeks.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. Questions on the statement will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to be called will be Mr Sydney Anderson.

The business stood suspended.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair)

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Child Exploitation

1. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Justice what input the Department of Justice will have into the terms of reference for the investigation into child exploitation. (AQT 241/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I thank Mr Milne for the question, although I had better not say too much. It might annoy one of his colleagues if I go too far into the territory which is question 1 on the main list. The answer is that no specific actions were required of the Department of Justice (DOJ) in the Barnardo's report of 2011, but since then we have been working in partnership with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Safeguarding Board to look at various roles in the protection of children. I have had meetings with the Minister of Health and others to look at how that occurs. As Members know, an expert-led inquiry is being set up to consider the way forward.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. Can he tell us exactly what those discussions with the Minister of Health consist of? Does he not agree —

Mr Deputy Speaker: One question, please.

Mr Milne: At the heart of all this is an issue of justice, and, therefore, in my opinion, it is very necessary for the Justice Department to be heavily involved in it.

Mr Ford: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker, I really am at a loss. My understanding is that questions at this stage are not supposed to pre-empt those that are on the list. Any further answer would merely pre-empt an answer to a prepared question, which is not particularly topical.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Minister that it is entirely up to him whether he answers.

Mr Ford: I will happily answer in 15 minutes' time.

Prison Reform

2. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice to comment on his ongoing relationship with the Prison Officers' Association. (AQT 242/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not had direct contact with the Prison Officers' Association (POA) in recent weeks. I have certainly had engagement with it over different aspects of the reform programme. Senior officers of the Prison Service continue in those discussions, and I am keen to see that we manage the reform process in conjunction with all our staff, whether they are members of the POA, the Prison Governors' Association (PGA), the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) or none of them.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he give an assurance to the House that his change and reform agenda will not be deflected, despite difficulties or resistance from within the institutions?

Mr Ford: I can certainly give Mr McLaughlin that assurance. As I said in answer to questions a few minutes ago, we saw a short-term withdrawal of goodwill by the POA recently, which ended in the last few weeks. I hope that that is a sign that good progress will continue to be made. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that the reform programme is driven through against all the operational difficulties. I am not just saying that that applies to staff; the practical realities of the end-to-end reform are quite a challenge.

Prison Officers: Pay Review

3. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department will support the Prison Officers' Association when it makes its presentation to the pay review body. (AQT 243/11-15)

Mr Ford: My understanding of that is quite simple. The pay review body will seek the evidence that it wishes. It has had a detailed evidence presentation from my Department, and it will clearly have to engage with staff, including the POA, as it reviews the work that it has to do in looking at the matter which I referred to it.

Mr Clarke: I use the Minister's words with respect to the evidence. Given that there is clear evidence of a threat to all prison officers, will the Minister support the payment of an

environmental allowance to all officers who are currently working for the Prison Service?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr Clarke's point. For many existing staff, the previous environmental allowance was consolidated into normal pay scales. The issue that is of particular concern is that new members of staff may feel that they are being paid less proportionately, by comparison with their colleagues who have received that consolidated award, and in comparison with what happens in England, Wales and Scotland. It is not appropriate to make a direct comparison, as is frequently done — though not by Mr Clarke today — with the issue as it applies to police officers. Police officers across the UK are paid on the same scale, and there is an additional allowance in Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, we have completely different pay scales. The issue is in ensuring that they bear an appropriate relationship to the pay scales for England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Alex Maskey is not in his place for his question.

PSNI: Recruitment

5. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that the recent opening up of recruitment to the PSNI is to be welcomed and that it allows for a further transformation and civilianisation of the Police Service, which, as the Minister will know, is not yet fully representative of the society that we live in. (AQT 245/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the Member will know from his role on the Policing Board, there are issues around the numbers and the budget. I welcome the fact that the Police Service is now in the position to start a new recruitment campaign for the first time in some years. The important issue for that recruitment campaign, given that the specific artificial 50:50 targets are removed, is to get the best possible affirmative action programme, which is being carried through by the Police Service, to ensure that it gets the widest possible range of applicants and continue the work that it has been doing in recent years to ensure that it becomes a representative service.

Mr G Kelly: I thank the Minister for the answer so far. His Department is responsible for the business case for recruitment. Does the Minister agree that it is lamentable that Criminal Justice Inspection described what we have as large-scale reverse civilianisation, not as Patten saw the PSNI, in which civilian posts are being

populated by retired police? Does he agree that the recruitment campaign provides an excellent opportunity to put that right, bearing in mind that the recruitment is not just the 100 that we are talking about now but that it could go to perhaps up to 400?

Mr Ford: The difficult issue of exactly which functions are best carried out by warranted officers and which by civilians and what the background of those civilians may be is not one for my direct involvement. I need to be very careful to leave the Policing Board with its responsibilities in such matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the House discourages reading questions.

Flag Protests

6. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the continued flag protests in Belfast, particularly around the city centre, whether he agrees that it would be in the interests of all concerned if such protests were suspended during the Haass process. (AQT 246/11-15)

Mr Ford: I appreciate the question, but I am not quite sure how far I have a ministerial responsibility for it. As for the responsibility to ensure a more normal society, better opportunities for business, especially in Belfast city centre, and the chance to benefit from the five-party talks that Dr Haass is leading, I certainly believe that it would be beneficial for any protests, whether they are around Donegall Square or Twaddell Avenue, to be suspended immediately to allow this society to move on and to find a different way of dealing with the community problems with the past.

Dr McDonnell: I very much thank the Minister, particularly if it is slightly off-centre of his responsibility. Nevertheless, we see him as having a major role in that regard. Does he agree that such protests are a big threat, as they were last year, to trade in Belfast city centre in the run-up to Christmas? All of us have a collective responsibility to do all we can to reduce that threat to retail trade.

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Dr McDonnell on that point. I had a recent meeting with business representatives from the city centre. It is absolutely clear that there has been a major difficulty with business in Belfast city centre in recent months, way beyond the effects of the economic recession generally as it applies to other parts of Northern Ireland.

If there are further problems in the run-up to Christmas this year, it will be devastating for many businesses in Belfast city centre, and particularly for many services. It is possible that somebody may go back to a shop the next week if they are deterred from going to it one week, but they do not go back to the restaurant or pub the next week. It is clear that that has been very damaging. That is why we collectively have a responsibility to urge people to call off such protests and to ensure that we conduct our processes in this place or through the Haass talks.

Ministry of Defence Files

7. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Justice to comment on the recent public disclosure that the British Ministry of Defence is unlawfully holding more than 66,000 files in a privately owned warehouse in Swadlincote, South Derbyshire, many of which came from the British Army headquarters in the North of Ireland that was closed four years ago. (AQT 247/11-15)

Mr Ford: I think, Deputy Speaker, that what is being done by a UK Department in England is far beyond the responsibility of the DOJ in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has the right to ask a supplementary question.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister agree that the fact that this was never disclosed to the PSNI's Historical Enquiries Team and was never discovered by that team is cause for further concern about the lack of rigour and effectiveness of the HET in reviewing British Army killings? Will he agree to write to the British Ministry of Defence to ensure that those files are secured and not destroyed?

Mr Ford: The key issue with that concerns the operational work done by the Historical Enquiries Team. I am not sighted on whether there were specific requests for information that were not forthcoming or on what the relationship may be between the HET or the PSNI and the Ministry of Defence. Therefore, I am not sure that I am in any position to give a specific comment there.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Michael McGimpsey is not in his place.

PSNI: Recruitment

9. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Justice whether he is content with the procedures being put in place for the recruitment of new PSNI officers. (AQT 249/11-15)

Mr Ford: Again, although I can appreciate that Mr Byrne wishes to ask the question, that is a matter for the PSNI and the Policing Board, not the Department of Justice. I have no reason to believe that the procedures are not proper.

Mr Byrne: I appreciate that the Minister has a limited role and function in this regard, but, given that he is the Minister of Justice, is it appropriate that he could be blindsided if there were any misdemeanours in relation to the recruitment process?

Mr Ford: Again, the key role there rests with the Policing Board, not with the Department of Justice. If there are specific concerns that Mr Byrne or any other Member wishes to raise, I will happily have them raised, but I need to be careful that I do not interfere in the responsibilities of other Members who are on the board.

PSNI: Investigations

10. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that it is absolutely necessary that the PSNI, in cases of child abuse, carry out extensive interviews until they believe that they have got to the full truth, regardless of the position that anyone might hold in society. (AQT 250/11-15)

Mr Ford: Yes, I believe that the police have a duty to carry out their investigations as thoroughly as they need to in accordance with the legal advice that they are given on particular cases.

Mr Newton: Will the Minister agree that there is significant concern around the case that involved the leader of Sinn Féin and a perception in the wider community that the interviews may not have been as rigorous as one might have expected?

Mr Ford: I am not sure that I am a barometer for what the perceptions in wider society may be. That appears to be Mr Newton's request. All that I know is that I have no reason to believe that the police and the PPS did not carry out their duties properly in the case to which Mr Newton refers, as, I understand, they do as a general rule in other cases.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes topical questions to the Minister of Justice. We will now move on to the questions for oral answer.

Children in Care

1. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has held any meetings in conjunction with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the recent revelations about children in care. (AQO 4823/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 10 September, Edwin Poots and I jointly chaired a summit on child sexual exploitation at which key agencies were represented. That summit identified that much is already being done in and across Departments and the statutory and voluntary agencies to tackle issues of sexual violence and abuse, including human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Following the summit, Mr Poots and I attended a special joint meeting with the Health and Justice Committees on 16 September.

Following further engagement between us, on 25 September, it was announced that we had agreed to establish an expert-led independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation. The inquiry will be supported jointly by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland and will seek to assist in developing an effective regional response to sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland. Terms of reference will be agreed following the appointment of the independent chair. I have also engaged with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the review that the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland is to carry out.

2.15 pm

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is important for his Department to have an input to the terms of reference?

Mr Ford: I agree that it is important that we should have an input into the terms of reference, and that is taking place. What we need to do first is establish the independent chair and then work with the chair on detailing the terms of reference in conjunction with the two Departments.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. Can he tell the House what, with regard to children in care, is the definition for recording purposes of "missing"?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I cannot answer that question. It might have to be referred to my ministerial colleague Mr Poots.

Mr Givan: Will the Minister give a clear public statement that, in respect of children who are abused, whether in care or in institutions — indeed, regardless of where the abuse is taking place — anybody who knows about it must report it to the police immediately and there should never be any withholding of information of the type of abuse that we have witnessed?

Mr Ford: I am happy to endorse the point that Mr Givan makes. I will widen it: anybody with any knowledge of any criminal activity has a duty to inform the police and to ensure that they assist in any way that they can in bringing the perpetrators to justice. That is nowhere more obvious than in some of the dreadful crimes that affect the welfare of children or, indeed, vulnerable adults.

Mr Beggs: Young people in care experience a higher level of grooming, but the problem also exists among vulnerable young people in our community. Will the Minister advise us whether the Minister of Education has engaged with him and the Minister of Health to ensure that the resilience of all our young people is reassessed so that those who would try to exploit them will be prevented from accessing and abusing them?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Beggs's point about the importance of ensuring that all young people are protected, not just those in the care system. The key issue there relates to the work being done by the Safeguarding Board, which, of course, comes under DHSSPS. I have not had direct engagement with the Minister of Education on the issue. At this stage, the engagement has been led by DOJ and DHSSPS.

National Crime Agency

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the process required to introduce the National Crime Agency legislative framework. (AQO 4824/11-15)

Mr Ford: To extend the remit of the National Crime Agency (NCA) into the devolved arena and to build in appropriate, local safeguards

about its operation here, the Assembly's consent is required before secondary legislation can be made at Westminster. In practical terms, that would require me to consult the Justice Committee on a statutory operating model for the NCA and to secure the agreement of the Executive. The Crime and Courts Act 2013 provides the Home Secretary with order-making powers so that the NCA provisions can be fully extended to Northern Ireland, with the appropriate consent arrangements with the Assembly.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that answer. Will he confirm to us today that he will not permit so many concessions in the NCA legislative framework that it would have such diminished significance in Northern Ireland that it would not be of great importance to national security?

Mr Ford: I appreciate the point that Mr Elliott seeks to make; indeed, he has made it in the Chamber before now. I am concerned to see that we get the NCA operating in a way that enables its full powers to be used against criminality and organised crime from a variety of sources in Northern Ireland, subject to the appropriate safeguards of the operating model here. I believe that we have made significant progress around that, and that has not involved diluting the powers of the NCA but has involved working around the accountability mechanisms. It is absolutely clear that we do not yet have the political agreement to enable us to make that progress, but I have not lost sight of being able to make that progress. My officials and I continue to engage with those in the House who at this stage are unable to agree the proposals as they stand. I certainly do not see any prospect of the kind of diminution that is spoken of by Mr Elliott.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has been clear in spelling out the problems that are arising at the moment because we do not have the framework. Can he be equally clear about what the people of Northern Ireland are missing with the NCA not operating here and about the potential impact that it will have on the people of Northern Ireland if we do not have the full implementation of the National Crime Agency here?

Mr Ford: Mr Campbell makes a good point, but he is almost asking me to define a negative. If we do not have full operational powers, the NCA will not be able to deliver the same assistance to the PSNI in the fight against organised crime as, until 7 October, we had from the Serious Organised Crime Agency. It

will hamper a variety of crimes, including issues such as child exploitation and human trafficking, drug smuggling and fuel laundering. It will not necessarily mean that those activities cannot be carried out against such criminals, but it will mean that the PSNI has to devote resources that would otherwise be available from the NCA.

I suspect that there is a danger of a confusion of role, if members of various agencies are not sure exactly what the role of the NCA is in our current difficulties, and there will be a specific issue about being able only to use reserved powers for civil recovery. The NCA will not be able to use its powers of civil recovery in the devolved field. So, armed robbers and fuel launderers may well find that their assets cannot be seized as they currently stand. There will also be a problem that any claim made by the NCA for civil recovery for an issue here can be made only in the Northern Ireland High Court and cannot be replicated in London and Edinburgh under current restrictions. So, there are a number of restrictions, and, at this stage, we have the PSNI working to fill the gap as best it can and the engagement by my Department with other Members to see if we can get the arrangements fixed.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Does the Minister agree that there is now an opportunity for him, as Minister of Justice, to introduce legislation that would tackle serious crime and make it very effective but, importantly, make it accountable?

Mr Ford: I am not sure what legislation I could bring through in any meaningful timescale that would enable us to fix the current gap. Even if we were to seek to introduce a new Bill in this place and even if there were complete political agreement, there would be a significant gap to allow the consultation, the drafting and the processes of the House to be gone through, and I do not believe that we can wait for those processes to be gone through.

I believe that we have now got to the situation where the accountability mechanisms are in place to allow the NCA to operate in Northern Ireland subject to our normal policing architecture here, subject to the primacy of the PSNI and the specific lead role for the Chief Constable in approving actions by the NCA and subject to accountability to the ombudsman reporting to the Policing Board. All those are issues that, I believe, we already have, and I do not see any way in which there would be any benefit from legislating in this place.

Mrs D Kelly: As the Minister will be aware, we all want to see an effective and accountable NCA operating as soon as possible. Given the Minister's previous comments, will he give us some indication of progress on those points with the Home Secretary?

Mr Ford: The issue has not been so much, as Mrs Kelly talks about, progress with the Home Secretary at this stage; progress with the Home Secretary was made several months ago and has been refined on a couple of occasions since. The issue now has to be to obtain progress with the two parties in this place that are not yet happy with the arrangements.

Terrorist Threat

3. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current level of terrorist activity, including the threat to the security forces and the general public, between now and Christmas. (AQO 4825/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the outset, I should say that terrorism is primarily a matter for the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable. I can advise, however, that the threat level in Northern Ireland remains at severe, which means that an attack is highly likely. There have been 14 attacks up to 14 October this year. Police officers, soldiers and prison officers remain the primary targets. It is clear, however, that the terrorists are not concerned about the safety of anyone. Unfortunately, we have also seen paramilitary groups executing their own perverse view of justice, with the callous and brutal murder of Kevin Kearney in north Belfast on 8 October. There is no place for that in our society, and I utterly condemn all such violent activity, including the appalling murder of Barry McCrory. I understand that the two men arrested last week in relation to an attack on a woman in east Belfast on 25 September have now been released on police bail pending further inquiries.

Murderous attacks, assaults, shootings, victimisation and intimidation by any paramilitary organisation cannot be justified. Neither unionist nor nationalist terrorists can be allowed to thwart the progress that Northern Ireland has made. There is no doubt that there would be more attacks were it not for the success of the security forces in disrupting and preventing them. Having met both the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence in the past week, I can also attest to the high level of cross-border cooperation. While the efforts of security forces on both sides of the border have contained the level of

activity and undoubtedly saved lives, that has not diminished the intent of these groups. Everyone in Northern Ireland must remain vigilant and report any information that they have either to the police or anonymously to the Crimestoppers charity.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that answer. In light of what he has just said and given what has taken place, what further discussions will he have with the police and the NIO to deal with further disruption and terrorist activity in the lead-up to Christmas?

Mr Ford: I have regular meetings with the Chief Constable and the Secretary of State to look at the issues of the interface between her responsibilities and mine in the justice field. However, the key issue must remain the support of the entire community for the work being done by the PSNI, extending to the provision of intelligence when people have any information that can assist the police and a robust standing together against those who would threaten us from whatever side.

Mr Swann: Can the Minister inform the House whether any of the guns or ammunition used in murders in the past four years have a history before 1998?

Mr Ford: The answer is that I cannot inform the House of that position. I suspect that it is a matter for Forensic Science NI to carry out such investigations and report to the courts at an appropriate time.

Mr A Maginness: Given the obvious danger from terrorists, particularly dissident republicans, does the Minister agree that those who engage in demonstrations and public protests divert resources from the fight against terrorism?

Mr Ford: As Mr Maginness hints, it is clearly the case that, when police officers are required in large numbers to deal with public disorder and a variety of demonstrations, it diverts officers from carrying out other duties. I would not stop where he stopped in respect of his concern about the activities of dissident republicans: it is clear that dissident unionists are also carrying out similar attacks and seeking to impose their will on communities across Northern Ireland. We need to ensure that police officers are deployed against both.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I should have pointed out that questions 7 and 8 have been withdrawn.

Human Trafficking

4. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the need to retain flexibility in the justice system in the battle against human trafficking. (AQO 4826/11-15)

Mr Ford: Human trafficking is a heinous crime that has a devastating toll on its victims. I am committed to making sure that we have a robust and effective system in place in Northern Ireland to prevent people from being trafficked and exploited, to protect victims and to pursue through the courts those who perpetrate this crime. I accept that that involves reviewing law and procedure and promoting changes as necessary. For instance, Members will be aware of the new offences that I introduced under the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the progress that my Department is making against the human trafficking action plan. I agree with the Member that the approach requires flexibility.

Ms Lo: Keeping in mind the importance of flexibility, does the Minister share my concerns that some aspects of Lord Morrow's private Member's Bill may reduce flexibility and, therefore, could be counterproductive in our attempts to address human trafficking?

2.30 pm

Mr Ford: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is no great secret that Lord Morrow and I have discussed aspects of the Bill, including those aspects which reduce flexibility around prosecution decisions, those around the automatic granting of immunity to victims and those around a mandatory minimum sentence. I have concerns about aspects of the Bill, but those are issues which I have discussed with Lord Morrow, which I suspect I will continue to discuss with Lord Morrow, and on which the Justice Committee, in particular, and the House, in general, will have an opportunity make up its mind.

Lord Morrow: It is interesting to note that the question is more to do with Lord Morrow's Bill than with what the Minister is doing or not doing. Bearing in mind that the Minister has all the flexibility that he claims to need at present, we have had two convictions, to date. De facto, it is legal now. Does the Minister accept that what he has got is simply not working and that it is time for something better?

Mr Ford: The fact that we can say that we have had only two convictions is clearly a matter of

some concern, but we should also acknowledge that the number of cases which we believe we are talking about is very limited. If we looked merely at the conviction rates for some other offences, I am not sure whether we would say that we were being successful. They are there as a clear marker. The fact that we have had a guideline judgement with the case of Matyas Pis is an indication of how seriously the courts are taking cases.

However, as ever, I repeat the point that one of the key issues is that the police need information from members of the public; they need the public to report concerns that they have. If there are issues or matters that do not seem to be quite right, such as the number of people coming and going to houses, or people in a workplace who do not seem able to live their own life independently, they should be brought to the attention of the police. Ensuring that the community unites is the key issue.

Last week, I saw some very positive work in visits to Armagh college, Dromore High School and Regent House Grammar School. I have no doubt that many young people across society are learning the lessons and becoming aware, but we need to ensure that some older people become aware and report their concerns as well.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Can he outline how many different types of human trafficking there have been since he came into office and the reasons for trafficking?

Mr Ford: I can give the House the basic statistics, as they stand. Since the establishment of the national referral mechanism (NRM) in April 2009, until the start of October 2013, there were 104 referrals from Northern Ireland, of which 65 had positive decisions at the initial stage — the reasonable grounds stage — for acceptance into the national referral mechanism, and 37 positive decisions were made at the conclusive grounds stage. A number of cases are pending at both levels. It means that, so far, only 37 people have been accepted into the NRM in that period of something more than four years, which slightly predates my appointment as Minister.

It is absolutely clear that significant work is being done. Last week, I had a meeting, on a North/South basis, with the Minister of Justice and Equality and a number of relevant agencies. That was at a seminar dealing with trafficking there. I also attended the regular

meeting of the interdepartmental ministerial group led by the Home Office but, on this occasion, chaired by the Prime Minister, and the meetings that I just mentioned, at which I engaged with one college and two schools. So, there is clearly a significant effort being directed against trafficking across all of the jurisdictions of these islands, but, fundamentally, those who carry out that work are statutory bodies, and they require the support of the community to do it.

Legal Aid

5. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Justice whether anyone seeking legal aid will be disadvantaged as a result of changes being brought forward. (AQO 4827/11-15)

Mr Ford: The reforms currently published for public consultation in relation to legal aid would see the rates of remuneration for Crown Court work being reduced overall by 45% for solicitors and 30% for counsel. That would bring the fees paid in Northern Ireland into line with the fees paid in England and Wales. The reforms would also remove the higher guilty plea 2 fees, which could act as a disincentive to the entry of an early guilty plea, and introduce new fees to cover omissions in the rules. On the basis that this is an adjustment to the fees paid to lawyers working in Crown Court cases and does not affect anyone's eligibility for legal aid, I am content that no applicant for legal aid will be disadvantaged.

The reforms being undertaken to civil legal aid will ensure that those who are eligible will continue to be provided with appropriate representation, paid for by the public purse. I have published proposals to introduce fixed fees for legal aid in civil cases, which will save £14 million annually — including £3 million in administration costs — and improve accountability. I have also proposed changes to legal aid funding for representation in civil cases, which will ensure that only the level of representation that is actually required is funded by legal aid. I am confident that those who are assisted by legal aid will continue to be able to obtain the level of representation that they need.

I have also published proposals to harmonise the financial eligibility tests for advice by way of representation and civil legal aid. Those proposals would deliver an estimated 8.2% reduction in eligibility for civil legal aid from 43.2% to 35% of the population. Although that will reduce the proportion of people in Northern Ireland who are eligible for legal aid, Members

should note that in England and Wales only 28% of the population is eligible.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he guarantee that access to justice will not be compromised by any reform of legal aid?

Mr Ford: I can certainly assure Mr Boylan that, as I have assured the House and the Committee for Justice before, it is my ambition to not take issues out of scope for legal aid unless an alternative and better method can be provided. However, there is no doubt that the financial challenges that we face are placing significant pressure, to the point that current expenditure on legal aid means that I am having to make cuts in other aspects of departmental expenditure in this year. That is an issue that needs to be addressed. The key issue is to ensure that we maintain, as far as possible, access to the legal advice that individuals need, without necessarily funding adversarial appearances in court.

Mr McCarthy: I understand that, at the weekend, the Minister announced to the Law Society that he intends to have a further review of access to justice. Will he give the Assembly some further information on exactly what that will entail?

Mr Ford: I am glad that the Member referred to an announcement to the Law Society; I am not sure that all the members of the Law Society were entirely pleased with what they heard from me on Saturday morning, but that remains to be seen.

Following on from the access to justice review, which was carried out by Jim Daniell shortly after the devolution of justice powers, there are some issues that need to be further considered to underpin those reforms and to ensure that we continue to make the reforms to provide the best possible arrangements for legal aid and legal services across Northern Ireland. It is not something that will slow down the reform programme, because that cannot be slowed down.

We need to look at issues such as the possibility of making better use of advice agencies and alternative dispute resolution rather than, as I have just said, funding adversarial court appearances, and ensuring that we find better ways of resolving problems without always resorting to litigation in the first place. Those are the kinds of issues that I am

hoping we will get some further work done on. I will make a formal statement to the Assembly at an appropriate stage.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for the responses that he has given so far. While there may not be a great deal of public sympathy for those who are at the higher end of the earnings scale in the legal profession, what consideration has he given to the impact that changes in legal aid will have on small solicitors' firms?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr Weir's point but I am not sure that it is my job, as Minister of Justice, to ensure the maintenance of a specific model of the provision of legal services. I noted, for example, that in the president's speech to the Law Society dinner, he referred to a solicitor and named a specific small village in County Tyrone. I suspect that most people in that village travel to the district town in order to get their groceries, and I am not sure that they can necessarily expect that there will be a one-man solicitor's practice in all cases in every village, even though they might wish it.

I want to see that people get access to advice. I am afraid that it is not my responsibility to ensure that the current model continues to be there. I wish to see that the current model of solicitors' firms across Northern Ireland continues in operation so that people have those opportunities, but it simply cannot be assumed that it will be maintained without change, as other services are changed.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister been made aware of the concerns of many solicitors that the proposed cuts to the legal aid budget will reduce or minimise access to proper legal services for many people right across the North who are at the lower end of the income bracket and will, in fact, have a negative effect on society as a whole?

Mr Ford: I have to say to Mr McGlone and others that I am not in the process of reducing the budget for legal aid. I am reducing expenditure to get it down to the level of the budget; that is the fundamental challenge. Expenditure on legal aid has been running in the region of £100 million against a budget of £75 million every year since just before devolution. That position cannot continue.

On the issue of access, I repeat the point that I made in my original answer. Some 35% of the population of Northern Ireland will still be eligible for legal aid, as opposed to 28% in England and Wales, which is the nearest

comparable jurisdiction. I believe that that is a significant statement of our desire to protect our people.

Twaddell Avenue

6. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on any discussions he has had with the Chief Constable regarding the ongoing breaches of the Parades Commission's determination of the protest at Twaddell Avenue. (AQO 4828/11-15)

Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ceist uimhir a sé. Question 5.

Mr Ford: I will happily answer question 6 for Mr McCann [*Laughter.*] Although, naturally, I have had general discussions with the police, I have not discussed specific policing decisions. That is because the policing of individual parades, protests and related disorder is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. As such, his accountability rests with the Policing Board. I have had no discussions with him regarding the ongoing breaches of the Parades Commission's determinations in respect of the protest at Twaddell Avenue.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight my concern at the recent call to increase protests, including the threat of civil disobedience. I encourage all those with influence to consider an alternative way forward to bring about a peaceful conclusion to the issue. It is vital that they show leadership and work with their communities and the police to ease tensions where they exist.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his correction. I was daydreaming. Will the Minister join with me in calling for everyone, including certain Members of the Assembly, to desist from further political confrontation with the PSNI on the streets of Belfast and to uphold the rule of law in keeping with the determination of the Parades Commission?

Mr Ford: I will happily repeat my comments in answer to Dr McDonnell's topical question. I believe that we all have a responsibility to encourage people to obey the law, to desist from confrontational activity and to ensure that we do not continue with the current £60,000-a-night expenditure on policing Twaddell Avenue and Ardoyne. That is unnecessary and has significant opportunity costs compared with the use of those officers in normal policing duties. As I said, I hope that we will see a reduction in tension around the city centre, Woodvale and Ardoyne.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister give an assessment on the impact on community relations of the unveiling of a plaque to Shankill bomber Thomas Begley yesterday?

Mr Ford: Although I do my best to answer questions, an assessment of community relations lies with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and not with me. However, even in the context of what happened yesterday, it is clear that there was public disorder that had a policing cost.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 10 and 13 have been withdrawn. We begin with topical questions.

Lisburn: Sport

1. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what additional support is planned this year for the sporting organisations in Lisburn, given that, as she will well know, Lisburn was awarded the accolade of European city of sport this year, and we are rightfully proud of all its sporting organisations. (AQT 251/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question. A bid process will see the City of Lisburn Racquets Club receive additional money. Additional money has also been allocated to Salto Gymnastics Club through the governing body for gymnastics. I have had approaches and will certainly look at opportunities around soccer, boxing and other sports.

Attracting the Chinese male gymnastics team, which is ranked first in the world, to Lisburn was no mean feat. I have absolutely no doubt that Lisburn will be banking on that in order to attract additional investment in the future.

2.45 pm

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that answer. It is recognised that Salto pulled off one of the key achievements from the Olympic Games in getting the Chinese gymnasts there. Unfortunately, Salto is a victim of its own success. It is bursting at the seams and has plans to develop that facility further. Will the Minister and her Department support that extension, which will benefit all the people of Northern Ireland, further than Lisburn itself?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member is right in saying that the facilities at Salto are an exemplar across the island when it comes to gymnastics. I am happy to meet representatives of the Salto gym with the Member, members of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and Sport NI to look at the potential expansion of the facilities at Salto. As yet, there has not been a request to do that, but I anticipate one. I have been at the gym on several occasions; it was flagged up to me that it has a waiting list that it cannot facilitate, and it is not happy to be in that situation. However, I am happy to meet the Member and a delegation from the gym to see what we can do.

Mr Deputy Speaker: At the beginning, I informed Members that questions 10 and 13 had been withdrawn. That refers to the oral questions. Topical question 6 has been withdrawn.

City of Culture: Legacy Plan

2. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she can confirm that the City of Culture legacy plan will be brought forward this year and further confirm that Derry City Football Club will be included in the IFA subregional stadium development plan. (AQT 252/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is certainly a theme of local politics emerging in topical questions. I appreciate that all politics is local.

We were very successful in securing an additional £2 million, as part of the monitoring round, for the City of Culture's legacy fund. That is important, particularly when you are looking at the legacy, and there has been much in the media about the legacy. However, our focus — the entire Executive, through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) — has always been on addressing opportunities, and there is no better opportunity than tackling poverty and social exclusion. I am happy that that will happen. The other facilities — the Brandywell, the Showgrounds and the rest as part of that legacy — will be included in that. We are working with the council on the production of a robust legacy plan, and we will bring our own in addition to that. I have no doubt that, right up to the last minute, I will hear from the people of the city and the surrounding communities about what they would like to see the money invested in.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr McCartney for a supplementary, and I encourage the Member to ask one question only.

Mr McCartney: Well spotted, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for her answer. I will ask her one question. We heard this morning, and the Minister alluded to it, that the Executive have, through DCAL, ring-fenced £2 million for the legacy process. Can she confirm today how that will be used and, in particular, how it will advance the Brandywell and the Foyle valley master plan?

Ms Ní Chuilín: With not just the £2 million from DCAL but the £3 million from Derry City Council, a quare dent — as we say in Belfast — will certainly be put into the Foyle valley master plan and help to address one of the legacy projects that has been flagged up in the city. It is really important to use opportunities through sport and physical activity, through the arts, through community development, through health, and through social development and the rest to make sure that we leave a good footprint. I believe that the Foyle valley project is one of those. I look forward to seeing how it rolls out.

Boxing

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she believes there was good uptake for the tranche of funding that was available for local boxing clubs, for which the deadline has recently passed. (AQT 253/11-15)

Following a great weekend for boxing in Northern Ireland, Belfast in particular, I am sure that the Minister will congratulate Carl Frampton as he heads on to greater things.

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, I concur with the Member's statement on Carl Frampton, and that goes for all the other boxers who succeeded at the weekend. I believe that the wins that they achieved and the support that they got from right across the community was probably unprecedented. Many other sports can learn from that.

There was huge uptake. I do not have the figures with me, but it will come as no surprise to the Member that the demand far outweighs our funds, so we need to look at ways to support that. Certainly, the uptake has been huge. As the Member — and other Members who, I am sure, will raise the issue today — will know, the state of facilities in boxing clubs are probably the worst across sport.

We aim to ensure not only that we invest and that facilities are fit for purpose, but that all other Departments and bodies have an opportunity to contribute. That includes local government. Some councils have done great work. Other councils have expressed an interest. I am keen to ensure that that deadline is not a cut-off for boxing forever. We need to see what money we have to try to meet the need.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her answer. Now that the deadline has passed and we are in a period of assessment, when does the Minister expect to see delivery on the ground?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, most clubs, if not all, have received certain minor capital for equipment, such as head guards and bags. I anticipate that, by December 2015, not only will a lot of the technical assessment for capital needs have commenced and be well under way, but some will be nearing completion. I am still hopeful that, even at this late stage, where city councils have boxing clubs in their areas, they will also help them, maybe contribute some funding and look at a better way to deliver some of those much-needed facilities.

Sport: Subregional Development

4. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what process she would envisage that would allow sporting clubs outside the three main sporting bodies to, on a subregional basis, take advantage of modernisation and improvement programmes. (AQT 254/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, as the Member will be aware, the IFA has subregional facilities. It is in the process of looking at a facilities development plan. That will be completed and presented to me. Based on what is there, I will make a final decision at the end. It is really important to ensure that local clubs, be they small or big, have themselves in a state of readiness. As the Member will also be aware, not everybody who puts a plan forward will get funding.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. Can she give the House the fullest assurance that Derry City Football Club will not be disadvantaged by playing in the League of Ireland and that it will become part of a funding stream in the current comprehensive spending review period?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I know that the Member is aware of the response that I gave to his Foyle colleague Raymond McCartney, which is that we have already submitted £2 million towards Daisyfield and the Showgrounds as part of the overall Foyle valley programme. Derry City Football Club, along with many other football clubs, has met and will continue to meet the IFA to ensure that its facilities are certainly on the list for approval.

NI Events Company

5. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to confirm that the NI Events Company investigation is complete, to state when the findings will be published and to clarify whether the Department intends to reinstate any of the events. (AQT 255/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will be aware that the Events Company was transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in April 2010. A report is being compiled on the findings of that investigation. Basically, as far as I am concerned, the Events Company has been transferred to DETI along with the Tourist Board. There are events here that we need to look at collectively in the Executive. There is no better example than 2013 of what we can do to hold events on a world stage. I want to see the conclusion of the investigation and the publication of the report.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Can the Minister assure me that those events will happen right across the North rather than just in the two main cities?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Given the impact that the events have on tourism and, indeed, the local economy, a lot of people are concerned that areas outside Belfast and Derry city may not be given an opportunity to host them. I would say to those people that there is absolutely nothing to stop them bringing forward projects now. I would like to see the report published to make sure that the lessons that need to be learned are learned and that we bring forward collectively those opportunities that need to be progressed in that way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As pointed out at the beginning, question 6 has been withdrawn. Mr Declan McAleer is not in his place. Mr Alex Attwood is not in his place. Mr Daithí McKay is not in his place. Mr Ian McCrea is in his place.

Mr I McCrea: I was not expecting that.

Pipe Bands

10. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she is aware that the Northern Ireland pipe band scene has had very good results during this piping season and to comment on how that success could be maintained next season. (AQT 260/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am delighted that the Member was in his place, because he asked a very valid question about pipe bands. Some of the pipe bands that I visited and witnessed this year have enjoyed a lot of success, and rightly so, because that has not come without a lot of hard work. I have no doubt that that success will continue next year and that DCAL, the Arts Council and the Ulster-Scots Agency will play their parts in ensuring that that success is realised.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the —. My apologies, Ian. You have a supplementary question to ask. It is the least that we could do.

Mr I McCrea: I think so. Will the Minister join me in congratulating a young fella called Matthew Wenlock who became the under-16 world champion at — if I get this correct — the world solo drumming championships at the weekend?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Of course I will join you in congratulating him. Such competitions are an opportunity for people not just to compete but to excel and to try to improve their skills and move from one category to another. I admire anybody who plays a musical instrument, regardless of whether they are in a pipe band, a marching band, a pop band or a traditional band. It is absolutely no mean feat. So, I extend my congratulations to Matthew, and I hope that he and others succeed next year.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, that concludes topical questions. We will now move on to questions for oral answer. As previously pointed out, questions 10 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Libraries

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the strategy of Libraries NI is delivering an uptake in usage in areas where libraries have been closed. (AQO 4837/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI's strategy for delivering increases in library usage is set out in its 2013-14 business plan. Libraries NI will measure participation in a wide range of activities, events and programmes, as well as through book usage, library membership and other activities.

Due to an incomplete dataset in Libraries NI's 10-year-old ELFNI computer system, it has not been possible to identify with sufficient certainty the changes in usage in areas where libraries have been closed. The introduction of Libraries NI's new computer system, the E2, over the coming year will provide, among many other improvements, a complete postcode dataset for the analysis of library usage in the future.

Mrs Dobson: The Minister will agree with me that libraries play an essential role in our local communities. She is on record as saying that she disagreed with library closures under the previous Minister of Culture. Does she, therefore, plan to reprofile spending in her Department to build up those vital services again, including Gilford library in my constituency?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Perhaps the Member is not aware of this — I am happy to furnish her with the figures — but I have reprofiled the budget across all the ALBs to ensure that libraries have additional money. Not only that but we have tried to balance out the proposals for reduced opening hours to make sure that library closures are totally avoided. I am happy to provide the statistics to the Member.

3.00 pm

I am aware that great lengths have been gone to, particularly by working with the local community development group in Gilford, to make sure that people avail themselves of every opportunity for better library usage in the area. Libraries have held mother and toddler groups, helped with job skills and given other support right across the board, particularly in rural areas. Libraries can be sustained only where there is proper usage. Therefore, I would welcome anything that the Member and others can do to make sure that our libraries are protected and that their usage increases.

Mrs McKeivitt: Libraries NI has invested heavily in mobile units, but has there been an increase in their usage in areas where there have been library closures to facilitate those library users using the new E2 programme?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said to Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson, we do not have exact data on increase in usage or even any profile or complexion of library usage through mobiles in the areas where libraries were closed. As the Member will be aware, a stage 1 review was proposed into the mobile services, but anecdotal evidence is that there is greater use of mobile services. E2 will come on board next year, and we anticipate that it will lead to increased usage and will particularly help people who have dependants or are isolated. We need to make sure that we bring the library to them as much as possible, but it is important to make sure that people who are really committed to their libraries have every opportunity to have a service in their area.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister can correct me if I picked her up wrong, but I think that she said that no data is available on mobile libraries. Is the Minister not concerned about that, given that a lot of the figures are based on lack of usage of libraries and, indeed, the promotion of the usage of mobile libraries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are figures there, but breakdowns by postcode, gender, whether people have dependants or children, and background are not available. The system at the minute is well over 10 years old and not fit for purpose. That is why E2 has been procured and brought in, and it will provide the kind of breakdown that we need.

We also need to future-proof stock, decide what type of stock to buy and decide how many people need Kindles, but we do not have the detail. However, we have details of how many people are using mobile libraries at the minute and the demand for future use. The key thing is to make sure that people not only have membership of their local library but continue to use it and encourage others to do so, because libraries that have not been used and cannot be sustained will be harder to sustain.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister provide an update on the seven libraries that were originally identified for closure?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A lot of progress has been made, and I pay tribute to Libraries NI and its board and staff for that. The Member may be aware of the new library in Draperstown and the partnership with the local community association there. That library has now been saved and is open, and we have looked at that model, particularly in rural areas. There are

also advanced plans to improve facilities at Carnlough and Killyleagh.

As the result of a lot of hard work at the quarterly meetings, it was announced on 17 October that the remaining seven libraries that were earmarked for potential closure are currently sustainable and should remain open. The only caveat is that a further review on viability will take place for Killyleagh and Greystones libraries only, as the level of usage in those libraries, although they still look sustainable, continues to be a concern. Unless that sustainability and the numbers and usage improve, we will come back to a situation in which those libraries will not be deemed viable unless more people are accessing their services and creating demand.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Declan McAleer is not in his place.

Boxing Strategy

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the boxing strategy. (AQO 4839/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since my last update, which was in May this year, Sport NI, in conjunction with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA), selected four suppliers to provide boxing equipment to clubs. An independent technical team was appointed to carry out surveys of the premises of boxing clubs where there is a need for capital works. To date, £166,000 has been allocated for the provision of equipment, which is being issued to clubs. It is anticipated that delivery of such equipment will be completed for all clubs by the end of the year.

The independent technical team has completed 65 on-site surveys, and 26 survey reports have been submitted to Sport NI for consideration. Submission of the other reports is ongoing. Subsequently, a call for formal applications for capital awards was made on 10 September.

The Member will be aware that the IABA club development manager has been holding one-to-one meetings with some of the clubs. The Member may also be aware that a number of district councils have been proactive in identifying premises that could be used to accommodate boxing clubs.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her answer. In light of the need to maximise the value of spend for boxing to ensure that it gets the most out of this, and in light of the concentration of clubs in

certain areas, particularly Belfast, what actions is the Department taking to encourage the sharing of facilities and ensuring that underused facilities that are under local government or central government control are identified as venues?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First, the Member is right: there are huge challenges for us in trying to meet the needs of some boxing clubs. Some local councils have been excellent in trying to provide some of the underused facilities that they have under their control and match them with identified need, particularly in boxing. But, not all councils are involved in that, and I encourage the Member's own council and others to become involved, because it is a valuable exercise. There are huge opportunities, particularly ahead of the review of public administration (RPA) and all the changes and challenges that that will bring with it.

I have no register of central government facilities. I am keen to find out if there are any, and, if so, how they can be used, if at all.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. What assistance was given to boxing clubs to maximise how they availed themselves of the boxing investment strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said to the Member who asked the previous question, a club manager from the Irish Amateur Boxing Association met a lot of the boxing clubs, supported by Sport NI. They have been working with the clubs on a range of one-to-one issues to ensure that, for example, they avail of funding for small equipment. They have also been looking at other needs, such as making sure that clubs have a funding strategy, going through the process of assessment on the bigger capital needs of clubs and trying to give them advice. That assistance has been welcomed. The feedback that I have had from most clubs is that they value the one-to-one work, because they feel that it was probably one of the areas where there was a gap.

As I said, there are still huge opportunities, particularly with local government and this investment in boxing, to yield better results for a sport that, despite its success, and the weekend that we had, has facilities that are not fit for purpose.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her responses. Given the acknowledgement that boxing clubs across Northern Ireland hit the key

element of the Programme for Government, namely greater participation in sport, has the Minister been able to ascertain how many boxing clubs we have and how many are in need of urgent modernisation programmes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are well over 60 boxing clubs across the North. It would be fair to say that the majority need capital support. That need varies from some support to a lot of support. You could count on one hand the number of clubs that do not need any support. Without waxing lyrical, we continually praise the work and the product of boxers in the Assembly. We continue to acknowledge their commitment and work, and how they serve as role models for children and young people in our communities.

We have to get behind the sport to make sure that clubs have facilities that are not only fit for purpose but will attract more youngsters to the sport. Despite the success in the sport and what boxing clubs have done for our communities and families, I could not blame any parent who walks into some of our boxing facilities for being tempted to walk straight back out again. We really need to get behind the sport and make investment where it is needed. Boxing needs that investment.

Mr McGimpsey: Does the Minister believe that a facilitation process between Sandy Row Boxing Club and the boxing authorities will result in the club and the wider community having the confidence to go forward with her strategy, in the belief and certainty that they will be free from sectarian and racial abuse?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am waiting for the report to come back from the independent panel. I am glad that Sandy Row Boxing Club representatives met the panel. I am not sure how many times they met, but I believe that the discussions were robust and that there is certainly a desire to make sure that the youngsters involved at Sandy Row — albeit in dwindling numbers — have opportunities like others.

I absolutely, utterly and unequivocally condemn sectarianism in sport, regardless of where it happens. The Member knows in his heart that, of all sports, boxing has had the fewest complaints. However, if it happens once, it is once too often. I would like Sandy Row to be involved in this. I would like the club to move forward and take every opportunity that becomes available to get the facilities that not only the club needs but the people of south Belfast deserve.

Ulster Canal

4. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the current funding position on the re-opening of the Ulster canal. (AQO 4840/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Work by Waterways Ireland on the restoration of the Ulster canal has been solely focused on the section from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. The project will be advanced in line with available resources. The Ulster canal interagency group has been tasked to examine all possible options for financing the project. DCAL economists are reviewing the business case to update the estimated costs and identify social as well as economic benefits for the first section of the canal. The Ulster canal interagency group is exploring funding options with the Special EU Programmes Body.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome the Minister's continuing commitment to the Ulster canal, particularly the section from Upper Lough Erne to Clones. However, one of the difficulties that it faces is an absence of funding. Will the Minister provide more information on potential funding options for completing the work on that section of the canal?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The work of the interagency group is focused not just on funding options but on what we can do with current available funding. It is really important that we look at the Ulster canal with a view to how we can open up waterways to improve tourism and the local economy. It is important that we get started on the restoration of the Ulster canal in that area because it has experienced a lack of investment for decades.

We are looking not just towards the Irish Government, within DCAL and towards Europe but at other opportunities, possibly through the Lottery Heritage Fund and many others to see whether we can get this started by looking at options to bring the work forward, rather than waiting until all the money is in. We can do that only on the basis of secured funding. Once that happens, I will be happy to make a statement to the House that will be a bit of good news that the Member and other Members for that area have been waiting to hear for a long time.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that update. Will she tell us how much the overall project

was estimated to cost, based on the business case, and what income it projected?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Overall, it goes into tens of millions of pounds. I believe that the business case needs to be updated, and that will be part of discussions involving me, Minister Deenihan, and Minister McGinley. Some of the work that is being done by DCAL economists is bringing a fresh approach to the economic appraisal. We are sharing that with our Irish Government colleagues and the interagency group. That is because I believe that, rather than waiting for all the money to be secured at once, we need to look at the potential for phased approaches. It is good news that we now have full planning permission across all the councils and from our Planning Service here.

We now need to look at what capital moneys are available, what we can do and our plan to secure additional funds for that area. As I said to Phil Flanagan, it is really important — I am sure that the Member is more aware of this than I am — that we get parts of that canal opened and try to get some construction work done on it.

3.15 pm

Mr Byrne: Can this issue be raised at the next meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council? What potential does she expect could accrue to the areas of Fermanagh and Tyrone in future tourism?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member should take comfort in knowing that this is always raised at the North/South Ministerial Council. Certainly, within the waterways sectoral aspect of DCAL's North/South arrangements, it is constantly brought up. The key here is to look at what we can do now for rural communities and what moneys are available. I appreciate that, when the Irish Government said that they would fully fund the project, they were in different economic circumstances. However, they still remain committed to doing something.

In DCAL, I am looking at a new economic appraisal to see what the real costs are and what parts of the work I could try to start, possibly in conjunction with Ministers Deenihan and McGinley. There is a lot of expectation around the project, and rightly so, no more so than among the people who live and work in the surrounding area and those who are waiting for work on the restoration of the canal.

Ms Lo: Parts of the UK and many other countries have reinvented canals as tourist

facilities and attractions. What lessons does the Minister intend to adopt from other people's experiences?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Certainly, we regularly receive reports from Waterways Ireland about tourist potential. The royal canal has brought great potential. There are festivals across all the canals and waterways the length and breadth of this island. Unfortunately, those are some of the very few opportunities that people who live in rural communities near waterways have of generating a local economy. So the tourist potential is absolutely huge. Not only is it huge for people who live on this island; it is huge for those who want to visit here and travel. There is big interest, particularly in Europe, in canals and waterways. It is incumbent on us to do what we can to get the project financed. We need to make a start on it. We do not have all the funds yet, but it is time to make a start on it rather than sit and wait on free money coming. People who are looking for tourists and have a tourist product to offer and people who are willing and able to work look to us for opportunities to get this moving. I think that is what it could do.

Motorsport Facilities

5. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any discussions she has had in relation to developing a purpose-built motorsport track facility, suitable for hosting international events for cars and motorcycles. (AQO 4841/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Up to yesterday, I had not received a request from any individual, group or organisation to discuss the development of a purpose-built motorsports track facility. I am committed to sustaining motorsport here, and I recently met Ministers Kennedy and Foster to explore opportunities around safety in motorsport and the continued funding of motorsport into future years. Through partnership and collaborative working, DCAL will ensure that positive outcomes will continue to be delivered for motorsport. Moreover, DCAL's interest in road racing remains focused on encouraging the sport to improve the safety of competitors and spectators.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she recognise the need for such a provision? She should consider the huge interest that there is in motorsport in Northern Ireland and the need to reduce risks, especially in the road racing of motorbikes, and increase the safety of spectators at motorsport events?

Furthermore, has the Minister considered the Maze site as an option for such a motorsport facility? It would be an excellent facility and an excellent site.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have received no facilities development strategy from the governing body, which is 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group, as the Member knows. It is on the basis of governing bodies bringing forward strategies that the Department, through Sport NI, decides to give funding. I have not looked at any site for that purpose because the 2&4 Wheel group has not even revisited its current facilities plan. It has not asked me to assess the need for a purpose-built stand-alone facility for motorsport. It is happy with the three outlets that it has at the minute. On that basis, I have not given any thought to purpose-built facilities. I am not really sure that the governing body has, either. I met it recently, and it did not present that to me as something that it wished to take forward.

Mr Swann: The Minister mentioned the 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group and investment. However, the current Sport Matters strategy outlines the potential for greater private investment on the back of increased demand for motorsport to build a new facility. Is the Minister looking into that at all?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The short answer is no. Investment will be in the performance of the athletes involved, the work of the governing body and the improvements that it has to make. That investment will continue. I sense that there is a bit of a lobby coming on, but the governing body has not spoken to me about it. It had an opportunity to do so. It would certainly like additional improvements to its current facilities, but it has not brought forward a proposal for a stand-alone motorsport facility.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she tell us how the funding provided by Sport NI to the 2&4 Wheel Motor Sport Steering Group under its performance focus programme will assist the development of the sport?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the performance focus programme, Sport NI has agreed to provide over £300,000 over the period 2013-17 for the development of motorsport across the North. It has identified priorities, including the modernisation of the sport, particularly the development of performance, talent and coaching. It has also identified the need for a full-time development manager and high-performance coaching officer. Those are

several ways in which the investment from DCAL to Sport NI can go to the 2&4 Wheel group to help its performance and focus for the future development of facilities.

Community Relations

6. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline how she has promoted good community relations, as well as the interests of the whole community, whilst discharging her ministerial responsibilities. (AQO 4842/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. DCAL is committed to ensuring that it fulfils its duties under the NI Act 1998 in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. Sport, arts and creativity and linguistic diversity make a valuable contribution to good relations and the creation of a shared and better future. An example of that is the cultural awareness strategy. The implementation of the strategy has seen the Ulster council of the GAA and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland engage in positive dialogue to deliver joint relations events in March of this year at Magee campus in Derry. Plans for a second good relations event are well under way.

Derry City Council and the City of Culture programme included the tattoo and the fleadh, which successfully included and celebrated the whole community. I was there to see both first-hand. The organisers worked with the community in the city to include Irish, Ulster-Scots and minority community traditions. As well as that, the Líofoa initiative makes Irish accessible to people from every background. The Irish language belongs to us all and is a vital part of our shared cultural heritage. Foras na Gaeilge funds an Irish language officer post in the East Belfast Mission, and DCAL officials have met the mission to discuss how we can assist with its work. The agencies of the North/South Language Body have undertaken joint projects in the Irish and Ulster-Scots communities. The agencies delivered showcase events to coincide with the Olympic torch relay. The young ambassadors programme involved eight young people from the USA and Canada. The Arts Council's Re-imagining Communities programme between 2005 and 2011 invested over £3.3 million in 155 projects that transformed communities by removing images and replacing them with more positive images that reflected the views of all of the community. The Irish Football Association, through its Football for All campaign, has introduced measures to address sectarianism in

soccer. An IFA community relations department has been established, and a community relations officer has been appointed to work with clubs, officials and supporters.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's two minutes are up.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The intercultural arts strategy creates avenues for minority ethnic communities to access arts and participate in them. The strategy uses arts to develop community cohesion, increase awareness of diversity, develop good relations and tackle racism, and a total of £300,000 from lottery funding has been committed to the programme over the next three years.

Mr Deputy Speaker: After that comprehensive answer, does the Member have a supplementary question?

Mr Allister: Do I get a comprehensive one? As the Minister is Her Majesty's Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland and a Minister of the crown on a 24/7 basis and, therefore, subject to the constraints and obligations of the ministerial code at all times, why, this summer, did she see fit to align herself with partisan protests against expressions of British culture in Northern Ireland and be present on several occasions —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Allister: — when such matters took place?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will ask the Member to sit down if he does not ask a question that relates to the previous one.

Mr Allister: With respect, I am asking why, if she is subject to the ministerial code, she did not abide by it during in the summer —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will resume his seat, please.

Mr Allister: — and instead engaged in partisan actions. That is very pertinent to the question.

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I have consistently said, the Member is consistently silly. He provides nothing to the House but divisive politics. He has done absolutely nothing for community relations or building good or better relations and reconciliation. He has an absolute brass neck to question my adherence to the ministerial code, which belongs to this place. The Member, despite all his alleged expertise of

knowing Standing Orders inside out, has not asked a question that is factually right and pertinent to the question that he asked in the first place. If he has any difficulty doing so, I am happy to sit down with him and show him how it is done.

Mr Lyttle: What proposals has the Minister put to OFMDFM for the cross-community sports programme that was announced as part of the OFMDFM Together: Building a United Community strategy in May this year?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The £2 million that was secured in the most recent Executive meeting will happen either through monitoring rounds or through Together: Building a United Community funds, which look at the Foyle valley programme that my colleague Raymond McCartney mentioned. We are also looking at specific programmes on access for disabilities, and we are talking to some of the sports bodies, mainly through Sport NI, to look at the potential for others. I could happily spend every penny of that on sport, and I am happy to do so. I heard the Minister of Finance and Personnel talk about the need to see projects that can be brought forward. Despite some of the rigid criteria that have been applied to accessing those other moneys, I am looking outside the box for potential opportunities. Access to sport for people with disabilities is one example on which, I believe, the House will join together in saying that that is money well spent.

Assembly Business

Topical Questions

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I seek some clarity about topical questions, when a Minister says that a question has already been tabled in questions for oral answer. A case in point is that Ian Milne asked a question earlier about the terms of reference for the investigation into child abuse. Question 1 of questions for oral answer was about the number of meetings the Justice Minister had had with the Health Minister. The Member asking a topical question can assume neither that the other Member will be in their place at the appropriate time nor what the Minister's answer will be. Indeed, when the Minister answered Ms Fearon's question, he made no reference to the importance of the terms of reference or what input the Department would have on them. So we have to be careful. We do not want duplication, but Ministers have to be careful that they answer the questions that they are asked.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will know, of course, that it is entirely up to the Minister how he or she answers a question. The whole concept of topical questions is under review by the Speaker, and I imagine that, at the next meeting, we will talk about Members being absent for topical questions.

Mr McCartney: Further to that point of order, I have no issue with a Minister who does not want to answer a question, but I do not think that Ministers can be permitted to say that they are not answering a certain question but will answer it during questions for oral answer and then not do so. I do not think that that can be permitted.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As I said, the Member's views will be considered. Of course we are striving to improve ways in which topical questions do not overlap with oral questions. I can assure you that the Speaker is giving a lot of detail to that.

3.30 pm

Ministerial Statement

Prison Reform: Owers Report

Business resumed.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, your statement refers to major changes in the workforce that have taken place over the past year and a half. On the back of those changes and other issues, such as the completion of the exit scheme and the payment of the environmental allowance to quite a number of officers who are not in receipt of it, how do you assess the morale of staff at present?

Mr Ford: Clearly, the issue of staff morale is an important one, but, again, as I do not have direct line management responsibility for the staff in question, it is difficult for me to make the assessment. As I said earlier, it is clear that, when going through a programme of reform such as this, there will inevitably be difficulties with staff. It is not unique to the Prison Service, and I know that other public agencies have had similar difficulties, as, indeed, have private contractors, when changes are made to the way we operate. However, I believe that we have seen a significant change in the reform structure. We have seen opportunities for staff to gain qualifications. We have seen movement forward to make opportunities available for all of them to engage in relevant training programmes, whether they are the very new staff or those who are progressing through different grades. We have seen staff who have wished to transfer into the main grades from prisoner escorting and custody services. All those things, I believe, show that morale is not as bad as it is sometimes represented, but I acknowledge Mr Anderson's point that we need to ensure that we keep morale at the highest possible level.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. The reform programme, as the Minister outlined, is at a halfway point. I acknowledge that there have been positive changes, but Anne Owers said in her final report that piecemeal and incremental change would not be enough to bring about the desired changes envisaged in her final report and that only fundamental change would do so. Does the Minister agree with me that, with only nine of

the recommendations signed off on, we are still at the piecemeal stage of the process?

Mr Ford: I am afraid I cannot agree with Mr Lynch on that point. I indicated earlier that we have nine signed off at the halfway point and nine further expected to be signed off at the December meeting of the oversight group. That is effectively halfway at a little over halfway through the time. I also indicated, on the scale of the reforms that are being proposed, that, inevitably, many of them will take time and we cannot expect early delivery of a significant number of them. That is because it is not a piecemeal programme. We are talking about issues in the programme that are of fundamental importance in changing the culture of the Prison Service and ensuring that our prisons operate more effectively. So, I cannot agree with the description that it is piecemeal. It is a substantial reform programme, but the important thing is to keep the impetus going so that we deliver on all of the programme as intended.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I was reading through the statement, and I see that considerable emphasis has been placed on people in prison requiring support with addiction issues. I also see reference to the Prison Service and PSNI initiative at Maghaberry, where they have joined forces to reduce the supply and demand of drugs in the prison. Will the Minister give us some indication of the amount of drugs seized at the prison in recent times? Clearly, unless they cut off supply, it will be a continuing issue.

Mr Ford: At this point, I cannot give Mr McGlone statistics, but I will happily write to him and give him the statistics on recent seizures. It is absolutely clear that the change in emphasis — the move to intelligence-led searching, rather than routine searching — has made a difference and that good work is being done, as I highlighted, including arrests last week. That shows that we can make a difference, but we need to ensure that we apply both the initiative that the PSNI is working on to deal with the smuggling and the educational aspects, working with our healthcare providers to ensure that we tackle both the supply of drugs and the demand for drugs. I believe that we are likely to see progress in the coming months, but clearly it is a significant issue. It has been an issue for some years, and it will require a lot of attention.

Mr B McCrea: Following up on the point about drug addiction, is there any reason why we cannot have routine drug testing of all inmates

in prison? Surely that would be the easiest way to have intelligence-led confiscation of drugs.

Mr Ford: I am afraid that the question almost contradicted itself. Talking about routine and then talking about "intelligence-led" work shows the contradictions between the two possible approaches. For example, there has been routine drug testing on people entering and leaving prisons, including for home leave. That has proved to be not particularly effective, but the key issue is to make it intelligence-led where there is believed to be a risk. It is clear that some prisoners are more vulnerable than others, and we need to ensure that we take action, led by the intelligence, to ensure that we deal with the drugs problem. So, I entirely agree with the point that Mr McCrea makes about an intelligence-led approach, but that is not the same thing as a routine approach that is the same for everybody.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister outline what additional intervention education programmes he envisages being available at HMP Magilligan?

Mr Ford: The details of the education programme for Magilligan will be announced shortly as we look at the wider issues of prison reform. The concentration in the statement was on the work being done around Hydebank, making it Hydebank college, but it is absolutely clear that we need to build on our education programmes for all prisoners in all three prisons, not just for the young offenders in Hydebank. There are clearly issues there that are directly related to employment opportunities as part of rehabilitation.

We have seen some good work being done in the workshops and in the education service in Magilligan in recent years, despite the fact that the physical infrastructure is very poor. The reality is that it will not be easy, in the funding circumstances that we have, to replace those workshops in the near future. However, we have seen good work being done by the staff there, and we will build on that as we enhance the training of staff so that they can carry out their work better with prisoners.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and his determination to complete the recommendations of the Owers report as soon as possible. What has been done in regard to the initiative that was announced in June, specifically the passport to employment? What will it deliver?

Mr Ford: One of the key issues that has been identified for a long time, which helps to rehabilitate prisoners, is giving them a better chance of obtaining employment when they leave, alongside issues such as housing and supportive personal relationships, especially with families.

The passport to employment looks at three aspects. One is giving the opportunity for the prisoner to record in a daily diary the issues that they do around soft skills learning. There is a further issue about ensuring that they get regular feedback on that file from staff. There is also the issue about looking at a portfolio to include certificates and building on the CV, where NIACRO is assisting the Prison Service, to ensure that it can present something to show that, during somebody's time in prison, they have not been merely out of the community but have been learning in the prison and building up skills that will help towards employability. It ties in very much with the work that is also being done looking at some private sector employers who are keen to provide employment opportunities in prisons. We have opportunities developing there, building on some good work done, in particular by some businesses in England and Wales, and looking at how those businesses might also work in Northern Ireland. It is all part of providing prisoners with something more constructive to do while they are in prison and having a proper record of it that is then validation for taking to employers when they leave.

Executive Committee Business

Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

That the Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The sea fish industry scheme forms part of the package of strategic assistance that I announced for the sea fish catching sector earlier this year. The first quarter of 2013 saw unusual weather conditions in the Irish Sea that kept many vessels in port. That came at a time when we were encouraging the fleet to adopt highly selective fishing gears and to accept the challenge of reducing fish discards under the reformed common fisheries policy. It was appropriate, therefore, to look at the fleet's needs in a strategic way and, at the same time, to offer some immediate encouragement in recognition of changes that the fleet had already made to its practices. As well as this scheme, assistance is being provided towards compliance with EU vessel monitoring rules. The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) remains open for owners who wish to modernise their vessels to become more efficient. Assistance is also available under the EFF for improving vessel safety and safety training.

The reformed common fisheries policy commits fishing fleets to end the practice of discarding unwanted fish at sea. We will build on the good work carried out on reducing catches of cod in the prawn fleet to minimise the unwanted by-catch of other species. My Department is drafting a proposal that combines a research programme on gear selectivity with financial assistance for the fleet to adopt new gears. My aim is to achieve as much progress as possible over the next two years so that, when the landing obligation comes into operation for our prawn fleet in 2016, the fleet is in the best position possible.

The harbour and landing dues scheme has been deliberately targeted at vessels that are most likely to have been affected by the poor weather conditions at the start of the year. The scheme will allow the Department to pay grant aid to the owners of vessels that are fewer than

27 metres in length that have fished for 25 days in the current calendar year. That excludes the three largest vessels engaged in fishing for pelagic species, that is, mackerel and herring. The pelagic sector is the most profitable sector of the fleet. There is no indication that those vessels experienced the same problems as vessels fishing in the cod recovery zone for demersal species.

The requirement to fish for at least 25 days is to ensure that only active vessels receive grant and that vessels that have made no attempt to fish are not rewarded. The scheme launched eight months into the year, and, therefore, it is not onerous for an active vessel to achieve the 25-day requirement. Grant is being paid at an aid rate equivalent to 70% of the berthing and landing dues paid to harbour authorities by vessel owners in 2012. To quickly pay a grant to vessels in need that is in proportion to their activity, the only realistic option is to use the previous year as a basis. Generally, harbour and landing dues vary pro rata to landings. Therefore, they reflect activity and the likely impact of adverse conditions in 2013. A contribution of 70% partially reflects the fact that 2012 had the highest level of landings in the past five years.

To provide assistance within a reasonable time, the scheme has been designed to fall within the scope of the EU de minimis state aid rules for the fisheries sector. Under those rules, no undertaking can receive more than €30,000 over a three-year period. Therefore, under the scheme, payments to a single undertaking will be capped at that level. The scheme also includes other necessary conditions to ensure that all aid complies with those rules.

The scheme became operational on 2 September this year. Invitations were sent to all 367 vessels in our fleet. As of 17 October, 155 applications had been received and 120 claims, worth £354,000, had been paid. I anticipate that the remainder will be paid by the end of October, subject to the provision of any additional information required from the applicants. I estimate that the final amount of grant to be awarded under the scheme will be approximately £400,000.

I believe that this assistance is important to encourage our fishermen during a period of significant current and future change. I therefore recommend the scheme to the House.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): As Chairperson of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The

Minister has brought us a scheme that the Committee has considered and endorsed. This is a confirmatory resolution, meaning that the scheme is already in operation. It came into operation on 2 September, but it shall cease to have effect if not approved by a resolution of the Assembly within three months of the date of its making, hence the Minister's bringing the motion today.

A little bit of background may be useful at this point. There was a plenary debate before the summer recess on the need for more support for the fishing industry. That industry has suffered as a result of extremely bad weather that meant that fishermen were unable to fish and incomes fell substantially.

Coupled with rising fuel prices and other economic circumstances, that left the industry in a fragile state. After that debate, the Minister sought and obtained approval from the Executive on 4 July for just over £500,000 of emergency financial assistance to the fishing industry.

3.45 pm

As we were in recess at that stage, Joe Byrne MLA, Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, and I, as Chairperson, were briefed by a senior Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) official on 8 July on the funding and the proposed scheme. We were informed that the financial assistance would require secondary legislation and that the plan was to lay that legislation during summer recess. We were also informed that the legislation would enable DARD to pay a grant to the owners of vessels less than 27 metres in length who had fished for 25 days in the current calendar year. That should ensure that only active vessels receive the grant aid. The Deputy Chairperson and I indicated that we were broadly content with the information provided and did not see the need to recall the Committee to consider the financial assistance package or, indeed, the secondary legislation, once it had been laid during summer recess.

The Committee was in recess, so an information note based on that meeting was provided to all its members. They were also given the option of asking for the Committee to meet to consider the matter if necessary, but no member took up that offer.

As the Minister outlined, the grant will be paid based on 70% of the berthing and landing dues paid to UK harbour authorities by the vessel

owner in 2012. To pay out the financial assistance as quickly as possible, with minimum red tape, DARD opted to use the previous year's activity as the basis for payments.

By the time that the Committee reconvened after summer recess and considered the information, we were glad to see that vessel owners had already been contacted and invited to send in applications. The Committee was pleased to note that the first of those applications were being processed in August and September.

The Committee considered the scheme at its first meeting in the 2013-14 session, on 10 September, and noted that legislation had taken longer to draft than anticipated, owing to the need to ensure compliance with EU de minimis aid rules. Nevertheless, the Committee was content with the legislation and the proposed scheme.

On behalf of the Committee, I say that I am pleased that the Minister brought forward the scheme as a short-term option to assist the fishing industry, which has experienced very bad sailing and fishing conditions in the severe winter months. I note that further, longer-term assistance is to be offered. Indeed, I was very interested to hear late last week that the Minister had announced a fund worth £2.6 million that is aimed at supporting projects and initiatives that focus on the sustainable socio-economic development of County Down's fishing communities. I understand that the aim is to see a range of projects based around community development; business development and diversification; tourism and leisure; and technical development support. The Committee looks forward to hearing more on that initiative in the near future.

Mr Byrne: I rise as Deputy Chair of the Committee to welcome the statement and the motion in the name of the Minister. As the Chairman outlined, we had a debate before the summer recess in which great concern was expressed about the plight of the fishermen at the three ports of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel, given the bad weather that there was in March and April. I am delighted that the Minister and the Department brought forward a proposal, which was agreed by the Chairman and me with Mr Ian Humes, a senior official, on 8 July.

I welcome the fact that the processing of the scheme has been fairly fast, given the circumstances surrounding the whole fishing debacle that people found themselves in. I

support the motion and welcome the statement by the Minister. Hopefully, the fishermen of south Down and Portavogie will be happy that on this occasion the Assembly responded to their plight.

Mr McCarthy: As a past pupil of the Agriculture Committee, I was not involved, but I listened attentively to what the Chair and Deputy Chair said. I certainly welcome the proposal by the Minister this afternoon. However, I want to ask just one question. I think that the Minister said that there were 367 of something but only 155 applications. That is rather surprising. If I am wrong, perhaps the Minister can put me right in her response.

I welcome this. As other Members who spoke said, the fishing industry in Northern Ireland has been on its knees for far too long. I encourage the Minister to do what she can to help the industry — in fact, to save it — at every opportunity, because it has been on a downward spiral for too long. From her perspective as Minister, it is a matter of saving the industry. My constituents depend on the fishing industry for a living and I encourage her to use every opportunity to support it.

Mrs O'Neill: I welcome all the comments made by those who contributed to the debate. I can confirm for Mr McCarthy that there were 367 eligible boats, but that only 155 applications came forward. There could be various reasons for that; perhaps some were affected to a greater or lesser extent than others, but that is the reason for the figures.

Again, I want to say that the scheme sends a very strong message to the fishing industry that this Executive is committed to making sure that we have a very strong and sustainable fishing industry into the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Sea Fish Industry (Harbour and Landing Dues) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Job Creation

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other contributors will have five minutes.

Mr Flanagan: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses concern at Invest NI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs created as a result of government intervention; notes the absence of any Invest NI-facilitated visits to some constituencies in recent years, by potential foreign direct investors; welcomes the Programme for Government 2011-15 commitment to address regional imbalance; and calls on the Executive to publish an action plan outlining how they intend to meet these commitments.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Committee for selecting this important motion for debate. The whingers, as we would be dubbed, are back again. I was going to say that, as usual, the Chamber is far from packed for a debate on the economy, but then I looked at my own Benches and thought that I had better not. I have said it now anyway.

Have the whingers anything to whinge about, or is it that there is some sense of an inferiority complex when you get outside Belfast? We have been provided with an extensive paper from the Assembly research team and I am glad to have it. The figures it contains clearly show that, since April 2009, there has not been a single Invest NI-led visit by a potential foreign investor to County Fermanagh or County Tyrone. That is simply not good enough; it is a shameful indictment of the Department and Invest NI and it needs to change.

There has been far too much emphasis spent, comparatively, on trying to get investment into already thriving and affluent areas such as east Belfast and south Belfast. A credible visit is defined as one where Invest NI claims to have promoted the North and arranged a visit programme to a district council area or parliamentary constituency area for a potential

inward investor who has an identifiable project proposal. If we take a look at the credible visits that have been led by Invest NI, there were none last year in Fermanagh or Tyrone and four in Derry. That demonstrates the problem that we face here, which is that Invest NI is completely failing to get investors out of the typical areas in which you would expect to see them. That has been going on since Invest NI was founded and, really, since the foundation of this state.

Not enough is being done to create jobs and attract investment into struggling rural areas. *[Interruption.]* The Minister can tut and sigh and roll her eyes, as she always does, when somebody tables a motion that criticises her Department or any of her arm's-length bodies, but that is a fact. We have statistics here to back it up.

I am sure that the Minister will come up with figures showing that there is a higher unemployment rate in the rest of Ireland than the average figure in the North —

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily give way, Sammy, go on ahead.

Mr Wilson: I am glad to see that the Member is keen to get jobs promoted in Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Perhaps he will tell us what he thinks of the jobs that might be created if fracking were allowed to get cheap gas to drive industry in the area and get investment into the area, or is that the kind of investment that he does not like?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. Unfortunately, I will not get an extra minute, which I am sure he knew when he interrupted me. We will continue to debate fracking. Tamboran invariably overestimates the number of jobs that would be created. It is a very small number; you would be looking at 10 to 20 jobs a year over the period of the investment. Tamboran would tell you that it would have three people doing three shifts a day, monitoring the gauges at each pad. Nine people would be required at each pad each day to do nothing else but look at a gauge. Am I seriously expected to believe that a company like Tamboran would not simply put in a computer that could be monitored by one individual somewhere? That is eight jobs a day gone. Every time we are told that a certain number of jobs are coming, it is quite clear that there is nothing in it.

I will not allow the red herring of fracking to be thrown into the debate. I will return to what Invest NI is actually doing. Not nearly enough is being done to get investment into struggling rural areas, which are being hammered by the return of forced emigration. There is a similar picture in deprived areas such as Foyle and west Belfast, which are being completely neglected by the Department and Invest NI.

The Minister, some other Ministers and some MLAs are right to point out in the media that there are some green shoots of recovery. Those have been identified through a number of very accurate surveys, and that is welcome news. However, unfortunately, as a rural MLA who has spoken to businesses and those who live in my constituency, I know that those green shoots of recovery are not making it as far as rural areas, nor are they making it into deprived communities —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: — where unemployment and underemployment remain fair too high. I will, quickly, Paul.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I have heard what the Member said and I have read his motion. However, the same Member sat in a media studio with me not so long ago and heaped praise on Invest NI for the work that it has been doing. Why has he changed tack?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am more than happy to clarify that. Invest NI has had a number of successes in attracting foreign investors into the North. My complaint at this stage is that not enough is being done to get those investors into the areas of highest need. I remind the Member and the party opposite that the Programme for Government makes a very clear commitment to address regional imbalance. When I said that at a meeting of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I was appalled when a Member for North Down said that such things do not exist. That is a commitment of the Programme for Government, which his party signed up to.

Invest NI is doing some positive work. I am not going to stand here and criticise it for 10 minutes. The last time that representatives of Invest NI made a presentation to the Committee, I and the Chair acknowledged and welcomed the fact that there is a widely held acceptance that Invest NI has improved its performance. It is much more accessible to the

wider business community and it is no longer solely focused on client companies. The establishment of the Boosting Business campaign has made it an awful lot easier for small businesses and microbusinesses to access the services that are provided by Invest NI.

All those things are welcome, but much more can be done. We had the recent very successful investment conference, when 55 potential investors were brought here and sold what we have to offer. That is all very positive and great to see. However, we need to ensure that the commitments of the Programme for Government are delivered and that efforts are made to address regional imbalance. That is one of the key points of the Programme for Government.

(Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair)

There has been a long-standing issue with Invest NI reporting jobs promoted and jobs created. We have not got satisfactory closure on that yet. We kept being told that that is a work in progress and that it is being done through the jobs fund. However, in the financial interventions by Invest NI, we are still told that we are dealing with jobs promoted. That is not really good enough from the point of view of the scrutiny Committee or the Assembly in trying to hold the Executive to account. If we do not have the information, how can we assess what is being done?

I am sure that someone on the Benches opposite will tell us that Invest NI cannot force investors to go to a certain location. However, I would like to remind them that, under selective financial assistance, there is a greater incentive for businesses to set up outside Belfast because they can tap into a higher level of financial return from Invest NI. I really cannot understand why Invest NI is so keen to put people in east and south Belfast. That is where most of the investment goes.

4.00 pm

If you actually speak to some of the people on the ground in east Belfast, they will tell you that all of those projects that have been brought in are not being felt in the working-class communities there either. Therefore, this is not just a problem for rural communities; it is a problem for working-class and deprived communities right across our society, and it needs to be addressed.

I also want to make a point about the recent media speculation about the social investment fund. The report is out there that the DUP want it to be split 50:50. I am not involved in that at all, and it is not something that I am privy to. However, on the radio this morning, we heard a member of the east Belfast steering group say that there is £80 million. That is £40 million for each community — £10 million a year for each community. That is not the way that it should be divided. It should be done on the basis of objective need. That is the way that the social investment fund should be used, and that is the way that the Executive should do their business. We should not simply seek to put jobs and investment into already affluent areas. Much more focus needs to go on tackling deprivation, social exclusion and isolation in rural and deprived communities.

Mr McKinney: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "publish" and insert:

"an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs."

At the outset, I apologise for not being in my place at the beginning of the debate. I appreciate that the timings are indicative.

The SDLP welcomes the general intentions and thrust of the motion. Our amendment seeks to expand and extend its scope and, in particular, to assert that, although it is important to hold officials and agencies such as Invest NI to account, our fundamental problem revolves around the lack of political action on the economy.

We welcome the motion for the simple reason that there is too little debate on the economic fundamentals — too little in the House, too little in our council chambers and, indeed, too little in our society as a whole. Turn on the radio any day of the week and you hear people complaining, with justification, that our political system spends too much time debating flags and parades and neglects the bread-and-butter issues in general and the provision of jobs in particular. John Hume often related the one political lesson his father taught him: you cannot eat a flag — any flag. That is a diet that our people have had to live on for far too long, and we are the people who should be providing new and better forms of sustenance.

In Parliaments around the world, different views of how to generate economic growth or how to

reconcile growth with social values are the very stuff of politics, but not here. We think that it is time to change that. We think that it is time to put the economy at the forefront of our politics for the simple reason that our need is so great. It is so great because our economy is so weak and so dependent on government spending. You sometimes hear that our public sector is too big, but that is quite simply the wrong way to define the problem and no way to find a solution.

The real difficulty, and it is a very large one, is that our private wealth-producing sector is too small. Some economists point out that the private sector in Northern Ireland is smaller than it was in East Germany before the wall came down. We do not produce enough wealth to fund the public services we have, never mind the services that we need. Notice has been served on us that current funding levels cannot be taken for granted.

This is not just an economic problem, and it is certainly not just a problem of public finance and the block grant. It is a political problem, because, if we do not provide a better diet than flags, and if we do not show our people that we have some sort of plan to bring them more prosperity, the achievements of the peace process will be at risk, and all the photo opportunities in the world will not save it. The challenge that we face in trying to turn our economy around is so enormous, so difficult and so uncertain that many people prefer to stay with the other simple certainties. Even well-intentioned people who seek —

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. He seems to be obsessed with flags in his speech. Maybe he will tell us how many times flags were debated over the past three weeks in the Assembly and on how many occasions there were debates about one or another aspect of the economy. Let us put it in some perspective, please.

Mr McKinney: I do not confine the debate that I am referring to as being simply within the Chamber; I am talking about in this community. I am trying to suggest that we remove the flags from our narrative and focus on the economy. I think that that is something that you, Mr Wilson, as a former Finance Minister, would agree with.

Even well-intentioned people who seek to grapple with the enormity of the problem can get lost in very local arguments or sidetracked by less-essential details. Scrutiny of Invest NI is important, but there are more important things, such as having an agreed, integrated economic development plan. Even if we were

to double or treble the number of investment visits west of the Bann, it would not provide the essential infrastructure that investors want to see before they commit. We should not confuse symptoms with the illness of poor regional development. Every country in Europe has its own version of the west-of-the-Bann problem. Every country knows that there is not much point in balanced underdevelopment. Regional imbalances are best addressed in a growing economy. That is the crux of our amendment.

In the spring and early summer, the SDLP undertook a round of consultations with the social partners, other economic stakeholders and professional economists. It confirmed what we suspected: that there is, in fact, a high degree of consensus about the way forward for the Northern Ireland economy, which runs right through the business community, the trade unions and the voluntary sector. Indeed, the economists told us that the consensus has existed for nearly half a century.

There was another thing they all agreed on, which was the urgent need for political action to drive the economy forward. So there is consensus out there, Mr Wilson. We need to match it with enough political consensus in here to develop our economy. We cannot wait until we have sorted all of the flag and parade disputes, and we do not need to. An economic consensus need not be hostage to constitutional differences.

The SDLP wants to see a new Ireland, but in the meantime we want growth and jobs, and plenty of them. So I put it to the proposers of the original motion: can you sign up to the proposition that we should make the best of our economy right now? Can you commit to the building up of Northern Ireland and its economy within its current constitutional arrangements? I put the same fundamental question to those on the Benches opposite: are you prepared to extract all of the economic value that can be won from North/South cooperation and to seek new forms of cooperation in the interests of providing jobs here and saving our young people from forced emigration? Are you prepared to adopt the ambition that Northern Ireland should, some day, be able to pay its own way?

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. He has talked about how important it is to do all that we can to create more jobs in Northern Ireland, and I absolutely agree with him. Would he therefore support calls to reform employment law to make it easier for companies to take on additional staff?

Mr McKinney: I do not know the extent to which you are talking about the reform of that, but as long as people are being paid the industrial wage and above, we should be talking about the same thing.

I will go back to my point. That is all the political consensus that we really need to put the economy at the top and centre of our agenda. That is all that we would need for the Executive to convene a standing council of stakeholders in our economy who could reveal the existing broad policy consensus and guide us on its implementation.

During our consultations, we were quite surprised by the virtual absence of ideological bickering when it came to the development of the economy. Nobody is arguing that economic growth can be safely left to market forces on the one hand or that we need an even bigger public sector on the other. From all sides, we heard arguments for greater coherence, well-planned public policies, dialogue across sectors and much greater economic awareness among politicians and civil servants.

We believe that a good economic plan should start with an infrastructure plan. That would clearly challenge the powers and competencies of the devolved Administration. However, with a good plan for a prosperity process, it would be reasonable to approach the two Governments and ask them to incorporate it into their own long-term planning. So, improved road transport, power and communications infrastructure are all essential elements of a package that a prospective investor would want to see. I question whether that is the case, for example, in Fermanagh today. This morning's news about further delay in road infrastructure to Derry is also disheartening. We need ambition. We need political action. We need a plan. I urge you to support the amendment.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome this debate and the opportunity to put on record our support for the good work that has been done in job creation.

Northern Ireland has come a long way in recent years, not least economically, despite the challenges that are presented by the global downturn and recession. We continue to work very hard to rebuild and rebalance the economy. I commend the work of the Executive for leading on that issue, not least the First and deputy First Minister, along with the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Arlene Foster, who have been selling, and continue to sell, Northern Ireland to the world as a great place to do business and invest in.

The fact that, as we speak, the First Minister and deputy First Minister are in America trying to attract investment shows the commitment to and focus on trying to bring jobs and economic stability to this country — quite rightly. Invest NI continues to promote Northern Ireland as a great place to do business and invest in as well as working to support our existing small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the backbone of the economy throughout the country.

The task of attracting jobs and developing our economy is not easy, not least because we are still trying to emerge from 30 years of terrorism. However, despite the difficult circumstances and global challenges, we have many assets and skills, and we should all do what we can to encourage, support and attract economic growth and stability.

It is noteworthy that Sinn Féin reps and others complain about the lack of job creation in the west and north-west. One wonders what they have done to encourage and attract investors instead of complaining and sending out negative messages about their areas. The north-west area and the city of Londonderry, in particular, have seen an unprecedented level of funding through the UK City of Culture. We understand that upwards of £26 million or £28 million has been spent. Some say that it is £26 million on a ceilidh; that is some ceilidh.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He mentioned Londonderry being the UK City of Culture. Does he agree that, had it not been for the good work and expertise of the Culture Company's chief executive, Shona McCarthy, we might not be as far forward?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dunne: Indeed we concur with that. They have done a good job in getting the UK City of Culture. That has no doubt given them an excellent platform on which they should be able to build. I am sure that, with the support of their elected representatives, they will start to promote the city as a positive place where business can be done.

The recently launched Fermanagh and Omagh Smart region project is an example of an innovative project that has been developed to explore economic opportunities in those areas. Another example is the recent investment of £11.5 million in a clinical research facility in Londonderry — well outside Belfast — that will create 22 high-quality research posts. That

came about as a result of £5.6 million support from Invest NI, part-funded by the European regional development fund. Many other recently announced projects have been brought about with the help of that European fund. Northern Ireland's 100% assisted area status will remain, which means that the country will avoid being divided up into subregions for that funding support.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way and for his support on a number of projects. Does he accept that joined-up thinking and research between Invest NI, the Department, the European Commission and the SME sector is needed across the whole of the North? You will be aware from our trip to Brussels of the attempts to facilitate that.

Mr Dunne: I concur with that. Joined-up thinking is important. As was said, Invest NI has taken the lead and has gone onto the byways to sell its products. We all believe in communicating better, especially with elected representatives, to get the message out there.

Many other recently announced projects have been brought about with help from the European fund. Northern Ireland's 100% assisted area status will remain, and it will continue to get such support.

Evidence from Invest Northern Ireland's annual report for the year ending March 2013 shows that investment and job promises in 2012-13 exceeded the targets, and investment by externally owned businesses, including foreign direct investment, signed up for £183 million linked to 2,203 jobs. Invest NI trade missions have also brought about real benefits. I know of many companies in my constituency that have come back with orders and direct work and been given windows of opportunity for the future after being on such trade missions around the world.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Dunne: Yes. Northern Ireland has a lot going for it, and the recent investment conference, along with the G8 held in Fermanagh, showcased this country as a great place to do business.

4.15 pm

Mrs Overend: The economy is, rightly, set out as the number one priority of the Executive in the current Programme for Government. I thank the Sinn Féin Members for tabling the

motion today as it is right and important to talk about job creation. The central component of that priority is job creation with a commitment to support the promotion of 25,000 jobs by 2015. So, the motion highlights an important issue, namely the fact that we have next to no clarity on the number of jobs created as opposed to those promoted and so we cannot judge our success against the Programme for Government. My party has a similar motion tabled on the no-day-named list. It is entitled:

"Ambiguity over Job Creation Targets and Performance"

That sums up the situation that we are in.

The Audit Office produced a report in March 2012 entitled 'Invest NI: a performance review', and one of the major issues raised in it was that, whilst Invest Northern Ireland's job promotion record has improved, the number of jobs created is unclear. The report points out that the estimated proportion of promoted jobs that translated into jobs created stands at around 75%. However, that is Invest Northern Ireland's own estimate. The reality is that the conversion rate may be as low as 50%. If we were to look at a practical example, we would see that the Programme for Government target that I mentioned would result in the actual creation of only 12,500 jobs. That is not acceptable, and we need the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI to have more accountable measurements in place. The alternative is the absence of proper scrutiny and an erosion of public confidence. However, in saying that, I note the progress made in the jobs fund, where jobs created have been measured, as a step in the right direction.

The Public Accounts Committee took evidence in February 2013 from officials representing Invest Northern Ireland and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I welcome the clarification that that evidence brought to the matter. Alastair Hamilton explained in detail where we are today in relation to where we were in 2000 when the Westminster PAC first suggested a move towards measuring jobs created. I am sure that he will agree with me that, in 13 years, we have not moved far enough. Nevertheless, I welcome his attempts to rectify that, not least through Invest Northern Ireland's corporate plan. It is also the case that new systems are in place whereby, from 1 April 2012, letters of offer can be tracked to give a more accurate jobs picture. That is a positive development. The PAC subsequently produced a report including a recommendation that, now that Invest Northern Ireland has developed systems for measuring outcomes, it should

establish formal targets for job creation, sustainability, job quality and funds invested. It also said that performance should be reported annually from 2014-15 on the basis of actual outcome. I ask the Minister, in her response, to outline how she is implementing that recommendation put forward by our Public Accounts Committee.

The motion also specifically mentions issues such as regional imbalance and the absence of Invest Northern Ireland in certain areas. I have raised that in the context of the Regional Start initiative in light of the proposed new council model. I have also facilitated Invest Northern Ireland meetings on Coleraine and Limavady, which appear to suffer from a lack of focus from our central agency in supporting business and attracting FDI. I have also met business development representatives in Omagh who feel that the potential of Project Kelvin is not being adequately promoted in Northern Ireland's sales pitch. We must guard against becoming too Belfast- or Londonderry-centric, and we must promote Northern Ireland as a region that is all open for business, not just certain parts of it. We must recognise —

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. She has sat through the Committee meetings and is probably sick, sore and tired of me rabbiting on about this stuff, but does she accept that it is crucial that we have the infrastructure in place? The infrastructure is not just roads and sewerage services but power, such as electricity. I know that that has been raised with you. Likewise, it includes accommodation: suitably tailored accommodation for firms that are potentially about to invest and need accommodation quickly to do so. Otherwise, they will be away somewhere else.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Chairman of the Committee for his intervention. I was just coming to the SDLP amendment; I was not going to forget about it. The Ulster Unionists are minded to lend our support to the SDLP amendment and agree that it is logical that any action plan that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment develops will also take into account the issues that the Member mentioned: development space, infrastructure needs etc.

We must recognise the lack of openness and transparency surrounding job creation targets and performance, which has been particularly

unhelpful in the current economic climate. I welcome the fact that the Minister is here to respond to the debate, and I look forward to her response.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. The amendment expands the motion slightly, so we are happy enough to support that also.

At the outset, I place it on record, not for the first time, that Invest NI has been and continues to be a success story, despite complaints from time to time about its performance, its failure to spend all its money at a time of world recession and the occasional failure it has. Its long-term record is impressive.

It is hard to comprehensively judge Invest's performance on the present available data. The first part of the motion expresses concern about the actual number of jobs created as opposed to jobs promoted, and that is a theme that I have taken up with the Minister. I quote the Minister's answer to a question on 26 April this year:

"Invest NI is developing its systems to enable the reporting of jobs created. Data will therefore be available this year but as offers typically have a three year life span, a detailed and meaningful analysis of this job creation data will not be possible until the end of each contract period ... The exception to this are those projects supported through the 'Jobs Fund'".

It will obviously be some time before accurate figures filter through, but I am satisfied that the matter is being dealt with. Doing that was recommended some 13 years ago in a review report on the IDB.

The second part of the motion deals with regional imbalance, which is of particular concern to Mr Flanagan, who proposed the motion. The amendment develops that point when it talks about "available office and development space" and infrastructure. There has to be realism. Most investment visits will focus on key sites, such as city centres and zoned industrial sites, the Titanic Quarter and hopefully, if God spares us all, eventually the Maze. The ultimate decision rests with the investor, and, while the Programme for Government commitment to address imbalance is welcome, the investor will look at all the pluses and minuses, not least infrastructure and linkages.

On a slight tangent, Mr Deputy Speaker, I put a question to the Minister about air routes in September 2012, and she gave a full and

informative answer that concentrated on tourism potential rather than business connections. I strongly advocate reducing the need for businessmen or businesswomen from the powerhouse economies of Europe — Germany, France and Scandinavia — to fly into Dublin to access Northern Ireland. I encourage the Minister to continue her efforts to establish direct links to major cities in all those regions, including Brussels.

Having said that, I see nothing wrong with the motion or the amendment. We are content to support them, and I look forward to the Minister's comments.

Mr Frew: I rise in bewilderment at what the party that tabled the motion and the party that seeks to amend it are saying. We in Northern Ireland are doing well. We are starting to recover from the worst recession in living memory, and we are doing fine. We are creating jobs. In only the past month, we have had announcement after announcement of new jobs in places from Omagh to Limavady, Londonderry and Belfast and everywhere and anywhere in between. Yet, here we are debating a motion that tries to put a damper on everything that we are trying to achieve in this place.

It really amazes me how MLAs who represent certain areas, whether that is Fermanagh, Londonderry, mid-Ulster or anywhere else for that matter, can play down and talk downbeat about their areas when we are trying hard to bring inward investment to those areas. The last thing that a company that could employ 1,000 people wants to hear is MLAs being downbeat. The Member who moved the motion told us only last year in this very House that, whenever he wanted to go on holiday, he could not spend two weeks in his own constituency of Fermanagh. What sort of language is that that this Chamber —

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: — hears from time to time about —

Mr Flanagan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to put it on the record for Mr Frew that I did not say that I could not spend a fortnight in my constituency, given that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That clearly is not a point of order.

Mr Flanagan: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is not the same point of order.

Mr Flanagan: No. I want to ask the Deputy Speaker what an MLA can do to correct the record if a false allegation is made about what one has previously said in the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Discussions can be had with the Speaker's Office. Apart from that, this is a debate, and the Member may well have an opportunity to respond later.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am glad that you stopped the clock for me; I really appreciate that.

I am sorry that the Member is so sore. Of course, if he wants to apologise to his constituency, that is well and good — he can do it here and now. I will give way to him on that.

I must also say that the Member who moved the amendment was obsessed by flags; Mr Wilson was right. Whenever we talk day in and day out in the House about the economy being the number one priority —

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept the assessment by business organisations in Belfast that the flags dispute last year cost something in the order of £50 million?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Again, why are we so obsessed with this when we are here trying to play up Northern Ireland, its economy, its workforce and the provision of work that we can produce that will help foreign direct investors to come here to plant down on our land and to create jobs for Northern Ireland? I do not know what is wrong, but I will say one thing to the Member —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: I will not give way at the minute, but I will say to the Member that I welcome the SDLP's shift today from its position on easing employment laws in line with the rest of the UK. That could create a competitive edge for Northern Ireland in bringing these companies into the UK. We want a slice of that market, and I am glad that the SDLP is now shifting tack

on that issue. I welcome that announcement here today.

The Member also talked about infrastructure. Was he not listening when the Finance Minister made his announcement on money and said that £8.1 million will go to help dual an 8-kilometre section of the A26 at Glarryford? Was he not listening? Has he not been studying the work that we have done over the past couple of months on rural broadband and how we have been able to get broadband provision into our rural areas? Has he not been listening and studying? I know that the Member is new, but I thought that he would be sure to keep a grasp of the agenda and the business that is going through here.

I am sorry, but some of the Members on the Benches across from me are so small-minded that they want to start talking about a job created here in this county or there in that constituency. When you look at foreign direct investment around the world, you will see that they will think nothing of planting down in Northern Ireland and creating jobs for the whole of Northern Ireland. Some of the largest employers are in North Antrim, where 1,000 jobs have been retained, and those jobs come from far and near. They benefit not just Ballymena, Ballymoney and Ballycastle but places all over Northern Ireland. They create direct employment in Tyrone, Londonderry, Down and everywhere else. They also add a dimension of indirect employment, whereby they support other businesses and subcontractors. That is what we want to see more of in Northern Ireland. I ask Members across the Chamber this: as long as you play down your own areas, how do you expect to go to those direct employers, let alone have the Minister do so, and —

4.30 pm

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Frew: No. I am not giving way. I gave you your chance, and you blew it.

How do you expect to go and plead with companies to come into your constituency when they read the papers and read Hansard and see that you run the place down? That is the problem that we face in Northern Ireland. There are too many negative MLAs playing down their own area. I for one want to talk about the good things in my constituency of North Antrim. I want to talk about job retention, the skills base and how we can create even

more jobs for North Antrim and all of Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Frew: That is what the Minister is doing, that is what she should be doing, and I am glad that she is doing it.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: The Member who has just spoken was bewildered before he started; I am more bewildered having listened to him. None of his commentary was about the economy; rather, it was an attack across the Benches. I, for one, have no qualms about promoting my city or the north-west region or, indeed, the island of Ireland as a whole. However, I will continue to challenge and criticise where gaps occur, and I take issue with the Member across the Benches who referred to £28 million being provided to our city for a ceillidh. I am sure that the 51% of people who live in high social need in our city would equally take issue with that comment. As the proposer of the amendment said, we should of course all concentrate on keeping the economy centre-stage. That is the very reason that the economy is central to the Programme for Government. However, where there are gaps and regional disparities, in line with the commitments in the Programme for Government, they need to be addressed.

Let me deal with some of the facts, as perhaps some have escaped Members on the opposite Benches. It is not good enough for the Audit Office simply to tell us that the impact of INI's R&D programmes on productivity has not yet been quantified. Some 60% of the investment support offered by INI from 2011 to 2012 went to eight constituencies across the North. Those eight constituencies are located in and around the greater Belfast area. That is a fact. The remaining 40% of support was shared with the rest of the North, including Derry, which received 5%. Again, we have looked at the number of jobs promoted, although we take issue and want to see new jobs created. Some 56% of the jobs promoted by INI, across all the sectors, went to the same eight constituencies. The remaining 44% of jobs were shared among the rest of the North, including Derry, which received only 6%.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was asked in June 2011 to provide a breakdown by constituency of the 13,870 jobs promoted and the £784 million investment by INI. The answer told us that 47% of the jobs promoted by INI from 2011-12 to 2012-13 went

to eight constituencies. Again, the pattern is stark. Of the remaining 53% of jobs promoted, Derry received 6%. I do not need to go on, but we had a similar pattern when we looked at the numbers of jobs created and promoted. Therefore, overall —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. It may have been before her time of course, but does she realise that between 2003 and 2012, on a per capita basis, more jobs were created in Londonderry through foreign direct investment projects than in any other city in the UK?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Thank you for your intervention. The research papers that Members have been provided with today reveal that four FDI visits were conducted in that period to Derry, but there was no follow-up.

Overall, there is a trend in job promotion and creation across the North. I have detailed the outline of the eight constituencies. Two per cent of logged enquiries to the Boosting Business campaign were from Derry. There have been 18,724 enquiries. INI told us that there was a total of 41 inward investments to Derry over five years. There were, as the Member tried to challenge, four first-time prospective international investors in 2012-13, but there was no follow-up.

I want to specifically make reference to office development space. INI land-holding titles in the Derry area come to 414 acres. A remaining 203 acres are available for economic development. Therefore, my suggestion is that processes should be targeted. I want to deal with the important issue of supporting and promoting your city. I accept that every —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way again. We are down to not only constituencies but acres. Any foreign direct investor is coming here to look at Northern Ireland as a Province-wide entity. They are not looking at constituencies, and they are definitely not looking at acres. Does the Member agree that we have to promote Northern Ireland in its totality in order to get the jobs and investment here?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for his intervention. He should have listened to the Centre for Economic Policy, which was before the Committee last week and clearly talked about the need, as the proposer of the

amendment mentioned, to deal with office accommodation and office space, particularly for economic development. I am making the point that 203 acres are available and need to be targeted in the overall context of the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw her remarks to a close, please?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: The Member can smile and be smug if he wants.

It is about promoting the city. Derry and the north-west region has clearly stepped up to the mark in relation to a unique selling point. We need the Minister and INI to fall in behind the recommendations that say —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: — that we need to tackle regional disparities.

Mr Wilson: I am grossly disappointed by the debate. I expected the proposer of the motion to have at least some substance to his complaint against the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. No Minister has been more successful in promoting industry in Northern Ireland than Arlene Foster, who has trailed the world and brought jobs here by the thousand. We have only to look at the record since May: over 3,500 jobs have been promoted and announced in Northern Ireland in that short period from across the world. Incidentally, those jobs went across Northern Ireland; one third of them went to the west of Northern Ireland.

Normally, the Member who proposed the motion can have a good whinge. He did not even have a good whinge this time. He ran out of steam after eight minutes and had to move on to the social investment fund, so few points had he to make in complaint about how Invest NI and the Minister have promoted the west of the Province.

I will make a couple of points to deal with the issues he raised. The first is a point that has already been made: you do not make a case for your constituency by running it down and saying that you have the worst unemployment, the worst infrastructure, the worst skills and the worst long-term unemployment. That is the kind of thing that puts investors off. Secondly, the harsh reality of the market is that people do not say, "I fancy investing in Derrygonnelly, What is Derrygonnelly like? What is Belcoo like? What is Kesh like?". There is parochialism; it is almost as if people coming in

from all around the world want to look at each individual village. It is hard enough to get them to look at Northern Ireland, let alone to start looking at all the favourite spots that Members wish to see promoted.

The third point on the issues that he raised is that the promotion of jobs and the announcements that have been made do not bear out the complaint that he has made. A total of 1,139 of the 3,500 jobs that have been announced since May are in the west of the Province. What is the nature of his complaint and what does he want the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to do? We have had the G8 conference in Fermanagh, and we will have an investment conference. Jobs have been announced in many of the towns in his constituency.

The people who actually sell Fermanagh are not Sinn Féin representatives but the people whose companies I have visited. They are proud of their workforce and the work that they do. For example, Fisher Engineering, which lost 70% of its work in the Republic, went out to search for work and secured the likes of the Titanic signature project and the Shard, against all competition. Those are the kinds of people we ought to be saluting today, rather than hearing the kind of whingeing that we have had here.

I turn to the amendment, from which Mr McKinney is now trying to retreat. What he said will, of course, get him a good headline. He fed media perceptions when he said that the Assembly spends too much time talking about flags. I cannot remember when we did that in the past three weeks, but it will give him a good headline. What answers does he bring? First, he wants us to have a standing council of stakeholders. I do not know what that means. There is already an economic advisory group and a whole range of people have fed into the economic policy of the Assembly, but he wants yet another body. That will sort the problem out, apparently.

Secondly, he wants a grand plan. We have had plans in the past. Stalin had his —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr Wilson: — five-year plan, and maybe that is the Stalinist wing of the SDLP coming out. I would prefer us to get down to doing hard work; not setting up more committees or drawing up more bits of paper. Let us search out the

investors and sell the values of Northern Ireland, as Arlene Foster has done.

Mr P Ramsey: I support the motion and our added elements through the amendment. I am glad to contribute to the debate, although, at times, I fail to understand some of the comments of the Members on the other Benches. Sammy cheerfully told us that all we are doing is whingeing. I want to reflect directly to the Minister the views of the long-term unemployed and young people in my constituency, who feel somewhat disillusioned at present.

The issues reflected in the motion are regularly raised with me by my constituents, who comment on the failure not only of Invest Northern Ireland but of DETI and the Executive collectively to deliver in my constituency. I have long championed the need for a spatial investment strategy from Invest Northern Ireland to target and address important issues affecting the north-west.

Time after time, the Minister has informed me that the agency is not able to produce subregional plans or targets because of the recommendations of the independent review of economic policy. That just does not wash with the long-term unemployed and young people in my city. Time after time, whether they like it or not, favouritism is shown at every opportunity for the capital city, Belfast, in getting jobs, forgetting the importance of the second city and the role that the north-west region plays.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr P Ramsey: Yes.

Mr McKinney: Does the Member accept that, if an £8.5 million spend on the A26 is good for the economy, a commensurate spend on the A5 and A6 would also be beneficial?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is obvious that, when we talk about regional disparity, we are talking about the infrastructural needs. The infrastructure in Belfast is a big winner for investors coming into Northern Ireland. The lack of roads infrastructure to the north-west is an obstacle, and I think that people should listen to what is being said by the business community in the city that I represent.

Look at the Department's view of economies of conglomeration, where sectoral clusters are sited close together for the purposes of investment. We are told that Invest Northern Ireland highlights those clusters. I ask the Minister directly again: will she please tell me why Derry is not marketed as a cultural and technology hub for the future, given the amount of creative interest we have around the system?

4.45 pm

I have another question about the process used by Invest Northern Ireland to attract foreign direct investment to the North. I was told that all factors are utilised, but I ask the Minister: why is there no provision for Invest Northern Ireland to, for example, highlight and promote Derry city as the City of Culture and the north-west as the gateway to Donegal? Why has that not been invested in, when businesses, particularly inward investors, are looking for quality of life? That is the added bonus for many companies that have come to Derry with inward investment jobs; they see that quality of life in Donegal.

Derry city is doing very well. I have never seen such an immense sense of pride in the city. People feel that it is appropriate to stand here and say that there has been almost £30 million invested in the céilí. That money was invested because Derry represented Northern Ireland to become the City of Culture. Derry is representing Northern Ireland; it is not representing any community, whether it is the Bogside or the Waterside. I have to say, for all of the talk of shared future and reconciliation, it has never been going so well in terms of looking forward, setting the trends in the city and bringing both communities together in the most natural way, which has never happened before.

We have taken the lead in the most positive and constructive way in resolving the parades issue in the city. The last difficulty we had in the city was in 1999. Since then, we have been able to resolve it as a model of good practice. So I do not want people jibing away that we are not positive. I think that, in many regards — I have always said it in terms of the parliamentarians in the city — we have a unity of purpose, because we stand together to try to make a difference to the quality of life of the young people who we represent.

I am standing up today for the many unemployed and young people in my community. The Minister conceded — the figures are there — that the level of unemployment in Northern Ireland at the

present time is under 7%, but, unfortunately, in Derry and the north-west it is 9%. Somebody tell me about those same young people, having the appetite for jobs and wanting to have a better future for themselves, who stood in their thousands at a jobs fair in the Millennium Forum seven or eight weeks ago. I say that we need bespoke programmes in the city. We need more creativity to give a better future to those same young people. Do not let anybody tell me that there should not be direct investment forced onto the north-west because of the high levels of unemployment, because I think that is what is needed in that community.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I now call Sydney Anderson. As time for the debate is running out, the Member will have three minutes.

Mr Anderson: I rise as a member of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee to speak briefly against the motion.

I am opposed to the motion because it is churlish, petty and negative. It is simply yet another effort to belittle the sterling efforts of Invest NI. The motion and the amendment are also further illustrations of the kindergarten level of economic thinking that seems to permeate both Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

Of course, it is no secret that Members opposite have always been critical of Invest NI as an organisation. I often think that, no matter how many jobs Invest attracts or what successes it might have in boosting our economy and creating jobs, there are those in the House who would still be carping and complaining about it. I am not saying that Invest NI is perfect or that it always gets things right, and I do not envy the Minister, her officials or the people in Invest, for they have a very challenging task.

Our economy has been battered as a result of the dramatic downturn in the world economy in the past few years. Credit must go to the Minister and Invest for all of their efforts during the past five challenging years to promote Northern Ireland on the world stage, attract foreign direct investment, and encourage and assist the local business sector. The Programme for Government target for 2011-15 is the creation of 25,000 new jobs.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr Anderson: No. As of 31 March, almost 14,000 jobs have been secured. I think we can safely say that those high-value-added jobs would not have happened under direct rule.

Given the economic climate, and faced with increasingly strong competition on the world stage, our priority is to promote Northern Ireland plc. Northern Ireland is a small place. People who live and work in Great Britain are often bemused or amused when we complain of having to travel more than 20 miles to work. Even the furthest extremities of Northern Ireland are not that far from the greater Belfast area, where, not surprisingly, most of the jobs are.

In answer to my question to the Minister last month in relation to attracting new business across Northern Ireland, the Minister gave me several examples of businesses investing, expanding and winning new orders right across the Province. So, we are on the right track. I have no doubt that the Minister and Invest NI will continue to use selective financial assistance and regional aid to encourage the spread of business and employment opportunities across Northern Ireland, and particularly to areas of high unemployment. Instead of sulking in the shadows, surely Sinn Féin and the SDLP, as members of the Executive, should grow up and support the efforts being made to revitalise our local economy. I oppose the motion and the amendment.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): First of all, to raise the level of the debate, I thought that I would give you a quote this afternoon. Eleanor Roosevelt used to say:

"It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

We have had a lot of darkness here today, but I want to say to the Members opposite that I will keep turning on the light, even though you continue to curse the darkness.

I want to clarify the matter of reporting of jobs created as a result of Invest NI activity. The motion as proposed states that there has been a continuing failure by Invest NI to provide such information. That statement is somewhat misleading and would imply that Invest NI has or is currently deliberately withholding information. It is not withholding information. I am happy to give way to the Member if he wants to get up.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not know how the Minister can read:

"That this Assembly expresses concern at Invest NI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs"

as somebody saying that Invest NI is hiding them. This is how far we have to go now to get appalled and outraged and offended at something.

Mrs Foster: I think that you are appalled and outraged. I am not appalled and outraged. I have come to expect that level from the Member. Let me state quite categorically that Invest Northern Ireland has not been deliberately withholding information or secretly squirrelling it away. In fact, since the introduction of the jobs fund in 2011, Invest NI has had a specific target of creating 4,000 jobs by the end of the current financial year because it was a new jobs fund, and it has reported its progress against that goal openly as part of its annual performance reporting process.

It is also important to highlight the fact that the targets set for Invest Northern Ireland by the Programme for Government are, again, for job promotion. The Programme for Government sets out job promotion targets; it does not set out job creation targets. If the Member wants to take that up with his colleagues in the Executive, that is a matter for him. Again, it openly reports on its progress against those targets as part of its annual performance process, including to the Committee of which he is a member.

The issue of Invest NI providing information on the jobs created as a result of its wider interventions has been raised in the past and, as has often been explained, wider accurate reporting of job creation has not been possible before now because the appropriate systems were not available to allow for the relevant information to be comprehensively captured and collated. However, as I mentioned to the House a few weeks ago — and sometimes I wonder if Members actually listen to what I say in this House when I am asked the questions. It is almost as if they have to keep asking the questions even though I give the same answer every time in direct response to requests for details on jobs created. It has now developed new systems which will allow it to produce more extensive job creation information. However, it should be appreciated that developing such systems and migrating information into them takes time. Perhaps he would rather that I spend time on doing that rather than going out and looking for jobs.

However, I am pleased to say that it is expected that the information on job creation will be

available from the start of the next financial year, but I do not want to give Members false expectations on what information can and will be provided. Whilst Invest will be able to report on the number of jobs created, it will not be possible to set widespread targets for job creation across its range of intervention because the majority of Invest NI's employment-related support is focused on projects that can take a number of years to fully implement. In such cases, the imposition of job creation targets would be counterproductive — that is counterproductive. That means that it would go against job creation, just to be clear, in case people do not understand what that means.

That is because it would require annualised targets to be incorporated in individual letters of offer to companies. If those were not met, companies would be in breach of their offer conditions and liable for clawback of assistance. Such an approach would be unfair on businesses, because they operate in an ever-changing economic environment. During the recession, we frequently had to communicate with companies to see whether their letter of offer was such that they could take it up or whether they needed us to change the conditions. We recognised that people had difficulties at those times.

We are in an ever-changing economic environment, which makes it difficult to predict exactly when jobs will be delivered on the ground.

Mr Byrne: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Foster: Can you wait a second?

Therefore, the imposition of job creation targets would be seen as a barrier to investment and make Northern Ireland less attractive to potential foreign investors.

Mr Byrne: I want to recognise the contribution that Invest NI has made to my area of Omagh in recent times, with 40 jobs for Telestack and 260 jobs for Terex Powerscreen. Does the Minister accept, however, that there has to be a separation of function and operation between locally led development projects and foreign direct investment projects? There is some confusion, and our amendment may offer help.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for mentioning those two jobs announcements, which are significant: one from an absolutely tremendous locally owned and managed firm in Telestack and another from an international firm in Terex.

There is a good mix of our indigenous companies and a foreign direct investor investing in the west of the Province. I was delighted to be able to make those jobs announcements.

I welcome the opportunity to clarify the position regarding Invest NI's role in inward visits, which is, namely, to promote all of Northern Ireland as a region that is capable of providing solutions to the business needs of new investors in its key target sectors. It is performing very well against that task in a highly competitive global market.

Members should remember that, in Northern Ireland, we are competing for mobile investment against much bigger countries and, indeed, regions within countries that are bigger than us. To be able to compete against those areas, we must sell Northern Ireland as a whole.

It is also important to note that Invest NI does not determine location. Mr Flanagan does not think that that point is worth very much, but it is true. We do not force people to go to particular areas in Northern Ireland. They tell us where they want to go, and we facilitate that. We do that because people make bids. They sell themselves and are positive. That is one reason why I have got very involved in the Smart region concept in Fermanagh and Omagh. If I am challenging other areas and asking people what they are doing to bring foreign direct investment to their region, I have to step up to the plate as well. That is what I have done with the Smart region in Fermanagh and Omagh, the new review of public administration area in the south-west.

That Smart region gives us a proposition to take out and sell. I am so excited about the prospects for Fermanagh and Omagh with the Smart region. Invest NI has put in place a data analyst to help us to look at all the data in the region, to be clever about what we are doing in looking for foreign direct investment and, more importantly, to help our indigenous companies to look to the future, particularly to export markets. I put a challenge back: what are they doing for their regions and areas? I am quite satisfied that what I am doing with the Smart region for my area is new and innovative and will deliver for Fermanagh and Omagh.

I am the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the whole of Northern Ireland. Any inward investment must, therefore, showcase Northern Ireland's capability to meet a company's specific needs.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for giving way. Does she agree that the debate has been quite negative? We should be thinking about things that are pure and deemed worthy, such as the Giro d'Italia, which will come here next May, bringing not only tourism possibilities but job opportunities for businesses across Northern Ireland.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for mentioning tourism, because tourism is very important to a lot of areas across Northern Ireland. The Giro d'Italia will again lift our tourism offering to the wider world. We look forward to it very much.

Investors, when they consider anywhere, look at a number of key factors, including the availability of appropriately skilled labour. In answer to Mr Ramsey's point, which he made to me at Question Time and to the Minister for Employment and Learning, with whom I had a conversation last Thursday about economically inactive young people, I say that that strategy is coming out soon. I know that the Minister for Employment and Learning has spoken to you about some of that strategy and where we can move forward in it. We look forward to that, because that will be a mechanism for dealing with some of the genuine concerns that the Member has. I recognise that. We will want to deal with that.

5.00 pm

Investors will also look at suitable vacant land or property, which goes back to Ms McLaughlin's point; appropriate infrastructure to meet business needs; and existing clusters of companies in the business sector. So, Invest is continuing to capitalise on the opportunities to showcase Northern Ireland as a great place to invest and to do business in. The G8 summit gave us a great platform. Even the weather came out in Fermanagh, as I knew it would, to give us those pictures and to raise the profile of Northern Ireland as a whole.

The recent investment conference, of course, was a great success, and we look forward to some announcements coming out of that conference in the near future. I think that Members will be very pleased with those announcements, and, when they are made, I hope that some people will reflect on what they have said in the Chamber this afternoon about what people have been doing in relation to their areas.

Invest NI is pursuing a number of opportunities to bring investment to the constituency of Foyle. The agency will actively engage with local

stakeholders. Mr Ramsey raised a point about Digital Derry. We are absolutely engaged in that process to maximise the local proposition and to sell the area as a great place in which to invest. I believe that that is a very strong legacy from the UK City of Culture. We have been engaging with Digital Derry — that is its title; I say that before any of my colleagues get excited. We have been engaging with that organisation, because we see it as an organisation that has a futuristic approach for the economy in the region.

We are planning for Invest NI's 2014 international staff conference. Mr Flanagan will be pleased to hear that it is coming to Fermanagh. Although I note from the 'Fermanagh Herald' that he has said that they are not going to come out of their hotel when they come to Fermanagh. I will make sure that they come out of their hotel, Mr Flanagan. That is the sort of negative attitude I expect from Mr Flanagan. I bring the Invest NI staff conference to Fermanagh; international staff are coming to Fermanagh. What does he say to the 'Fermanagh Herald'? He says that they are going to stay in the hotel the whole time they are there. That is absolutely disgraceful from Mr Flanagan. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs Foster: It is the kind of opportunistic stuff that I expect from him.

With regard to where new investors choose to locate, we need to be realistic and understand that such decisions are taken by the investors, based on their respective business needs. However, overall, the Northern Ireland inward investment proposition remains strong, and we are well positioned to take advantage of any upturn in investor confidence.

I turn now to the final part of the motion. Whilst there are no specific commitments in the Programme for Government (PFG) that seek to specifically address regional imbalance, as a general principle, it is implied that all Programme for Government commitments should be implemented as equitably as possible for all citizens in Northern Ireland. As a Carson unionist, I say that that is exactly what we should be doing. Maybe the Sinn Féin Members across the way should have a look in Lord Carson's biography at what he said about true unionism. It is about delivering for the whole of the UK.

In translating that to Invest NI activity, there are important considerations to be made. As I have already made clear, seeking to force companies

to recruit from, or locate in, specific areas could be highly detrimental to our ability to attract investors. By undermining our sales proposition — in effect, putting my arm behind my back when I am out trying to sell Northern Ireland — it would have a negative impact on our ability to create employment for the benefit of all in Northern Ireland.

Mr Frew: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I will.

Mr Frew: Does the Minister agree that MLAs across the Chamber talk, as they have done today, as if it would burn their tongue to say "Northern Ireland" or as if it would burn their tongue to say "UK City of Culture", and it would burn their tongue to say that Belfast is our capital city? It burns their tongue, Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Frew: That sends out a confusion, which hurts investment in our country, as did the fact that they supported people who bombed our infrastructure for over 30 or 40 years.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his point. I noticed that, when Mr Flanagan talked about Invest NI, he talked about it promoting the North. We do not promote the North; we promote Northern Ireland right across the world, and that is very clear. We do not promote the North, and I want to put that on the record this afternoon.

Selective financial assistance has been mentioned on a number of occasions. I wanted to make the point that almost one quarter of new selective financial assistance jobs promoted were located in 10% of the most deprived neighbourhoods. That is a fact. This debate has had a scarcity of facts, but I think that it is about time that we got back to the facts.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister draw her remarks to a close, please?

Mrs Foster: It is not just about foreign direct investment. I could go on to talk about the local economic development measures that we have put in place through European funding and everything else, but I do wish that people would talk up Northern Ireland and its success.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas

leis na Comhaltaí uilig agus ar ndóigh le moltóirí an rúin seo. I thank all those who contributed in one way or another to today's proceedings and those who tabled the motion.

A variety of issues came up. The proposer of the motion talked about PFG commitments, regional imbalances, jobs promoted and jobs created, which was a common theme throughout the debate, and the location of jobs created by Invest NI.

Mr McKinney, in proposing our party's amendment, was criticised for raising the flags issue. It is a fact that, as a region, we cannot afford to have those messages flagged across the world again, whether it is regarding tourism or inward investment. I spoke to people in different parts of the world after those incidents, and some of them were deeply concerned about where we were and about the message that was being sent out. Political stability must be uppermost in the message that we send out above all else. Silly things that are being raised here about flags are just really daft.

Mr Ross mentioned pay and conditions. I assure him that my party's response has always been to look after people and ensure that they have proper pay and conditions and are treated fairly by their employers.

Mr Dunne did a great broadcast for Derry. We will have to get you to the next fleadh, Gordon, whenever it comes; it will be well worth it. He referred to important things around EU funding, which is a key part of the issue. We cannot be left in a position where — Ms McLaughlin referred to it many times in Committee — the likes of Trinity College in Dublin draws down far more moneys under framework programme 7 than did the whole of the North. That is a ridiculous situation, which leaves us in a position where a key element of research, innovation and development for the economy is not being dealt with. I have spoken to the Minister about that, and I am assured that she has this well under her brief at the moment. We will see from the beginning of next year how that pans out with Horizon 2020.

Mrs Overend referred to the issue of jobs promoted versus jobs created, the jobs fund, infrastructural needs and the issue of electricity and office accommodation. Mr Lunn referred to the imbalance and, again, key issues such as infrastructure and linkages.

Mr Frew did a great job to promote north Antrim. I really do not think that people can be sore in this debate. We have to be sensible,

pragmatic and promotional, particularly on the whole question of investment.

Ms McLaughlin emphasised the need for jobs promoted and jobs created and for regional disparities to be addressed. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister agreed the jobs strategy and signed up to promote it. Perhaps she could have a word in someone else's ear about Derry and the inequities in investment there.

Mr Wilson did a great job of promoting his own Minister and complimented her on the job that she is doing.

Mr Ramsey brought us to a crucial area: the existing skills deficit and skills mismatch. Again and again, we are told that, whenever people go looking for jobs, for one reason or another, those who have been turned out with skills qualifications have either received the wrong qualifications or inadequate qualifications that do not allow them to move into the labour market.

Mr Anderson referred to kindergarten economic thinking. Had he been listening last week to Professor Neil Gibson, who is also the economic adviser to the Executive, he would have heard the very clear message about what investors want when they come here. They want to hear about the circumstances around investment packages and investment for roads, water and accommodation and office accommodation, which I trust that the Minister has under her hat at the moment. Likewise, however, they want to hear about education, schools, health and the environment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close?

Mr McGlone: Those are crucial issues for them.

I will wind up on one final note. I was listening very carefully to what the Minister said about Smart regions and so forth. I will wind up with a quotation from Eleanor Roosevelt, who said:

"Great minds discuss ideas. Average minds discuss events. Small minds discuss people."

I hope that when —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McGlone: — we reflect on Hansard, we will come to some conclusion about that as well.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted that the motion turned into such a positive and constructive debate, as is always the case.

Turning to the comment that the new Member for South Belfast made about flags, I think that we could have a debate on flags and there would not be as much animosity between the parties over what is a previously agreed position to tackle regional disparities. That is clearly a Programme for Government commitment. Despite a number of speeches and pre-written speeches that were read out very quickly from Members on the opposite Benches, I still do not understand why the DUP is opposing the motion. However, that is what it is going to do.

Last Friday in Enniskillen, along with Joe Byrne from the SDLP, Thomas Buchanan from the DUP and Ross Hussey from the Ulster Unionist Party, I engaged with over 120 young people from across Fermanagh and south Tyrone and west Tyrone. That meeting was arranged by the Peace and Reconciliation Group in conjunction with the Assembly's Education Service. A range of questions were put to the audience, one of which was whether they thought that they would still be living in Fermanagh or Tyrone in 10 years. Of those young people, 78% said that they did not think that they would be living there, mainly because of the lack of job opportunities.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily.

Mrs Foster: Was that the same conference at which the Member told young people that the only thing that I had brought to Fermanagh was fracking?

Mr Flanagan: Yes.

Mrs Foster: When did the fracking start in Fermanagh?

Mr Flanagan: The Minister is nearly correct, except for the tense. It was a passive tense and a present tense, as opposed to a past tense.

Over 80% of those surveyed indicated that they did not think that the Minister or the Department were doing enough to create jobs in Fermanagh and Tyrone. So, that is not a Sinn Féin position or an SDLP position. It is the view of the people in the wider community that Invest NI

and the Department are not doing enough to bring jobs and investment into rural and deprived communities. That is where the motion comes from. It is not some attempt to attack any Minister in a party political way. We are calling on the Executive to do something; we are not highlighting the failures of any one Minister or government agency. In my opening speech, I highlighted some of the good work that Invest NI has done and some of the major improvements that have been made. I recollect — *[Interruption.]* Is the Minister going to listen, or what is the story?

Mrs Foster: So, you contradicted yourself by —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. Other Members may ask him to give way.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I happily will, Minister. That is better.

Mrs Foster: The Member contradicted himself in his own statement by saying that the only positive thing that I had brought to Fermanagh was fracking, and he then went on to talk about the good work that Invest NI has been engaged in.

Mr Flanagan: Aye; dead on. *[Laughter.]* The Minister was too busy tutting during the debate to listen to what people were saying. She was tutting, sighing and putting her head up in the air. That is not going to work. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Flanagan: Perhaps the Minister would like to reflect on what has been said by looking at Hansard and to reflect on what has been provided in the lengthy job creation document.

When representatives from Invest NI last appeared before the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, they presented us with a green glowing sheet of everything that they had achieved. They told us how they have outperformed against most of their targets, apart from the one that was held up as the result of a legal challenge that was largely outside of their control.

In the Committee room, there was unanimous support for and expressions of happiness at how well Invest NI had performed on the wider economic front. However, when it comes to the Programme for Government commitment to address regional imbalance, the Department

has failed. The DUP seems to be opposing the motion —

5.15 pm

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will not, Paul, no.

The DUP seems to be opposing the motion because it calls for an action plan to deal with a previously agreed Programme for Government commitment. I suppose that that is nothing new to us here.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will not be giving way, because I have an awful lot to get through.

In his contribution, Gordon Dunne rightly highlighted the fact that it is not easy to attract jobs and investment. He praised the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and all of us would support that. Those three Ministers in particular have done an awful lot to get out around the globe and sell this place and everything that we have to offer, and that is on record in the House on a number of occasions. However, once we convince them to come here and to invest here, it is about more than just sending them somewhere in Belfast where there are already plenty of jobs. Getting them out into areas where there is a real shortage of jobs, where people are forced to live on the dole for years on end or are forced to emigrate because there are no jobs, is the real challenge that has been set aside in the agreed Programme for Government. That is what needs to happen.

Paul Frew got very excited in his contribution and spent five or six minutes talking about what we had said. I thought that he was making the winding-up speech on the motion. However, he did not once mention anything that Invest NI had done to tackle regional disparities, and that is the thread that ran through all the DUP's contributions. Not one of them defended the fact that Invest NI has not brought a single investor into Fermanagh or Tyrone in the past four years.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I cannot, Paul, no. I am delighted to see that Sammy Wilson is taking part in debates as a Back-Bencher, because I really enjoy his contributions. However, poor ol' Sammy picked an unfortunate village in Fermanagh to try to convince people to bring

jobs to, because another failing of the Minister is in dealing with the issue of mobile phone coverage. Sammy said that we should set up a factory in Derrygonnelly, but there is not a single drop of mobile phone coverage in the village, so how would anybody establish a mobile phone factory there?

Mr Storey: That is your experience of the Carphone Warehouse. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Flanagan: That is right, Mervyn. Good man.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr Flanagan: Sammy Wilson's thread was — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members. There should be courtesy in the Chamber at all times.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Deputy Speaker for trying to bring a bit of control, but it is clear that Members opposite really cannot defend what is going on here, so they are trying to deal with other issues. If, as the DUP claims, regional disparities do not exist or, worse, that they are not important, even though tackling them is a commitment of the Programme for Government, why do we constantly hear unionists complaining on the radio, on the TV and in the Chamber about the absence of European Peace funding in some unionist areas? Worse still, in recent days we have heard unionists say that the social investment fund needs to be broken down and based on people's religion instead of people's actual need, which is completely wrong.

Pat Ramsey highlighted the failure to bring forward a subregional strategy to deal with the strengths that any particular area has. Regarding the review of public administration and further powers that could be transferred to councils, there is an opportunity here for councils to do an awful lot more to pinpoint any given area's strong point and work with Invest NI and the Department to profile that area. What is going on at the minute is that Fermanagh is being promoted as a stretch of water with a big fancy hotel beside it, and that is it. After four years of being a Minister, she has brought something forward called a Smart region, but she still has not brought a single investor into County Fermanagh or County Tyrone.

Sydney Anderson said that the motion was churlish, petty and negative. That was all that I

heard of his contribution. There was no justification for those comments.

In her response, the Minister misread the motion. Perhaps if she lit a few more candles, she would know what we were talking about. The Minister said that we keep asking the same question and that we should just simply listen to her. Perhaps we are not getting a satisfactory answer and not enough is being done to meet the Programme for Government commitment to tackle regional disparities, because that is what we collectively have signed up for, and that is what we need to address. I do not understand why there is such a sense of defensiveness across the Benches about addressing regional disparities.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I have already said that I am not giving way, and I am not going to give way.

The failure to invest in rural communities such as Fermanagh and Tyrone and in deprived communities such as Derry and west Belfast, has not gone unnoticed. It has been going on an awful long time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members.

Mr Flanagan: It has not just been happening since 2009. It is a much longer-term problem than that. It is a real culture that we here need to address collectively. That is why addressing regional imbalance was a key component of the Programme for Government. We hear all this fancy talk about rebalancing the economy, but that is really a right-wing way of saying, "Let us cut the public sector." That is not what it should be about at all. It should be about trying to get balanced growth in the economy in all communities and not simply by cutting the public sector. That is not what rebalancing the economy is about. It is about growing the private sector in all areas and transferring public sector jobs into each one of our communities.

As regards what Paul Frew and Arlene Foster said, different messages seem to be coming out. Arlene Foster spent most of her 15 minutes talking about that Smart region in Fermanagh. It seems to be all that she has to talk about — apart from the G8, which she did not do. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Flanagan: Paul Frew said that we should not focus — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, Members. Allow the Member who has the Floor to finish his speech. We are all meant to treat each other with respect at all times.

Mr Flanagan: Paul Frew said that we should not focus on individual reasons. However, that is just what the Minister has done. Of all of the contributions from DUP Members, not one single Member put forward any kind of defence as to why no foreign investors were brought to places such as Fermanagh, Tyrone and Derry. That really says it all.

In her contribution, the Minister said that I was wrong to say that the Invest NI delegates would stay in the hotel and that she would see to it that they would be taken out of the hotel. That is probably correct: they will probably be brought to the Giant's Causeway and the Titanic centre, as always happens.

My final point is that Arlene Foster says that Invest NI does not promote the North. We all know that. It promotes only certain areas of the North. That is the whole problem. That is the reason for the debate.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mrs McKeivitt

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs

Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 33.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McKinney, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Flanagan and Ms Maeve McLaughlin

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses concern at Invest NI's continuing failure to provide accurate figures for jobs created as a result of government intervention; notes the absence of any Invest NI-facilitated visits to some constituencies in recent years, by potential foreign direct investors; welcomes the Programme for Government 2011-15 commitment to address regional imbalance; and calls on the Executive to publish an integrated action plan to address jobs investment, available office and development space, and infrastructural needs.

Adjourned at 5.49 pm.

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

The content of these ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Organ Donation

Published at 8.30 am on Wednesday 16 October 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Written Statement to the Assembly to update Members on the public engagement programme to establish attitudes towards organ donation in Northern Ireland.

Earlier this year I announced that I intended to initiate a public engagement process to establish attitudes towards organ donation in order to inform my decision on the future policy for organ donation in Northern Ireland; this work was taken forward by the Public Health Agency and consisted of a public attitude survey and focus group meetings.

I now wish to advise that the Public Health Agency has completed this work and plans to publish the report on its findings at 8.30 am on 16 October. The Public Health Agency will also announce plans for the launch of a major information campaign on organ donation, which is expected to run in the New Year. Should Members wish to obtain a copy of the report, it can be found on the Public Health Agency's website at www.publichealth.hsni.net.

I now intend to consider the report before making a decision on the future policy for organ donation, including the option of a statutory opt-out system for organ donation.

Regional Development

Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation

Published at 12.00 noon on Thursday 17 October 2013

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Members will be aware of the importance of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for Northern Ireland. It is important because of our location on the periphery of Europe, and our requirement to develop a transport network that ensures that we are not disadvantaged in terms of competing and participating nationally and internationally. My Department has already been successful in competing for funding through the EU's existing TEN-T programme to improve our roads and railways, and it is my intention that this continues in the next programme.

For these reasons I have taken a keen interest in the EU negotiations for a new TEN-T Regulation and the associated funding facility. I engaged pro-actively with key EU decision makers, including the Chair of the European Parliament's Transport Committee who accepted my invitation to visit Northern Ireland last year, the European Transport Commissioner, the UK Secretary of State for Transport, MEP's and Ministers from other jurisdictions.

I have kept the Committee for Regional Development and key stakeholders informed throughout the co-decision process, particularly as the Regulation entered the closing stages of negotiations. The Regulation is on track for a first reading agreement between the European Parliament, Council and Commission. It is envisaged it will be supported by the European Parliament at their Plenary Vote and adopted by Council later this year. I would like to provide Members with a full update of the positive outcome negotiated for Northern Ireland.

The amendments we have secured will ensure that Northern Ireland will not be subject to costly and inappropriate infrastructure demands and binding deadlines. In real terms this means that Northern Ireland will not be forced to spend some £1.46 billion on our rail network and £13 billion on our roads in order to meet what is clearly unjustifiable expenditure and otherwise risk infraction proceedings. This cost would have had to be borne by the Executive; it would have been money from our own resources. It is fair to say that had this policy been allowed to

progress unchallenged, Northern Ireland could have faced a budgetary crisis on a huge scale. In addition, following my positive interventions, key transport routes in Northern Ireland have been maintained on the TEN-T Network, with the associated opportunity of EU funding.

I have lobbied extensively for the inclusion of Londonderry on the Core Network, and I have been supported in this by the Committee for Regional Development. This would provide true EU added value by improving access to the internal market across two Member States and promoting the competitiveness of this regional gateway. Therefore, I do not accept the European Commission's position which does not include Londonderry on the Core Network, although it will now be included in the TEN-T Comprehensive Network.

The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Regulation, which determines the conditions, methods and procedures for the Europe's contribution to TEN projects, is also on track for a first Reading agreement. It is envisaged this will also be supported by the European Parliament at their Plenary Vote and adopted by Council later this year. As a result of changes we worked with London to push for it is now much more likely that Northern Ireland will be in a stronger position to bid for EU funding for our TEN-T Comprehensive Network. This means that projects on Londonderry's transport links could still be eligible to bid for EU funding.

Whilst bidding for funding from the CEF for investment in infrastructure will be a highly competitive process, the outcome of the negotiations will put Northern Ireland in a significantly improved position.

These achievements are a result of consistent engagement on this issue. I would also like to put on record my appreciation for the help and assistance that I have received from Northern Ireland's MEPs, who tabled amendments on my behalf and provided invaluable advice on engaging with Europe on these matters.

Our achievements ensure that Northern Ireland's transport infrastructure will continue be a constructive and contributing part of Europe's vision for the future development of high-performing, sustainable and efficiently interconnected trans-European transport networks.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I am able to share with Members this positive outcome; one which secures our participation in

Networks that provide genuine and tangible opportunities to support growth and improve competitiveness in Northern Ireland and across Europe, through more efficient and effective movement of goods and people.

Please note the above statement is embargoed until 12:00 on 17 October 2013.



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