

# Official Report (Hansard)

Monday 28 April 2014  
Volume 94, No 5



# Contents

## Assembly Business

The Late Mr David McClarty MLA ..... 1

## Executive Committee Business

Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent ..... 9

Work and Families Bill: First Stage..... 9

## Private Members' Business

Praxis Care ..... 9

## Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister ..... 15

Agriculture and Rural Development ..... 24

## Private Members' Business

Praxis Care (*Continued*)..... 33

Mental Health..... 35

## Written Ministerial Statement

Environment: PPS 23 ..... 51

Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the Editor.

They should be sent to:  
The Editor of Debates, Room 248, Parliament Buildings, Belfast BT4 3XX.  
Tel: 028 9052 1135 · e-mail: [simon.burrowes@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:simon.burrowes@niassembly.gov.uk)

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

# Assembly Members

Agnew, Steven (North Down)  
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)  
Anderson, Sydney (Upper Bann)  
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)  
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)  
Bell, Jonathan (Strangford)  
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)  
Boyle, Ms Michaela (West Tyrone)  
Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)  
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)  
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)  
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)  
Byrne, Joe (West Tyrone)  
Cameron, Mrs Pam (South Antrim)  
Campbell, Gregory (East Londonderry)  
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)  
Cochrane, Mrs Judith (East Belfast)  
Copeland, Michael (East Belfast)  
Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)  
Cree, Leslie (North Down)  
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)  
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)  
Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne (Upper Bann)  
Douglas, Sammy (East Belfast)  
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)  
Durkan, Mark (Foyle)  
Easton, Alex (North Down)  
Eastwood, Colum (Foyle)  
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Farry, Stephen (North Down)  
Fearon, Ms Megan (Newry and Armagh)  
Flanagan, Phil (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Ford, David (South Antrim)  
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)  
Gardiner, Samuel (Upper Bann)  
Girvan, Paul (South Antrim)  
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)  
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)  
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)  
Hay, William (Speaker)  
Hazzard, Chris (South Down)  
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)  
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)  
Hussey, Ross (West Tyrone)  
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)  
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)  
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)  
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)  
Kinahan, Danny (South Antrim)  
Lo, Ms Anna (South Belfast)  
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)  
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)  
McAleer, Declan (West Tyrone)  
McCallister, John (South Down)  
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)  
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)  
McCarthy, Kieran (Strangford)  
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)  
McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)  
McCorley, Ms Rosaleen (West Belfast)  
McCrea, Basil (Lagan Valley)  
McCrea, Ian (Mid Ulster)  
McDonnell, Alasdair (South Belfast)  
McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)  
McGahan, Ms Bronwyn (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
McGimpsey, Michael (South Belfast)  
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)  
McGuinness, Martin (Mid Ulster)  
McIlveen, David (North Antrim)  
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)  
McKay, Daithí (North Antrim)  
McKevitt, Mrs Karen (South Down)  
McKinney, Fearghal (South Belfast)  
McLaughlin, Ms Maeve (Foyle)  
McLaughlin, Mitchel (South Antrim)  
McMullan, Oliver (East Antrim)  
McNarry, David (Strangford)  
McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)  
Maginness, Alban (North Belfast)  
Maskey, Alex (South Belfast)  
Milne, Ian (Mid Ulster)  
Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)  
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)  
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)  
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)  
Ó hOisín, Cathal (East Londonderry)  
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)  
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)  
Overend, Mrs Sandra (Mid Ulster)  
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)  
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)  
Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)  
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)  
Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)  
Rogers, Seán (South Down)  
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)  
Ruane, Ms Caitriona (South Down)  
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)  
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)  
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)  
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)  
Weir, Peter (North Down)  
Wells, Jim (South Down)  
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 28 April 2014

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

### The Late Mr David McClarty MLA

**Mr Speaker:** It is my sad duty to advise the House formally of the death of David McClarty and to report that I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998, that a vacancy exists in the East Londonderry constituency that Mr McClarty served well.

I intend to pay my own tribute to David in a few moments, after which I will call a representative from each of the parties to speak for up to five minutes. I will allow around 45 minutes for tributes, and, if there is enough time remaining after all the parties have spoken, I may be able to call other Members who rise in their places to say a few words. The sitting will then be suspended for approximately 30 minutes as a mark of respect for our late friend and colleague. I will be reasonably relaxed about time. If we run slightly over 45 minutes, I will still be reasonably relaxed, because I know that a number of Members want to pay their own tribute. I have a list at the Table, which I will take, so those listed Members do not have to rise in their place. After we deal with the list, Members should indicate by rising in their places, and we will call them.

Much has been said and written since David McClarty's sad passing in the early hours of Good Friday morning, all of which reflects the high esteem in which he was held in the House. David fought strongly for all he believed in, all the while remaining a true gentleman. In this House, like any Parliament, we will have our differences, but David showed that you could express them in a way that maintained strong personal relationships on all sides of the Chamber. His brilliant wit undoubtedly assisted him in that. It was because of that sense of humour that I asked David to act as master of ceremonies for my annual functions in Parliament Buildings. David could always be relied on to provide light relief and to put people at ease, no matter what the situation. He

combined that with a firm but fair authority when presiding over the House as Deputy Speaker, a role in which I greatly enjoyed working with him.

I remember that, in 2012, along with Judith Cochrane, David accompanied me to sign an agreement with the Assembly of Kosovo. Some Members might know that we work closely with the Assembly in Kosovo, and that work is very much ongoing today. Watching how he spoke passionately to elected Members from a region with its own troubled history, I was struck by how great an ambassador David was for this Assembly and how proud he was of his involvement here since his election in 1998.

As well as his public life, David was a family man, a fine singer and, of course, a comedy actor — he loved the stage. He had a great love for his native constituency of East Londonderry.

This afternoon, we give our sincere condolences to David's wife, Norma, his sons, Colin and Alan, and the wider family circle. David was a true parliamentarian, a colleague and a dear friend. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that we shall miss him deeply.

**Mr Campbell:** It is with sadness that I rise to acknowledge the work and life of David McClarty. It was with great sadness that I, and others, heard of his passing on Good Friday. I knew David McClarty for some 20 years in local government and then as a political opponent in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster elections. He was, as has been described by many people, a parliamentarian and a gentleman. In fact, a number of people have spoken to me since his death and said things like, "He was a very difficult man to dislike". And he was a very difficult man to dislike, because of his gentlemanly way of dealing with people, both privately and publicly. I am sure that we all pass on our condolences to his wife, Norma, and his close family circle. I was in their home before the funeral and did so. I know that they are comforted by all the tributes that have been paid.

One thing sticks with me, Mr Speaker, and I think that it is a mark of the man. I remember that, many years ago, in one of the first elections that I fought in East Londonderry, we were canvassing in the area where David lived. One of my party colleagues advocated that I should canvas in a particular part of the estate, which just happened to be where David lived, but I did not know that. I think that they deliberately pointed me in his direction. I rang the doorbell and his wife came out and said, "Oh, Gregory, it's yourself. Can you just wait a second?" David came out, because he had finished his canvassing for the evening. We all know that, at election time, it gets very difficult and fraught and opponents can have sharp words. However, we had a very friendly discussion, at the end of which David said, "Do you want to come in for a cup of coffee?" That was the mark of the man. He was my political opponent, yet he was prepared to offer to sit down with me for a cup of coffee. We will all deeply miss the wit, the humour and the charm of David McClarty. We pay tribute to him today.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, acknowledge with great sadness the loss to the House of a highly respected Member, David McClarty. Whatever the loss to the House, it is a tremendous loss for his wife, Norma, his sons, Alan and Colin, and his three grandchildren.

I knew David only through the work that we have done in this body since it was formed. In the deliberations that take place here, many words are expressed, sometimes in a very hostile way, but that was never David McClarty's way. He was an absolute gentleman; someone who was not just respected but was deeply loved for his progressive and good-hearted spirit.

I was very pleased to attend his funeral in Coleraine, at Killowen Parish Church, and to see the tremendous turnout from the people of the constituency, which I know as east Derry but many others prefer to know as East Londonderry. David was a very proud unionist. At one stage, he was a member of the Ulster Unionist Party and became, in turn, an independent unionist. He was a unionist to his backbone but highly respectful of all traditions in our society. In his role as Deputy Speaker here in the Assembly, he was always very fair. He ensured that everybody had the opportunity to speak and was very firm with those who attempted to prevent that happening. In concert with all others in the Assembly, it is important to say that we will miss him. He was hugely respected by all of us.

I met him on a number of occasions at different events outside the Assembly and the work of Parliament Buildings, sometimes at church events in my city, and I always found him very decent, very courteous and very, very likeable. He was very much into amateur dramatics, but he never brought them into the Assembly. He was always conscious of the very responsible role of MLAs: to give a proper example to people outside and to show that this was not only an institution that could work but one in which people could get on with one another. We still have a bit of a journey to go in that respect, but, if we all see the example that he set as one that all of us should follow, this will be a far, far better place.

My final thoughts are with his wife, Norma, and with Colin and Alan and their wives and children. David made an enormous contribution to our politics, and he will always be very, very fondly remembered by all of us.

**Dr McDonnell:** Mr Speaker, this is bittersweet. I am saddened that we have to pay tribute today, but, equally, I am glad that you have afforded us the opportunity to pay tribute to my late friend — indeed, our late friend and valued colleague — David McClarty. I welcome the opportunity to express formally in the House my condolences and those of the SDLP to Norma, Alan and Colin.

In political terms, David was a staunch unionist, and I would not want anything that I say to be somehow misinterpreted or to take from that. However, he was not tribal; he was always reaching out to and conciliating with others to whom he was opposed or, perhaps, with those opposed to each other. He presented his robust unionist position in a most civilised, tolerant and openly inclusive way. He genuinely respected all and was, in turn, respected by all.

He was a very proud, loyal and committed son of Coleraine. He was even prouder of Killowen, his neighbourhood within Coleraine. It was his townland, it was his village and it was his community. He had intense community loyalty to Killowen and Coleraine, but he was not parochial and narrow in that loyalty. He was a proud Ulsterman determined to play his full part in seeing the peace process feed into a prosperity process that would benefit all.

I had the privilege of working with him on many occasions, whether serving on Committees or in whatever role we happened to be thrust together, and we shared a broad common interest in seeing investment, economic development and prosperity succeed here. I

had the privilege of travelling with him on a trade mission when Lord Empey was the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and it was a privilege to work with him on that occasion.

### 12.15 pm

Equally, Mr Speaker, I felt very privileged to be able to attend David's funeral and to listen to the many, many tributes that you shared in. I fully concurred with those tributes. I learned there that David had very robust family connections. I met Norma, whom I had met before. I also met his sons again and a number of his brothers. From talking to his family members, it was very clear why David was who he was. His very robust family network was evident there. I also learned of his deep Christian convictions and his connection to the Church.

We will all miss him. The place is quieter, sadder and emptier without him, but I hope that he is happy and is in a better place.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Mr Speaker, like you, I attended Killowen Church of Ireland Parish Church last week for David's funeral service. I know that many MLAs were in the crowd, and what a crowd. The church was full, as was the church hall, and Killowen Street, on the west bank of the Bann, was crowded. From speaking to the family afterwards, I know that they took great comfort from the fact that so many people wished to demonstrate their respect for David McClarty that they made their way to Coleraine for the service of remembrance. The family was truly pleased. Few families could dare imagine that their loved one was so genuinely popular as David was.

For most of his life, David McClarty was an Ulster Unionist. He was a positive, progressive politician who felt in his very fibre the essence of the Belfast Agreement: the need to build trust, mutual respect and parity of esteem, which are the core values that bring us here today. In the spirit of building a shared future, I wish to acknowledge the presence of the deputy First Minister at the funeral last week. I know that many surprised themselves by going out of their way to make sure that Martin McGuinness felt welcome, as many did for me when I attended Clonard monastery for the requiem Mass for Father Alec Reid last year and the service in Downpatrick for Eddie McGrady. It might indeed be a fitting tribute to David McClarty's memory that we start showing the same respect to one another in life as we do in death.

When the first Assembly sat in 1998, David McClarty was part of a team — the Ulster Unionist team. I know that he loved this party to his core. He preceded me in the Chamber by 13 years, and it is a matter of everlasting regret to me that I never had the chance to sit beside him as a colleague. I can think of no one I would rather have had at my side in group meetings upstairs or here in the Chamber for debates, but that was not to be. By the time I got here, David had gone to sit in the corner as an Independent, having not been selected to run again as a unionist in 2011. What happened to David McClarty then should not have happened. To his family and friends who were so badly hurt by those events, I am glad to take this opportunity to publicly say sorry.

When I got here, David may have been sitting apart from me, but he never ignored me. Often, he went out of his way, when he did not need to, to demonstrate public support. Sometimes — thankfully, not so often — he let it be known when he disagreed with me, but he always did so privately. Equally privately, enquiries were made to see whether he might come back, but, in typical fashion, the message I received was that he had stood as an Independent and that he would not abuse his relationship with the electorate by switching in midstream. What might have happened in the next election is now beyond academic.

I was looking at David's website last night, and the home page says all that you need to know about the man, for the first words are "thank you". It reads:

*"Thank you for taking the time to browse the site, I hope you find it interesting and useful. ... I have been a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly since 1998 and it has always been my intention to serve all the people of East Londonderry to the very best of my ability and resources."*

In attitude and application, David McClarty was a success.

In closing, I wish to float an idea for a fitting act of remembrance for David, who was incredibly proud of Coleraine, his constituency and the north coast. It is an area steeped in sporting tradition. It is home to the local Irish League side, Coleraine FC. The area is also the home of the Milk Cup, of which David was a great supporter. It is blessed with many great golf courses, of course, and next week it will welcome the Giro d'Italia. In two weeks' time, it will host the world-famous North West 200.

On Saturday, there was a minute's applause for David before the start of the Coleraine versus Dungannon Swifts match. I am told that one of the most poignant sights was the bouquet of flowers and two blue and white scarves tied to the front of the Railway End at the very spot where David could be found every other Saturday, supporting his beloved Coleraine FC.

So, with the family's blessing, I suggest that we ask the organisers of the Milk Cup to consider naming a trophy — perhaps for fair play and sportsmanship — in memory of David McClarty MLA. Our thoughts are with his wife, Norma, and his family.

**Mr Ford:** Mr Speaker, it is indeed a sadness and a pleasure to have the opportunity to pay tribute today to David McClarty, a man whom you correctly described at the beginning as a friend and a colleague to all of us here — one of the minority in this place who was first elected in 1998 and had remained in continuous membership, but one who had an impact in the Chamber, as I know from serving with him in Committees and in recent times, though not in this session, as Deputy Speaker. Indeed, in the previous and the current session, he was a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and a very fine representative of the best side of this Assembly in the work that he was doing to represent his cause without also denigrating causes that other people believed in.

He was also a man of many other parts: not just an actor on the political stage but very much an actor on the amateur dramatics stage. As Mike Nesbitt has just said, he was a passionate supporter of Coleraine FC, in all that that conveyed for his town. Clearly, his passion for politics was very much a passion for those whom he represented, not just for the institutions here. He was passionate about East Londonderry. He was passionate about Coleraine. He was, perhaps, most passionate of all about Killowen, for those whom he worked with, cared for and sought to represent.

Reference has been made to the fact that he had previously been a party politician, and there is no doubt that, while he was a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, he was a loyal member of that party and defended its cause. However, when I was paying a visit to Coleraine during the last Assembly election campaign, I met David in the Diamond. It was absolutely clear from the quality of the engagement that he had with the people of the town — as he engaged in conversation and canvassed in the most informal kind of way — how positive a relationship he had. It was no surprise

whatsoever that he was re-elected as an independent, because he was far more than the party label that he had borne. I suspect that not many of us in this place could be re-elected as independents the way he was.

It was also clear that, despite the fact that he was canvassing, he was happy to have a few minutes' chat with the Alliance team in the Diamond that day as well, and treat people as friends and colleagues, even if we had political differences. That is the measure of the man and of how much respect he held for others and for the democratic process, as, indeed, we saw at his funeral. The immense turnout showed the respect that his constituents and political colleagues from across Northern Ireland had for him. On behalf of my colleagues in this place and in Coleraine, I extend my sympathy to his wife, Norma, to his sons and to the wide family circle for the great loss that they have suffered.

**Mr B McCrea:** I knew David well. He and I were in the Ulster Unionist Party for a long time together. He, along with my colleague John McCallister and I, used to sit in a little conclave and talk about the future and what things might look like if we did things in a particular way. One of the really great things that I remember about David is that, no matter what you were talking about, no matter how serious the subject, he would always have had a turn of wit. He would always be able to say a little something to lighten the load, something funny, and that would just sometimes defuse things that were getting a little bit heated. He was a great man in that respect.

I also knew him from a family point of view, because he was in Killowen and my father lives just beside there. I had been to the church before. I was personally very touched by the church service and listening to the family talking.

A certain amount of comfort came from the fact that David let it be known that he knew that the end was coming and that he was content to move forward. He had made the arrangements that he wanted to make. These can be very difficult circumstances, but he was able to tell his family that he was never more proud of anything than of them. I think that that is a great source of comfort.

When people talk about his being on the stage, I was never quite sure which stage David preferred: that of amateur theatrics or of this place. He just loved it, and anybody who has ever been to Ulster Unionist Party conferences knew that David was usually the star turn who we all went to see, because he could do almost

anything, whether it was music or telling jokes or whatever. All of these things are symbolic of a man of the people.

On behalf of the party, I want to say that we had a number of conversations — David, John and I — about what would happen when we left various parties and where the future lay. He gave a certain amount of encouragement on certain directions, but, ultimately, when we went to talk to him, David told John and I, "I like you both; we get on; but my responsibility is to the people who elected me. I want to remain an independent, and I want to go and speak for those people, for all of the people." That shows great character as an individual.

When you look back on somebody's life, because who knows what happens after these things, his wife and family can take huge pride in the fact that David was not only loved by everybody, he was respected by everybody, and, during his life, he made a difference to an awful lot of people.

**Mr Allister:** I join in the tributes that have been properly paid to David McClarty. I am probably one of the people in the House who knew him for a lesser period than most, in that I did not really come to know him until I came here in 2011. Having sat beside him for the two years until illness overcame him, I had many discussions with him on a variety of issues when he was here. Obviously, our political emphases were quite different, but everything that emerged from the David McClarty that I got to know bears out what has been said much about him: that he was a gentleman of politics.

On the day that he passed away, I said that he was a gentleman of politics but no pushover. Thinking about what I would say today, I did not think that I could better that in summing him up. He certainly was a gentleman in the manner in which he conducted himself, in the courtesy that he showed to all and in the manner in which he expressed himself. Even from sitting nearby him, it was quite obvious from the comings and goings of other Members as they passed by, the affection in which he was held. When he was last with us last July, there was spontaneous applause for him, which was, I think, a mark of the affection in which he was held. He was a man of principled views to which he held and he was right to do so. He was no pushover in any sense on those views.

He obviously was held in considerable affection not only in this House but by his constituents, by virtue of the fact that he achieved the quite remarkable and rare feat in Northern Ireland politics of being elected to this House as an independent — the only Member so elected.

That was quite a considerable achievement. We are all the poorer for his passing.

The resilient way in which he bore his illness was also a mark of the man. I phoned him from time to time during the past year, and I was always struck by his uplifting tone of optimism and his determination to battle on. It was not to be, but he has certainly left his mark in this House and in the wider community.

### 12.30 pm

Of course, he will be missed most in the bosom of his family. He was much loved by his wife, Norma, his two sons and his considerable wider family of brothers and sisters. As they miss him, and as they continue to miss him, it may be some comfort to know that David was held in great and genuine affection across the House as someone who made his mark in the House.

**Mr Agnew:** On behalf of the Green Party in Northern Ireland, I express our sadness at the passing of David McClarty MLA, and I offer our condolences to his family.

On a personal level, he was always willing to offer me, as a new MLA, the benefit of his experience as an MLA who had been continuously elected since 1998. As a former Deputy Speaker, he also informed me of some of the ways around the Standing Orders and procedures of the House.

I remember the last time that I spoke to him in the Chamber. He came in towards the end of the term and talked about his road to recovery at that time as it appeared to be. I have some experience of the journey, the battle against cancer, because this week will mark the third anniversary of the death of a close friend of mine who lost that battle with cancer. I sat and had similar conversations with him in the hope that he would defeat the illness. However, it is a cruel illness in which your fortunes can turn. Unfortunately for David, his fortunes turned, and he was unable to overcome the illness.

As many Members said, he was a true gentleman. He held strong convictions but did so in a dignified manner. He was well liked, and I think that it is a mark of the man that he was well liked across all the parties in the Chamber. He had the ability to separate political disagreement from personal relationships, and he always maintained personal relationships in the face of disagreement. He was clearly highly regarded in his constituency. The support that he got as an Ulster Unionist and as an independent

showed that much of his vote was a vote for him personally, for his hard work and dedication and for him as a person and a politician.

I think that it is fair to say that he was a good boy in what has become known as the naughty corner of the Assembly. He certainly kept us in check at times and kept us right. He is a loss to us in this corner and in the House. Whoever his replacement might be, they will be warmly welcomed here by us all. He will certainly be sadly missed by the Assembly. I send my best regards to all his family and friends.

**Mr McNarry:** I knew David McClarty for many years, during which, mostly on Mondays, he gave me a torrid time, taunting me not about politics but about his beloved Manchester United. It was, of course, seriously good fun; he had that impish expression of self-satisfaction when taunting me. When Chelsea won it was a fluke; it was never a penalty, or the referee should have gone to Specsavers. But when United won, it was all about their obvious class and skills. They were, of course, superior in all departments, according to David when rubbing it in, and boy, David, could you rub it in at times.

His humour was legend. When we sat together, as we did over there and more recently over here, his quips were delivered with a grin out of the side of his mouth. I have to confess, Mr Speaker, that many a time I had to up and leave, my ribs cracking for fear of bursting out very loud in the House. We all got a mention in the nicest put-down way, and that was David McClarty's trademark: it was always in the nicest possible way that he let us know exactly what he was thinking.

Today, the House honours a colleague who showed us all that differences in politics are not about losing friends but about keeping friends. David, as was said, was a man of principle, and therein lies a great strength that he had. Good things have rightly been said, and we are all grateful for the good things that have been said today because they are so richly deserved. Let us all be assured: I think that he did know, colleagues, how popular he was with us all. I am glad of the memories and sad that they came to an end. May he rest in peace.

**Mr Speaker:** We have about 15 minutes left, but, as I said, I am reasonably relaxed about time this afternoon, given the circumstances. If Members rise in their places from here on in, I will try to call them.

**Mr McQuillan:** I want to be associated with the comments of my colleague Gregory Campbell and all others in the Chamber today about the late David McClarty. First and foremost, David was a committed family man who was dedicated to his wife, Norma, his sons Alan and Colin, their wives and his grandchildren. It is they who will miss him the most. However, he was also committed to the town of Coleraine and the people of Coleraine, whom he had served as a public representative for many years.

David and I differed many times on political matters, but, once the debate was over and we left the Chamber, you could always be sure of that smile and a witty comment. That broke all ice after a heated debate.

We were also united at 3.00 pm on Saturdays when we went to visit our beloved Coleraine FC. David stood at the front of the railway end, and I stood at the back of it, but, when going in and out, we always commented on how we played, how we should have played and maybe what team we should have picked. He was always a great man and a lovely-mannered man. I pass on my condolences to his wife, Norma, children Alan and Colin and the entire McClarty family.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Last Tuesday, the deputy First Minister and I, and all shades of political opinion, attended David's funeral in Killowen Parish Church, where we were received very graciously by the congregation, the minister and David's family.

David was amiable, affable and approachable. He was a colleague, and I like to think of him as a friend. When I came to the House for the first time three years ago, he was very much an adviser. He was pragmatic, principled and professional and was highly regarded by all the people of our constituency. He was a raconteur, a thespian and a troubadour, and his days with the Ballywillan players and with church choirs probably laid good foundations for his time as a Deputy Speaker here.

He was famous for his jokes and stories and was a fan of the Milk Cup, which is a competition that is so great, particularly in the East Derry constituency. As was mentioned, he was also a fan of Manchester United and Coleraine FC. He told a story about a particularly dismal performance against Portadown one day, and, when he tried to leave early, the stewards accompanied him back into the Showgrounds.

The East Derry constituency, the House and I will miss David deeply. We were much enriched by knowing him. I offer my sympathies to Norma, Colin, Alan and the entire McClarty family.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I join all others to express my condolences and those of the party to Norma and her sons on the loss not only to David's family but to the many constituents, because it is quite clear that he was held in very high regard by the people who, as others said, elected him as an independent. He stood for what he believed in, and people stood with him. His showmanship and oratorical skills were well regarded in this place, which, some might say, is one of the biggest theatres in Northern Ireland, but he did himself and his family proud.

It is on days like this that you are proud to be a politician, because we can see the public service that David gave and the difference that he made in his contribution to public life. It is important, on days like this, to note the sacrifice that Norma and their sons made at all those times when David had to go out to meetings, meet constituents, represent them and help them to cope with whatever stresses or strains they faced. So, it is with deep regret that we note the passing of David McClarty.

**Mr Hussey:** I begin by expressing my sincere sympathy to the McClarty family. As I look over into that corner, I can see that there certainly is a light missing from it. On the last day, or one of the last days, that David McClarty was in the House, he was applauded as he returned to the House. He was a man who had strong convictions in many ways, and he was a man who was determined to do his best for East Londonderry. I could see him, today, sitting there, smiling, when he got the deputy First Minister to refer to East Londonderry. I am sure that that would have brought a smile to his face, as it did to mine.

Many times, as we sit in the Chamber, there is anxiety: you are upset; you are wondering what is going to happen next; or, perhaps, you are waiting for a vote. David regularly used to come over here and sit beside myself and Mrs Dobson and tell us a joke or two. As Mr McNarry said, it was difficult at times not to giggle. Sometimes, it was so difficult that you nearly had to eat your handkerchief. He was one of those men who made you smile.

We will all have very fond and happy memories of David. His family will have many happy memories over the coming days. Towards the end of his life, I regularly kept in touch with him on Facebook. He never felt sorry for himself;

he was always that same positive man. Those memories will stay with me. That corner is now a little bit darker, but to the McClarty family, they will always have the light of the life of the late David McClarty MLA.

**Mrs Cochrane:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to say a few words in tribute to David. He was one of the first MLAs outside my party whom I got to know when I came to the Assembly, through being with him on the Social Development Committee, as well as travelling on that important delegation to Kosovo, as you have already mentioned. I was impressed, always, with the manner in which he carried out his public duties and with his sense of humour when there were difficult issues or differences of opinion. He stood up for what he believed in and was firm, but always well mannered and respectful, to those who had differing ideas. He and I did not agree on everything, and, when we did not agree, he liked to banter me about the fact that we had to get on because we were related, albeit distantly, through a McClarty/Cochrane marriage a couple of years ago.

Having attended the service of thanksgiving for his life last Tuesday, it is clear that he will be fondly remembered not only by the people in the House but by the wider community. We will continue to remember Norma and the rest of the family in our prayers.

**Mr Kennedy:** Mr Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to allow a short tribute from myself to the late David McClarty. I knew David for over 20 years, first through local government. He was a very successful mayor of Coleraine. I remember that, at the outset, I suppose, of the political and peace process, John Major, the Prime Minister, invited the mayors and chairmen of all the local councils in Northern Ireland to 10 Downing Street. We had good fun in the margins of that.

As a party colleague for many years, I found David to be very loyal, and he was a great friend. He had a moderating influence and always had a positive outlook, even in challenging times and when challenging decisions had to be reached. Of course, it is worth saying that the Assembly needed, and continues to need, people such as David McClarty for those reasons.

**12.45 pm**

David had other great interests, not least his family: his wife and the boys of whom he spoke often and of whose many achievements he was

very proud, and rightly so. He was also a man of the stage, a very great actor. There are, I suppose, some who regard this place as a palace of varieties, and there are a lot of actors about, but he had genuine talent as an actor. Certainly, in a place where people often describe politics as "show business for ugly people", there was no doubt about his ability to perform. However, although he was an actor, he was never false, which is a critical difference. He loved acting as MC and performing at other functions, both in the Assembly and more widely. His joke telling and storytelling were legendary and brought comfort and enjoyment to a great many people.

David also loved Coleraine Football Club and, as we have heard, Manchester United. As a long-suffering fan of Arsenal, trophyless for so many years, David was never slow to remind us of how many trophies Alex Ferguson had won, although Coleraine did not seem to have the same magical abilities.

David had the ability to lighten conversations and be positive. It was a privilege to know him, work with him and count him as a friend.

**Mr G Robinson:** Like the rest of the Members, I express my sincere condolences to David's wife, Norma, their two sons and the wider family circle. David and I had a great passion as supporters of our beloved Coleraine and of football in general. As most people have said, David was a gentleman and will be greatly missed by us all.

**Mr Speaker:** Order, Members. In accordance with the convention, as a mark of respect for Mr McClarty, the sitting will now be suspended until 1.20 pm.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.48 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —*

## Executive Committee Business

### Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill: Royal Assent

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Before we move on to the next item of business, I inform the House that the Health and Social Care (Amendment) Bill received Royal Assent on 11 April 2014. It will be known as the Health and Social Care (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

### Work and Families Bill: First Stage

**Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):** I beg to introduce the Work and Families Bill, which is a Bill to make provision about shared rights to leave from work and statutory pay in connection with caring for children; time off work to accompany to antenatal appointments or to attend adoption appointments; to make provision about the right to request flexible working; and for connected purposes.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

## Private Members' Business

### Praxis Care

**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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move

*That this Assembly acknowledges and commends the work carried out by Praxis Care; asserts that the transfer of the publicly owned assets at Hillsborough Castle should be conditional on securing the future of Praxis at this location; and calls on the Secretary of State to explore all possible avenues to ensure that the employment provided and the work carried out by Praxis at Hillsborough Castle remain on site.*

I am bringing this motion to the Chamber today in an attempt to get all-party support for 16 vulnerable people with learning disabilities who are under an enormous amount of stress and anxiety at the prospect of losing their jobs at the Secret Garden site at Hillsborough. Praxis Care is an organisation that offers a number of different services to children and adults of all ages. Some of them have a learning disability. Some have mental ill health. Some have an acquired brain injury. It also works with people with dementia. The organisation, like so many similar ones, is very often a lifeline for the people who access its services and for their families. It is very much the difference between someone feeling included and supported and feeling socially excluded and on their own. We very often hear the claim that the measure of a progressive, caring society lies in the treatment of its most vulnerable citizens. That is why today's motion is so important. I hope that it receives support from all parties in the Chamber.

One in every five people in our society is affected by a disability, and one in every four people at some time in their life can be affected by a mental health problem or learning disability. I know that many of us in the Chamber today have been affected in some way through events in our own lives or those of our family or friends. Having a learning disability is one of the most common forms of disability. It can affect a person's ability to carry

out everyday tasks such as social interaction. If vital day care opportunities are not given to people, it can have a long-term impact on their lives. I am asking for support for the motion to ensure that those 16 vulnerable people with learning disabilities will be able to continue to maintain the gardens and run the coffee shop and horticulture project that they have been running for years at that site. It will enable those 16 individuals to continue to work alongside the staff who care for them daily.

The publicly owned asset should be transferred only on the condition that Praxis and the people employed at the Secret Garden facility be allowed to continue. If we look at how the project evolved and developed and how the social benefits and the much-needed service it gives to those who work there evolved for their families and the many users of the facility, it is very clear that the decision to evict Praxis is totally unjust and unfair.

Twenty years ago, Praxis Care was offered a lease on the Hillsborough site — a site that is publicly owned and managed by the NIO. At the time, Praxis was advised by the Labour Government that this lease could be extended beyond the 20-year stipulation. As a result of that understanding, the charitable organisation invested up to £400,000 of its money in the site. The only condition that was sought at the time was that the walled garden would be maintained and opened to the public. Praxis agreed to that, and, indeed, it costs Praxis several thousand pounds a year to do it.

The Tory coalition Government, on taking power, advised that it would not honour the agreement made by the previous Labour Government to allow Praxis Care to stay on the site. Moves were made to open up the site to the public and hand over its management to Historic Royal Palaces, which has no base here and is more used to managing places like the Tower of London in England. Despite many meetings and contacts with the Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, the NIO and Historic Royal Palaces, Praxis was informed that it and its workers would be evicted from the site without any financial reimbursement for the money that it has invested, or indeed support or help to relocate the people who work there. In other words, the job of maintaining the gardens and running the coffee shop and horticulture centre would be taken away from the 16 people with learning disabilities and given to someone else. That is particularly cruel given the amount of financial investment, but more particularly the human investment, that Praxis Care has made in the site and the support and service that the

users get from working there. This is a totally unacceptable situation.

Along with party colleagues, I have visited this project. I have witnessed at first hand the social interaction that many of the people who work there get when people call in for a coffee or to visit the garden. Our party has made a number of representations directly to Theresa Villiers on the issue, pointing out that we believe that the NIO is being grossly unfair to all those involved in the project as it is benefiting from Praxis Care's investment in the site and yet refusing even to consider keeping the service on with the people who have been doing it for years.

There is a responsibility on all of us in society, but particularly on those in government and the public sector, to set up the proper standards. Service providers and policy- and decision-makers must do that, and equality and fairness must be central to everything that we do in that regard. It is very clear that the decision to evict Praxis and those working at the Secret Garden project is unjust, but it is also callous and should be withdrawn immediately. In the interests of the welfare of the 16 vulnerable people and their support workers and families, I call on everyone in the Chamber to show a united front on the issue and support the motion calling on Theresa Villiers and the NIO to reverse their eviction order. I ask that all of us here insist that the transfer of the site is conditional on Praxis and its workers remaining. I hope to get the support of the whole Chamber for this motion.

**Mr McKinney:** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate — I wish that more were here — and I support the motion. Praxis Care registered as a charity in 1983 — that is just over 30 years ago — and provides services for adults and children with a learning disability, mental ill-health or an acquired brain injury, and for older people with dementia. It provides those services for nearly 1,500 vulnerable children and adults. It is important to point out Praxis's pedigree. It is credited with providing holistic and high-quality care away from an institutionalised setting. What better example of that could there be than the daycare work that is being provided within the walled garden cafe at Hillsborough Castle?

This cafe, which has been in existence for 10 years, provides employment for seven staff and 16 people with learning difficulties. As we know, under the new redevelopment plans for Hillsborough, it is now under threat. It is the SDLP's view that all must be done to ensure that this unique project, which has numerous

benefits, is retained at its current location. Many Members will reflect on the need for adequate day services for those with a learning difficulty. Indeed, the current Health Minister wishes to promote and sustain the initiatives that are providing this care.

In December last year, the Assembly endorsed once again the Bamford review and the 'Equal Lives' report. The general message from that debate was that it is incumbent on the House to help to provide more adequate day opportunities for those with a learning disability, and not to disrupt the integrity of day services that are working well. To remove the walled garden at Hillsborough and the 16 jobs for people with learning difficulties who are employed there would be to act against the message of the Bamford review and, indeed, the very debate that we had on that issue.

### 1.30 pm

Furthermore, in the substantial consultation response to the Bamford action plan of 2012, the main message was that people with a learning difficulty need stimulation and choice. The Assembly needs to be mindful of its duty to consistently promote the effective social inclusion and empowerment of people with a learning disability.

The SDLP recognises that there is an opportunity to turn Hillsborough Castle into a visitor attraction and to build for the legacy that it has in a positive way, but the priority now must be those 16 individuals with learning difficulties who work there and the message that the provision of that project sends out about people who are affected in that way. It would simply be wrong to uproot them callously from an environment that they enjoy and greatly benefit from and which the wider public can also benefit from as a result of their endeavours.

Negotiations have been ongoing between Praxis Care and the NIO. The additional funds requested by Praxis to secure relocation were denied, and the situation as it stands is that it cannot afford to relocate. The Secretary of State and the coalition Government had advised that they would not honour the previous commitment given by the Labour Government to offer 20 years on the Hillsborough site for Praxis, nor will they help financially for a sustainable and satisfactory relocation. This has placed the staff and those who work there in limbo. It would be a great injustice and a shame to allow the situation to occur where these people are not only without jobs at the Hillsborough Castle site but are unable to work

at another location due to budgetary restrictions.

An important point is that the proposed new redevelopment of Hillsborough Castle is supposed to make the site accessible to the public and also be inclusive of community and voluntary groups. So, how is the eviction of 16 people with learning difficulties from an environment from which they greatly benefit consistent with that? The SDLP supports the motion and echoes the need for greater day opportunities for people with a learning difficulty. The walled garden cafe at Hillsborough Castle has provided a safe and high-quality day opportunity for 16 individuals. For these reasons, we cannot allow this project to dissolve as a result of stalemated negotiations. The Secretary of State must now re-enter into negotiations with Praxis Care either to allow for the continuing employment of the 16 individuals with learning difficulties at the site or to help with relocation that is agreeable for all parties.

**Mr Poots:** I was grateful for the opportunity to make representation on this issue at the outset, and I have to say that the Northern Ireland Office appeared to be fairly fixed on it, certainly at that time. I think that that is regrettable. Having met Theresa Villiers to discuss the issue of ensuring that there is some continuity, I did not come away from that meeting with much positivity. However, I had arranged to meet representatives from Historic Royal Palaces a few days later, and the sounds coming from them were more encouraging. We should recognise that.

Hillsborough Castle is a massive asset to the local area and, indeed, to Northern Ireland. The Secret Garden has been used very well by Praxis Care to provide support, assistance and therapeutic care and to develop the employability of people with learning difficulties. It has been well supported by the local community, which acquires goods and services from what Praxis is providing. Indeed, the cafe is well used and utilised. So, in all of that, there is a massive positive potential that is being utilised by Praxis Care at the existing facility. Aligned with that are tremendous opportunities to have the doors of Hillsborough Castle and its gardens open to many more members of the public who would not otherwise see them, and we want to encourage that.

I suppose that the conundrum is how we can assist these two things to coexist. Both things have potential. Historic Royal Palaces would indicate that works have to be carried out and that, for health and safety reasons if for nothing

else, there will therefore have to be at least temporary movement from that facility to allow for the works to be carried out.

The question is then how we can integrate people who have a learning disability back into the new service that is being provided and how we can bring many more people through those grounds and the castle. I want to ensure that people who have a learning disability can play their part and can be part of the service that is provided to the public. I think that the opportunity still exists to engage in a positive way that will bring beneficial outcomes for the people who have a learning disability — it is about individuals first and foremost — and that will derive wider benefits for local employment and tourism and all that by bringing more people to the castle.

So, I will be encouraging all with a role to play to engage positively and to seek to find solutions and outcomes. I do not think that the starting point was a good place; however, I think that the conclusion can be a good place, should people set their minds to it. The Northern Ireland Office, Historic Royal Palaces and Praxis Care must focus on delivering a solution that will ensure that the well-being and needs of the learning disabled community that have been using that facility are met.

I am speaking from the Back Benches, but there is a willingness in the Department of Health to look at alternative provision, certainly while construction and development take place at the site. We would be prepared to engage with Praxis Care on that to ensure that we can provide a degree of continuity in the service that is provided for the Praxis users.

**Mr Copeland:** I support the motion. It is interesting when you find a debate in this Chamber that could use words such as "eviction", "landlord" and "lease", which echo through our history and are essentially still appearing here today. A one-time stately home that is now a royal residence has within its boundaries a facility that was put there by a charity that provides employment and, most of all, a role in life for 16 individuals who were not blessed with a particularly great start. An argument between the Secretary of State, a new company and the incumbent tenants is unfortunate, and, as the Health Minister said, it needs to be dealt with effectively.

It is my understanding that Historic Royal Palaces had a business plan accepted and that a fundamental tenet of that plan was acquisition of the asset put in place by Praxis at its expense, with no notion of compensation or

recognition for the work that had been done. In my view, this situation is mind-bendingly stupid, because no matter how much the papers and lawyers say that they are within their rights, they may be within their legal rights, but by no sensible person's judgement could they be held to be within their moral rights.

I find it encouraging that 16 less-fortunate people find themselves the focus of what appears to be substantial consensus among those who have turned up for this important debate. It does not take five minutes to say that something is wrong. It is patently obvious to anyone who examines the situation that this is wrong. The secret will be when the Secretary of State admits that they got this wrong and does something to rectify the situation.

**Mr Lunn:** I support the motion, and I am grateful to those who tabled it for securing the debate. Over the past few weeks, I tried unsuccessfully to secure an Adjournment debate on the matter, but this is a better forum, even if there are only 10 people here. This is a good opportunity for the House to send a unanimous message of disapproval of the actions of the Northern Ireland Office and the Secretary of State's treatment of Praxis.

Praxis has been on the site for 13 years. I think that Ms McCann said that it was 20 years, but it actually moved in in 2001. At that time, it was offered at least a 20-year security of tenure, but it received only a 10-year lease. It has offered employment at the Secret Garden for a number of learning disabled people, in the gardens and at the coffee shop. I say to any Member who has not been there that it is well worth a visit; it is a lovely facility.

Praxis worked on the assurance of a 20-year security of tenure from the Labour Government. In fact, the 10-year lease was being renegotiated in 2009 and 2010 with a view to providing, I understand, a 15-year extension. Of course, in 2010, along came the coalition Government, complete with Mr Cameron's big society idea, which seems a bit hollow in the circumstances. Suddenly, the extension was no longer on offer. Praxis was told, after several extensions and assurances from the Northern Ireland Office and Mrs Villiers, that it would have to leave because the new management organisation, Historic Royal Palaces, needed vacant possession of the entire site. Quite why that was the case is not clear. No consideration has been given to the well-being of employees and users, who will be devastated by such a move. It is not a normal redundancy or redeployment situation; this is much more sensitive and damaging. Neither

has there been consideration of the mounting cost of £400,000 that Praxis has invested since 2001, when it took over an overgrown wilderness and turned it into a four-acre credit to all concerned and a much-loved place to visit by locals and tourists alike.

Praxis has been told: "No compensation; no assistance with relocation costs — just vacate the site and find somewhere else. We need it for a new entrance and a new car park arrangement". Some big society we have here. They are really pushing the boat out for some of the most vulnerable people.

Does Historic Royal Palaces really need vacant possession? I very much doubt it. It says that it cannot access funding without it. That seems quite ludicrous, if true. I looked at the UK Government press release published in December, which states:

*"Historic Royal Palaces depends solely on the support of visitors, members, donors, volunteers and sponsors. It receives no funding from the government or the Crown."*

I could say that it states the exact opposite on the far side of the page, but time does not permit. The long-term plan, apparently, is to provide a car park on adjacent land across the road and a slip road from the A1 dual carriageway to allow people into the site more easily. If Mr Kennedy were here, I think that he would be greatly interested in that because a slip road from a dual carriageway is mighty expensive. It is also a long-term project, and, given the speed of movement in our planning system on land acquisition and the financial pressures on the road-building budget, if this ever happens, it will take forever. You could be talking about five years or more.

What is the rush? Under the circumstances, why do we need to disrupt the operation of the Secret Garden? There is already access through the garden to the rest of the estate, so why the rush to remove Praxis?

I am aware that Praxis was warned some time ago that it would have to go. It is now, presumably, occupying the site illegally. Far be it from me to support an illegal action, but I will support it because I see no reason why this decision should be rushed, and I agree completely with the Health Minister that there is room for more negotiation and a lot of time to do it.

I plead with the NIO, the Secretary of State and Historic Royal Palaces to think again. Either agree to allow Praxis to remain permanently or

on a temporary basis while negotiations continue. If it must move, I ask them to soften their hearts a bit and talk to Praxis about proper compensation and relocation costs.

I believe that there is a site available at Hillsborough Fort, just across the road, which could be utilised, and the Minister indicated that there might be some funding available. So, all is not lost.

1.45 pm

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

**Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I commend my colleagues for bringing the debate forward. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo. I share the disappointment and concern of all parties across the House about the fact that 16 people with learning disabilities could lose their valued employment.

I welcome the fact that we have all-party support and I think that that sends the strongest message to the NIO. I believe that the NIO is out of touch, shows a lack of empathy, and is going against the spirit of equality and human rights of the Good Friday Agreement. I was a member of the Sinn Féin negotiating team, and we put equality and human rights at the core of the agreement, and of every subsequent negotiation from Good Friday, precisely to stop ill-thought-out decisions such as this happening. Obviously, there was no equality impact assessment carried out on this matter. If they had carried out an equality impact assessment — it shows why the NIO should be subject to that — they would have seen that this has the potential to have adverse impacts on people with disabilities. So, I share the disappointment and the concern.

I also know, from my time in the Department of Education, the difficulties of the transition between ages 18 and 19 and the potential to secure employment for adults who, one day, are children and come under children's law and who then, the following day, are adults in a world where it is difficult for them to get employment. We should be opening doors, not closing them. Closing doors to 16 people with learning disabilities, and their families, is absolutely the wrong way to go for the NIO. The Secretary of State has obviously received poor and ill-thought-out advice. She should reject the advice from the NIO, reverse the decision and immediately engage with Praxis Care.

I pay tribute to Praxis Care, which has been very pragmatic and flexible. Obviously, its preferred option is that the 16 people remain on site, but it has also provided another way, which is to look at alternative sites. I call on the Secretary of State to match that flexibility and reasonableness, support the younger and older people to continue their jobs and make sure that we do not close down opportunities. The Secretary of State is the boss. She should not be led by her officials; she should be leading from the front. Closing this down is not leadership.

I pay tribute to Praxis Care for having the courage to protest. There comes a time when you have to stand up and be counted. They stood up and were counted, and fair play to them because sometimes that is what you have to do. Poor and wrong decision-making needs to be confronted and challenged. Mickey Brady from my party represented us at that protest, because we feel very strongly about this. So, well done to Praxis Care, not just for its work in relation to this but for its work across the North of Ireland for people with learning disabilities. It is doing wonderful work for which it deserves a lot of credit.

Sinn Féin is proud to choose the motion. We are delighted that other parties are supporting it and we look forward, along with other parties, to working with Praxis Care to ensure that we bring about a reversal of the decision. I end by again calling on the Secretary of State to immediately engage and ensure that these adults with learning disabilities have their job opportunities. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

**Mr B McCrea:** It is a little disappointing that the Assembly is empty for this important debate. I know that we probably all agree on the issue, but, even so, I think that we could give a little more attention to it. I have been to Praxis in the Secret Garden many times. I enjoyed a cup of tea, had a wander around and even bought a few hanging baskets at one stage. It is a wonderful environment, so I can understand why the people who consider that to be their home, or at least their place of work, are so disappointed at being asked to move.

There must be some fundamental misunderstanding because, as one of the Members who spoke earlier mentioned, for the NIO to get itself into such a poor public relations position is incredible. I do not know what the legalities are. I suspect that the NIO is 100% right on the legalities, but this is still not good business or good public relations.

People need to be careful about how they handle the situation. I am quite sure that the original intention, when the facility was granted, was a generous one that said, "Look, you can have these facilities for a peppercorn rent, and, if you want to make some investment in them, fair enough". So, the original intention was good, but, somewhere along the line, the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office have got themselves into a public relations disaster that, frankly, does not reflect well on either of them. I am sure that they must be looking at the situation and asking what it will take to resolve it.

I listened to the Minister of Health talking from the Back Benches about how the health authorities might be interested in looking at it, even on a temporary basis. There seems to me to be some prospect of such movement. If there are works that have to be carried out, fair enough — let us get them carried out, but let us find a way of providing certainty about what will happen after they are finished.

Three or four weeks ago, I said more or less the same thing on 'The Nolan Show' namely that there must be a better way of resolving this. At one stage, Praxis was not coming forward to explain its position. That was partly because it did not want to cause any public embarrassment. That is really the issue here. We have a situation developing —

**Mr Brady:** I thank the Member for giving way. I was on 'The Nolan Show' with him, and what came across was the lack of public understanding. A number of people asked why Praxis had invested £400,000. It was not explained that, initially, Praxis had a 20-year lease, which was going to be extended. It was moving onto a derelict site. That is why it invested, and it was a very good investment for the people who benefited and should continue to benefit from the facility.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am grateful to the Member for his intervention.

For me, the programme was good because it allowed Mr Brady to say what had to be said. The debate had seemed, once again, one-sided. Afterwards, I spoke to some people connected with Praxis, and they said that it was good that we were able to put forward the counterargument.

It is not that I intend to prolong the debate, because there is general agreement, I think, on the Floor, but, surely to goodness —

**Mr McNarry:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr B McCrea:** I will.

**Mr McNarry:** I appreciate that. Does the Member agree with me that somehow from this debate, small though the numbers are, a message must emerge that there needs to be an emphasis on a Members' lobby — particularly Members from the area, but involving everybody interested — of the NIO and particularly the Secretary of State to stop the damage that is being done?

**Mr B McCrea:** I am grateful to Mr McNarry for coming forward and pay tribute to him for that. As he said, this is of particular interest to constituency MLAs, but he, from just outside the constituency, has made a special point of being here to talk on the issue. I know that he has a great interest in these matters. This debate should be symbolised by our saying, "Do you know what? If we don't get this resolved pretty soon, there will be a much more raucous and much more engaged debate very shortly". We are giving people time to get it resolved. The NIO and the Secretary of State need to understand that time is not on their side.

Those people who enjoy their work there and want to carry on in the Praxis family should understand that we are all supportive of them, the good work that they do and the work that they provide for the people they look after.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Members, as Question Time commences at 2.00 pm, I suggest that we take our ease for a few moments. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mickey Brady.

*The debate stood suspended.*

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

2.00 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

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

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

### Victims and Survivors Service

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the independent assessment report on the Victims and Survivors Service. (AQO 5991/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson (The First Minister):** Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

**Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** The implementation of the recommendations is being overseen by a programme board that comprises representatives of the Victims and Survivors Service, the commission, the victims' forum and our own OFMDFM officials. An overarching implementation plan has been agreed, detailing the actions and the time frames and identifying the ownership for each recommendation, which will ensure timely and full implementation. The programme board is providing high-level strategic oversight, with a specific focus on progress against the recommendations. We then have a project board operating under the strategic direction of the programme board and providing advice on progress. The project board monitors the progress against the implementation plans through the individual work plans of recommendation owners.

Significant action has already been taken, with over half of the recommendations either fully or partially implemented. Considering the short time since receipt of the report, those developments demonstrate the clear commitment from those involved to work together to ensure that the necessary further improvements are made and that the recommendations are fully implemented.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the junior Minister for his answer, and I welcome the good news that he has given to the Assembly. Of course, we

will continue to monitor the situation. At the European day for victims of terrorism, a constituent of mine, Mr Thomas Boswell, who had been shot by the INLA and left for dead, said that the current service must be improved — I think that everyone agrees with that — but that it should be —

**Mr Speaker:** Will the Member come to his question?

**Mr A Maginness:** — but that it should be effective and practical. That is what we want. I ask the Minister to ensure that that is in the thinking of the Government.

**Mr Bell:** My sympathy is with your constituent, the victims of terrorism and their families, and those who have lost. In fact, some of the most inspirational and encouraging times that I have spent in this office have been going round victims, both individually and in groups, from Fermanagh to Belfast and right across Northern Ireland, hearing their stories, sometimes brought together collectively by people of completely different backgrounds. I listened to their advice and their hopes for the future to ensure that we do not go back.

The Member is correct. We have 70 recommendations: 55 are from the individual reports and a further 15 are from the commissioners who are covering the advice. Of those, ownership for 54 lies with the Victims and Survivors Service; ownership for seven lies with OFMDFM; DHSSPS has responsibility for two; and the remaining seven have joint ownership.

With regard to improvement, 64 of the 70 recommendations are due to be implemented by the end of June 2014, with a further two to be implemented by the end of August 2014. One recommendation is due to be implemented by March 2015, and three are dependent on other time frames. However, we expect those to be completed by the end of the year.

Those time frames have been agreed with all the responsible owners, and progress against them is being monitored monthly via the project and programme boards. I hope that that gives the Member some reassurance. I thank our staff, who have been so efficient in delivering against the targets that we have set. We are driving forward improvement, and we will continue to tailor-make the service to meet the needs of victims and survivors.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as

an fhreagra sin. No one doubts the direction or the intention of this piece of work. However, does the Minister agree, given the length and number of recommendations, that perhaps the knowledge, skills and experience of some of the officials are, perhaps, not as appropriate as they should be?

**Mr Bell:** We have listened very carefully to victims individually, to the organisations that represent them and, through the report that has been brought forward, to the Victims' Commissioner. It is an evolutionary process. We are getting better at it as we go along. The more we listen, the more we gather an evidence base. We set up the programme board, and we have the project board working towards that.

I have to say that the recommendations are many but so are the needs of victims. I think that the progress made, in such a short period after the analysis, in responding to the evidence of need has been very constructive and helpful.

During my last contact with individual victims and victims' groups, they praised our officials for reacting so quickly to the recommendations. As the Member will know, people will not believe what you say, but they will believe what you do. The fact is that many in the Victims and Survivors Service have seen the recommendations and heard about our commitment to doing this. However, as I outlined earlier, they are actually seeing our delivery on the ground against the recommendations and our target for meeting the others. So, I think that we are generally on a positive trajectory with the victims and survivors sector.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the junior Minister for that update and for the comprehensive detail and figures on the recommendations. He indicated that they hope to have, I think, three recommendations implemented before the end of the year. Will he give details on what those three recommendations are and why there is a delay in implementing them? Has that anything to do with the proposal of the board to advise the Victims and Survivors Service?

**Mr Bell:** I am not sure, towards the end, of the proposal of the board. It is extremely difficult to break down each of the 70 recommendations; I have set them out as best I can. I am not picking up that there are any difficulties with the board. As I said to the OFMDFM Committee at the time, I am very pleased that we have the victim representation that is there. We are very serious about matching each of those

recommendations. We have taken ownership of that, and we have detailed them down to specific Departments. We in OFMDFM have stepped up to the plate in respect of what is ours, and we have been very clear on what is shared.

The best way to deliver for victims and survivors is to have recommendations, to listen to the service, to put in place measures in order to strategically address each of those recommendations and a plan against which to measure them, and to get the resources necessary from government to ensure that they are achievable within a realistic time frame. We have done each and every one of those things. If any Member wishes to write to the office about any of the 70 recommendations that I spoke about, we will reply to them to let them know, because we have a project board examining each one.

If I may say so, I think that one of the successes of devolution is that, compared with the position that we were in under direct rule, the service that we provide today is significantly enhanced in respect of the quantity of services being provided on the ground and the financial capital being provided. In many ways, we can never make things right for some victims who have lost a loved one. We know that. However, we are determined to do all in our power to ensure that what we can get right, we will get right.

**Mr Humphrey:** What are the junior Minister's plans for the recruitment of a new Victims' Commissioner for Northern Ireland?

**Mr Bell:** First, I echo the First Minister and deputy First Minister's words about the sterling work that Kathryn Stone did for the service. She undertook a difficult and complex task. She listened to victims and survivors respond to the way in which they were treated; she brought sensitivity to the subject; she applied herself to the task; and she delivered so much with integrity in that period. I want to echo that and have it written into the record.

There have been considerable developments in the sector, particularly the recent independent assessment of the Victims and Survivors Service. We are committed to ensuring that the advice and recommendations that Kathryn brought to us are implemented. So, a new recruitment process will be initiated as soon as possible to appoint a new Commissioner for Victims and Survivors. We thank Kathryn again and put our thanks for her work into the record of the House.

## Welfare Reform: Financial Penalties

2. **Mr McNarry** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the departmental projects that they intend to cancel as a result of financial penalties imposed by HM Treasury for the failure to implement Welfare Reform. (AQO 5992/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** As Members will be aware, the Minister of Finance and Personnel has already informed the Assembly of the financial consequences arising from further delay in progress on welfare reform. To help to address that pressure, he suggested a 1.5% cut to all departmental baseline resource budgets for 2014-15. This will be entirely and ultimately a decision for the Executive. The Executive have not yet taken any decision on the matter. They may, indeed, decide to protect one or more Departments from any such cuts. Therefore, the cut from other budgets would be greater.

The Department is assessing the range of actions that are required to manage within a reduced 2014-15 resource departmental expenditure limits (DEL) baseline budget. Those potential actions include reductions to all baseline business areas, including arm's-length bodies. Difficult decisions will have to be made, but, in considering the way forward, we will seek as far as possible to minimise the impact on the delivery of front line services.

**Mr McNarry:** I appreciate the grim aspect of the First Minister's answer. Accordingly, my supplementary question is this: has the good ship Executive hit the rocks over this issue? Can we be told, or should we expect, that the choppy waters between the First Minister and the deputy First Minister are to be calmed? Or, really, are we being positioned for budget reductions all round because penalties will be prioritised instead of programmes? Finally, will he give an assurance that all will be done to see that we are talking about salvaging a situation and not a shipwreck over this issue?

**Mr P Robinson:** First, I think that we have to recognise that in any coalition — this is much more the case when the coalition is mandatory — people come from very different ideological backgrounds. It is not unnatural that there are differences between parties in the Executive. That will always be the case. The press sometimes feigns surprise at that, but it is not unusual that people should have a different approach.

Of course, we will obviously have to sit down to try to resolve these matters. Quite simply, the

money runs out, and we have to deal with it. We cannot simply be left in circumstances where our permanent secretaries, who are the accounting officers for Departments, are forced to take decisions and seek directions.

As far as the Executive are concerned, I trust that they can sit down and look at the penalties, which have already begun. We have already had £13 million taken out of our Budget for this year, and another £87 million is to be taken out during the rest of this year. It will be £1 billion over the next five years. You simply cannot ignore and close your eyes to the consequences of that. It will have an impact on the services that we have, and we need to take the necessary decisions. By far, in my view, the best decision to take is to accept that the enhanced package, which DSD proposed and which is before the Executive, should be approved. That would be a better deal than anywhere else in the United Kingdom for those who require welfare assistance.

**Mr Campbell:** Is the First Minister aware that, just before the Easter recess, I had a written response from Danny Alexander of the Treasury that pointed out some of the statistics that the First Minister just provided? Given the very clear implications that that will have for our Budget, can he be any more specific about the possible consequences of the ongoing failure to implement welfare reform?

2.15 pm

**Mr P Robinson:** I think we have to be candid: we are facing a nightmare scenario. That can be seen not only through the figures that I gave to the Member for Strangford but in the very serious issue of computerisation. The figures given by DSD indicate that, if we are to continue with the present arrangements, the new required computer system will cost well over £1 billion. That will be £1 billion in capital and £1 billion in revenue over the next five years and will undoubtedly lead to the loss of around 1,400 or 1,500 jobs in the north-west for those who are already servicing welfare reform payments in GB. On top of that, the computer system will be switched off during 2016, so unless our new system were up by then — everybody in IT tells me that there is no chance of the new system being ready by then — it would require us to make manual payments or no payments. That would be unacceptable. If manual payments are required, staff numbers at all offices would have to be increased.

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his response thus far. Does he

agree that the Executive, in line with Programme for Government commitments, have a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society?

**Mr P Robinson:** Yes, I do, and I believe that the Executive will be the envy of the rest of the United Kingdom when they see that we have been able to negotiate twice-monthly payments; split payments so that one or other partner can receive them; direct payments to landlords; and the recent package that deals with joint claims and sets up a £6 million fund to provide payments for medical reports. It proposes a contingency fund of around £30 million to deal with the hardest cases, and of course it does not apply the bedroom tax to Northern Ireland to any sitting tenants.

**Mrs D Kelly:** The First Minister has, on more than one occasion, referred to an agreement that he and the deputy First Minister had come to on the implementation of welfare reform. Will he inform the House of the terms of that agreement and its sticking points?

**Mr P Robinson:** I want to be absolutely clear. We have a process, which I want to keep, whereby, although we have discussions that will reach a conclusion, we never have an agreement until the parties come back having considered them at a party stage. The outline that I gave to the Member opposite is the basis on which those discussions took place.

**Mr Copeland:** In October 2012, the Social Development Minister, Mr McCausland, told the House that we would run out of road by March 2013 in bringing forward the Welfare Reform Bill. It is now 12 months later. Will the Minister comment on what happened to that prediction?

**Mr P Robinson:** I think that it is pretty obvious. We are already being penalised. The Minister was absolutely right to draw it to our attention. We have not met the deadlines, the penalties have been imposed, reductions in our Budget have commenced and will increase year on year, so we have to face up to it.

I cannot understand why the Welfare Reform Bill was stopped in the Assembly, because the details that we are talking about are not in the Bill but in subsequent regulations. The Assembly could have passed the Bill and had continuing discussions about the regulations, but we have run out of road, the penalties have started, and they will get more severe to the extent of amounting to £1 billion over the next five years.

## Delivering Social Change

3. **Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how agendas such as Delivering Social Change are fostering more effective cross-departmental working. (AQO 5993/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** The Delivering Social Change framework represents a new level of joined-up working across government to achieve real and long-lasting social benefits for those in our society who are in most need. Absolutely critical to this is Ministers coming together to agree common approaches to shared problems. That is why the Executive ministerial subgroup meetings are at the centre of Delivering Social Change. At these regular meetings, key Ministers set the agenda, discuss significant challenges and agree shared actions to deliver tangible progress.

The benefits of this approach are illustrated by the multi-departmental, multi-agency and multi-sectoral implementation of six key cross-cutting signature programmes. These programmes were developed in the context of the three operating priorities for Delivering Social Change in this mandate. They provide tangible benefits to citizens and test beds for the deployment of joined-up and evidence-based policies that will, in time, provide a significant influence on mainstream programme expenditure. The framework has also encouraged positive and effective working relationships between Departments, leading to considerable progress being made. We are already starting to see positive outcomes through the practical delivery of these initial programmes.

Looking forward, we remain committed to the provision of a holistic approach to tackling the integrated, complex and at times spiralling issues that can lead to social deprivation. Delivering Social Change will remain critical to achieving that goal.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the First Minister for his response. Will he outline how Delivering Social Change has contributed to tackling educational underachievement?

**Mr P Robinson:** Over the past number of weeks educational underachievement, particularly among boys in the Protestant community, has again been highlighted. Of course, a number of initiatives are contained in Delivering Social Change to deal with that issue. First, we have recognised that there is a parenting requirement, and hubs have been set up. In addition, we already have 223 teachers

who are providing one-to-one tuition for students who are lagging behind. That is happening in, I believe, 267 schools. Although the process is delivering on a number of priorities, it is attacking that issue. However, it is an issue on which there is much more to be done.

**Mr Eastwood:** I thank the First Minister for his answers thus far. What engagement has there been with practitioners and experienced stakeholders prior to giving out funding under Delivering Social Change?

**Mr P Robinson:** Departmental officials regularly meet stakeholders in each of the areas. Because this set of proposals covers a wide range of Departments, we expect that other Departments are doing exactly the same thing. It is important from our point of view that we have that input, not only at the early stage but on an ongoing basis, so that we can make assessments and monitor the progress that is being made.

**Mr Swann:** I thank the First Minister for his answers, in which he highlights the importance of Ministers coming together in cross-departmental working. Will he assure us that he will use his offices to bring together the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Agriculture Minister to ensure that we get the best deal in future for the single farm payment and that the decision is made in the Executive and not in the courts?

**Mr P Robinson:** I can tell the Member that I have already had discussions about this during the course of today. It is a very important issue, and my special advisers have already been in touch with the deputy First Minister's special advisers to seek meetings so that we can have discussions on those issues. Those of us who are out and about in present circumstances know that it is a very real issue on the doorsteps in the rural community.

## Welfare Reform: Financial Penalties

6. **Mrs Cameron** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the impact on their departmental budget of a failure to implement Welfare Reform. (AQO 5996/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** Our officials are assessing a range of actions required to manage a minimum of £1 million of a reduction in the 2014-15 OFMDFM resource DEL baseline budget, which is a direct consequence on our Department of the failure to implement welfare reform. These

potential actions include reductions to all baseline business areas, including arm's-length bodies. Difficult decisions will have to be made, but, in considering the way forward, we will, as I have already said today, seek to minimise the impact on the delivery of front line services.

**Mrs Cameron:** I thank the First Minister for his answer. How does he propose that the Executive deal with the ongoing damage caused by the fines and penalties imposed by Treasury?

**Mr P Robinson:** The only way that the Executive can deal with it is to take a decision on the way forward. I notice that somebody else breached the Executive code: I read in the newspaper that I proposed at the last Executive meeting that the Executive have a day specifically to deal with the issue and that we look at bringing in some independent authority to give us figures that we can all accept on the consequences. It does us no good if I put out a set of figures on what the consequences are and we get a different set elsewhere. We end up confusing the public, and I do not think that that is helpful. It is far better that we get somebody independent who can look at each area, what the cost to the Executive will be and what the potential cost will be if computerisation has to be brought in. We can then at least be singing from the same hymn sheet about what the consequences are, and I hope that we will be able to reach some agreement on how we deal with those consequences.

**Mr Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the First Minister agree that the Executive have already taken a number of decisions that differ from those taken in Westminster and that those have had cost implications? If that is the case, why is it not possible to treat welfare cuts on the same basis?

**Mr P Robinson:** Of course, that decision should be taken by the Executive, if that is a decision that the Executive want to take. I am pointing out to the Member that we are not talking about tens of millions of pounds to deal with this; we are talking about £1 billion in our resource budget over the next five years and £1 billion off our capital budget. That is far beyond what the Executive are capable of bearing without it having very serious consequences for the rest of the provisions that the Executive are mandated to give.

## Social Issues/Poverty

7. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions their Department has taken to tackle social issues and poverty. (AQO 5997/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

**Mr Bell:** The Executive's main priority is to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage. Our Department is driving the Delivering Social Change framework to address the priority social policy areas. Seven signature programmes are being progressed across the Departments, and they are to support families, to address the barriers to learning, to improve literacy and numeracy and to support job creation in local communities.

OFMDFM is taking forward 23 social investment fund projects worth £33 million to tackle poverty and deprivation through improved community-based services and facilities. Progress is being made against the commitments in the Together: Building a United Community strategy. We have approved an innovative pilot scheme for 50 young people aged 18 to 24 who are not in employment, education or training to participate in the Headstart programme, which will help to inform the design of the United Youth programme. We are working to address the most immediate childcare needs identified during consultation. All 15 key first actions are under way, including the Bright Start school-age childcare grant scheme, which aims to create or sustain up to 7,000 school-age childcare places.

We are also working to address the challenges of disadvantage and tackle discrimination. In December, we launched a schools educational resource pack on the rights of people with disabilities. In February, we issued the Active Ageing strategy for public consultation in addition to improving existing services to ensure that they best meet the needs of older people. We have worked with Departments to propose some new programmes to tackle the challenges facing older people. In addition, we are working on the development of a new gender equality strategy —

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister's time is gone.

**Mr Bell:** — and have started consultation on other strategies.

**Miss M McIlveen:** Further to that answer, could the House be provided with additional detail on

the aspiration and proposed outcomes of the community family support programme?

**2.30 pm**

**Mr Bell:** The community family support programme is aimed at people not in education, employment or training. From January to June 2013, a 26-week intervention programme supporting parents and helping young people not in education, employment or training was successfully piloted with 44 families living in east and west Belfast, Cookstown, Strabane and Newtownabbey. The pilot programme targeted 44 post-primary school families with children aged between 14 and 18 to help 88 young people re-engage with employment, education or training. Families completed short accredited training courses and work placements, and they were provided with one-to-one employment advice, including advice on CV writing and interview technique.

The families also engaged in debt management, stress management and healthy eating and cooking programmes, and in confidence, motivational and life-coaching classes. Some of the positive outcomes from the pilot included young people returning to school to complete their GCSEs, improved school attendance and family members participating in structured training programmes. An upscaled version of the pilot was launched in November. It is being rolled out to 720 families. Some 904 participants are enrolled in the first cycle, of whom 325 are 14- to 24-year-olds.

**Mr Speaker:** That concludes questions for oral answer to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. We now move to topical questions. Question 7 has been withdrawn.

## **Credibility of Administration**

1. **Mr Allister** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the First Minister, as joint leader of this Administration, thinks is the impact on its credibility of the fact that the deputy First Minister has now been identified by one of his IRA buddies, Peter Rogers, as a director of terrorism. (AQT 1021/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** I do not think that anybody in the House will be surprised. If anything, I am surprised that the Member seems to think that this is some novel outcome that has been reached over the past number of days. I do not think that anybody will be surprised. Indeed, the deputy First Minister has made no secret of

his involvement with the IRA. He gave evidence to the Saville inquiry to that effect. The reality, of course, is that, if there is any evidence that he has been involved in criminal activity, he, like any of the rest of us, should be brought before the courts and tried.

**Mr Allister:** The First Minister will be aware that there is quite a widespread view that, under the aegis of the peace process, of which these arrangements are part, the deputy First Minister and his party leader are in some way untouchable with regard to criminal liability. Does the First Minister agree with that perception? As First Minister, has he made any representations to the prosecuting authorities about the pursuit of those with terrorist pasts?

**Mr P Robinson:** I have consistently indicated that I believe that certain people have been left alone because of their involvement with the political process, which the Government do not want to disturb. I drew that to the public attention, most recently, about the on-the-runs (OTRs) and the use of the royal prerogative of mercy. However, those are issues that are being considered by a number of inquiries. No one should be less amenable because of their political involvement. He will know from his days in the Democratic Unionist Party that the first principle of the party is that everybody is equally subject to the law. So, I hope that the Member will recognise that all these matters have to be dealt with by the due process of law. If anybody has evidence against any Member, they should bring it to the authorities. There are proper processes to go through. Again, everybody should be amenable to the law.

## **Colliers International: Market Research**

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it will comply with the Information Commissioner's order to publish this week the outstanding information on market research by Colliers International into the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. (AQT 1022/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** The deputy First Minister and I will have a conversation on this issue. However, I think we should recognise that the FOI issue is not black and white. It is not the case that everything that government does should be published and disclosed. In the public interest, we have to ensure that government can still operate effectively. Clearly, within the legislation, there are exemptions to ensure that facts and information can be given to Ministers in a way that does not

prejudice the Ministers or those who provide the facts. That exemption on policy formulation is there. It is not unnatural, I suspect, that, in performing his duty, the Information Commissioner might see that the onus should be on disclosure. Equally, from the point of view of Ministers, we have to be certain in disclosing information that it is in the public interest, and that is a matter of opinion. It is a matter of principle, rather than one of law.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Does the Minister accept that the time to appeal on this issue has passed and, therefore, the time for conversations has passed and that not to publish this week would be contempt?

**Mr P Robinson:** I think that the Member is a little confused about the law. He might like to look at section 35 of the legislation, where he will see what some people refer to as a "ministerial veto" that can be exercised. We will discuss whether to publish, publish with redactions, or operate under section 35.

I say to the Member that we are dealing with two cases in FOI. One relates to the risk register, and the other to the Maze. In the case of the Maze, this is a report that Ministers did not ask for, did not approve of and had no knowledge of until it had been undertaken. It is the kind of report that officials carry out to provide the very best of information and give Ministers options. I believe that there are some mischievous people, perhaps even some down in that corner of the Chamber, who would seek to use a report that is the views of other people and associate it with the Ministers who did not approve of it being carried out.

## Welfare Reform: Church Response

3. **Mr Milne** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the unprecedented direct attack by 27 Anglican bishops and 16 other clergymen who accused the Tory-led coalition of creating hardship and hunger through welfare reform changes in Britain. (AQT 1023/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** I am responsible for many things, Mr Speaker, as you know, but one thing I am not responsible for is the actions of the Conservative/Lib Dem Administration in GB. Of course, there are people on both sides of this argument. All I can tell the Member, from the point of view of the figures for Northern Ireland, is that the amount of money that will be spent on welfare continues to increase year-on-year, even with welfare reform.

**Mr Milne:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire go dtí seo. It is fair enough to say where your responsibilities lie, but does the First Minister not accept that the Executive have a duty and responsibility to protect the most vulnerable against the raft of austerity measures proposed by Westminster?

**Mr P Robinson:** I do, and I point out again to the Member the additional steps that are being proposed here in Northern Ireland that are not available elsewhere in the United Kingdom. What joy there would be on the British mainland if the bedroom tax were not to be applied there; it does not apply under the proposals that we have here in Northern Ireland. What joy there would be there on the British mainland if a fund were set up to deal with all the people hardest-hit by the changes under welfare reform, whereas we have proposed such a fund in the region of £30 million — and all the other changes that I outlined earlier. However, the Member has to take into account that there is not only one set of vulnerable people that we have to deal with. If we have to take money away from our health budget or other budgets, we will hit vulnerable people. We will hit people who are looking for new cancer drugs and will not be able to get them, and people looking for hip replacements. The issue of vulnerability is a two-sided coin. The Member has to recognise that there would be impacts on service delivery in Northern Ireland if we were to spend our money in the way he suggests.

## Invest NI: Performance

4. **Mr Anderson** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline whether Invest NI is meeting its targets in attracting jobs to Northern Ireland, following this morning's welcome announcement of almost 500 new jobs in the EY accountancy firm. (AQT 1024/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** Invest Northern Ireland will make its own statement in the next week or so, so I will perhaps give a trailer of what is to come. It has more than met its target for foreign direct investment. The jobs announced this morning were different in that they were not foreign direct investment; they were home-grown jobs. The management of EY took the initiative itself when it saw the possibility in the company of setting up a new business unit. Whereas, for many people, the answer was, "India. What's the question?", they turned it on its head and said, "The answer is Northern Ireland, and here are the skills that we have; here's the cost-competitive base that we have."

As a consequence, 486 jobs were announced today. Invest Northern Ireland is well ahead of its target for foreign direct investment.

**Mr Anderson:** I thank the First Minister for that response. Does he agree that that announcement is further evidence that devolution is making a significant difference when it comes to attracting jobs for the people of Northern Ireland?

**Mr P Robinson:** We have probably had a higher level of jobs coming into Northern Ireland than at any time in the history of Northern Ireland. In fact, during April so far, we have had 2,000 job announcements. That is a very considerable contribution to getting the increase in our economy that we have all been looking for. As the cinemas often say, there is more to come.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Jo-Anne Dobson to ask question 5.

**Mrs Dobson:** Apologies. I was not prepared for my question, Mr Speaker.

## Giro d'Italia

6. **Ms Boyle** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it believes that the Giro d'Italia will be a success. (AQT 1026/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** Yes, in spite of the junior Minister cowping from his bike on Saturday. I do not think that he will in the running for it. The Giro d'Italia is a massive success for Northern Ireland. I think that people are beginning to get the excitement of what is one of the great spectator sports. The sight of cyclists going at speeds that cars go at will be breathtaking for Northern Ireland. Most important from a Northern Ireland perspective is the fact that the pictures will go out right across the world to about 800 million people, who will be having a look at the Northern Ireland countryside and, most important of all, the start in east Belfast.

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister. I have not seen any of the pictures of the junior Minister coming off his bike, but he has obviously had a speedy recovery.

It is disappointing that, like other areas, west Tyrone, which is my area, does not feature in the cycle route. Can more be done to encourage similar events in the future to be located in west Tyrone and the west?

**Mr P Robinson:** I suspect that quite a number of MLAs will get to their feet to regret the fact that the race will not go through their constituency. I can send the junior Minister to Tyrone, if that is any help to you.

When we are looking at sporting events, we want to get as wide a spread as possible, depending on what the facilities are in various parts of the country.

**Mr Speaker:** Question 7 has been withdrawn, and Tom Buchanan is not in his place for question 8.

## On-the-runs: Judge-led Inquiry

9. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the judge-led on-the-runs inquiry. (AQT 1029/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson:** I have already met Judge Hallett, and I will meet her again next week. I understand that she has been interviewing people in the Civil Service and the police. I understand that she is looking at a wide range of documents.

## 2.45 pm

I suspect that the report will be helpful, not least to the other inquiries by providing them with an analysis of where best they might look. Although the House of Commons inquiry gives power to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to ask for persons and papers, it will be a fairly empty power unless it knows who to ask for and what papers it should seek. I think that the Hallett report should provide a lot of information that might allow it to have further interrogation of the issues.

**Mr Kinahan:** Is the First Minister content that she is not reviewing every letter? If she does not find out what we want, is he still going to put his job on the line?

**Mr P Robinson:** Can we be very clear that, as regards an inquiry, I had a choice, like anybody else in the House would have, if they were in my position, of whether to wait 10 years, which is how long it would take if we were to have the full public inquiry that some people in the House asked for. I am not prepared to wait 10 years for an outcome, and I do not believe that the people of Northern Ireland are prepared to wait that length of time for an outcome.

In my view, we have the very best of circumstances, whereby we have a judge-led inquiry that has the powers to go into Departments, here in Northern Ireland and in London, as well as the ability to go to the PSNI or the Public Prosecution Service. At the same time, we have two other inquiries, one with the Justice Committee in the Assembly and another with the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which, I think, are likely to be more long-term inquiries. I believe that the combination of them all can get to the truth.

## Agriculture and Rural Development

**Mr Speaker:** Question 11 has been withdrawn.

### Flooding: Home Insurance

1. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the Association of British Insurers to ensure that provision for flooding within home insurance remains available and affordable for residents. (AQO 6006/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. For clarity, insurance is a reserved matter, and, therefore, the work that is associated with the replacement for the statement of principles on flood insurance is being taken forward by Westminster Ministers and their officials, obviously with input from here. The new arrangements for flood insurance are being brought onto the statute book via the Water Bill. That draft legislation is at an advanced stage, with commencement due in early 2015.

To ensure that the arrangements are suitable for here, I, along with officials from my Department, have had regular contact with representatives of the Association of British Insurers, DEFRA Ministers and officials from Departments in England, Scotland and Wales. Specifically, I met the Association of British Insurers as far back as November 2012 to discuss potential options. The association has recently been in contact with my officials to arrange an update meeting. Given my concerns about home insurance, I have also written to DEFRA Ministers on a number of occasions stressing the need to ensure that home insurance, including provision for flooding, remains available and affordable for all residents in the North of Ireland and that that is adequately reflected in any agreed solution.

**Mr Copeland:** I thank the Minister for her answer. The Minister will be aware that the way to reduce insurance premiums is to reduce risk. We still have a very questionable situation whereby, for example, water in Belfast lough is the responsibility of DCAL; once it enters the Connswater river, it is the responsibility of the Rivers Agency; once it overflows the bank, it is the responsibility of DOE; and once it goes onto the roads, it is the responsibility of DRD. Can the Minister update us on the degree of cooperation that is taking place between all those Departments to ensure that the risk and, therefore, the premiums are minimised?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Obviously, there are very strong links and strong coordination across all Departments. I think that that has been evidenced in some of the situations that we have found ourselves in over the past number of years and even in the threat from coastal and tidal flooding. I have always said that I am open to looking at the bigger picture of who is strategically best placed to take forward the whole remit of flooding in general. However, I think that that needs to be done in the context of the wider discussion of departmental roles and responsibilities. I do not think that we should just pick and choose areas for movement now. So, there are strong links, which I very much welcome, and we will continue to have them. As I said, I am very open to any future discussions on how that is formatted and which Department takes the lead.

**Mr McKinney:** What specifically can DARD do? What are the specific options that the Minister is referring to in her discussions with the Association of British Insurers?

**Mrs O'Neill:** As I said, we have had a number of discussions. In particular, I was keen to stress with DEFRA and with the Association of Insurers that any solution must reflect our local needs. The scale of the problem in England is bigger compared with ours, so it is important that our householders are not penalised as a result of that. I made that point very strongly and had those discussions over the past couple of years. In moving forward, the levy that is being imposed on all householders will be more formalised. A levy of £10-50 already exists, and we are looking towards stabilising that and putting it into legislation. A number of arrangements are being taken forward, and we will have a lot more discussion on the issue when it comes to the House. We are talking about an implementation date of 2015.

**Mr Speaker:** Thomas Buchanan is not in his place.

## Single Farm Payment

3. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when people whose single farm payment is outstanding will receive their payment. (AQO 6008/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department has delivered a record payment performance for the 2013 scheme year, with 99% of claims finalised to date. More farmers received their single farm payment in December 2013 than ever before. The value of the payments made so far is £264.7 million and is a vital element of farm incomes. I am pleased to announce that the results of all remote sensing inspections have been processed. Payments have been issued to the businesses concerned. In fulfilment of my Department's commitment to the industry, payments have been made to the inspected businesses two months earlier than last year and four months earlier than the year before that. Currently, there are 357 outstanding single farm payment claims from the 2013 scheme year. These claims are not yet finalised because of a variety of reasons including probate proceedings, bank account details not being provided by businesses and disputes between businesses concerning land. The resolution of the claims is being pursued on an ongoing basis, but, in the great majority of cases, delay is due to factors outside the Department's control.

**Lord Morrow:** We are speaking today about those who have not received their payments, not about those who have received them. I note that the Minister can give no comfort at all about when these final payments will be made. Does she accept that a lot of hardship has been caused because the payments have not been made? Does she also acknowledge that it is incumbent on her Department to do everything that it can to ensure that the debacle ends as quickly as possible?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Perhaps the Member was not listening properly, but I clearly said that all cases that have been inspected by remote sensing have been paid. Some 99% of all claims have been paid, and the remaining 357 claims that are yet to be paid are as a result of issues that are outside the Department's control. Those include legal issues such as probate. We are in a very positive situation with the people who were having a remote sensing inspection and were waiting for their payment.

We are in a better place, and more people have been paid this year than ever before. Year-on-year, the picture is getting better. I very much welcome that, as does the industry. I have always said that I understand the stress and the financial situation of people who were waiting to be paid. I assure all recipients of the single farm payment that next year will be better again. We will continue to improve, year-on-year, but issues such as people not providing bank details are far beyond my control or that of my Department. We will continue to work with claimants on those issues to try to get payment for those people, but I do not think that anyone can walk away or ignore the fact that, year-on-year, over the past couple of years, we are in a better position by four months. There are improvements every year, and next year will be even better.

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. What were the payment processing targets for December 2013 and February 2014?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat. The payment target for December 2013 was 85%, and we achieved 90%. The payment target for February was 95%, and we achieved almost 97%. As I said, the total payment is now 99%. This is a positive and improved picture, and it will only get better.

**Mr Rogers:** Thanks to the Minister for her answers thus far. With the advent of the new CAP, what consideration has been given to proposals for advance payments of the single farm payment?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have always said that we hope to be in a position whereby we can make advance payments, and that will be part of the consideration in moving forward. For us to be able to get to the position to do that, we need more inspection cases to be dealt with by remote sensing. We have really ramped up the numbers over the past couple of years. Next year, I intend to increase that number, and we will learn from some of this year's experiences to get a better spread of how that is done. Once we are able to do that, and we have the majority of, if not all, cases done by remote control sensing, we will be in a position to make advanced payments. I am very open to doing that.

The priority to date has been getting the majority of people paid as early as possible in December. We will continue to drive forward with that, but I am absolutely open to advanced

payments when we are in a position to do that, which hopefully will be over the next couple of years.

**Mr Swann:** I thank the Minister for her answers. She highlighted that she understands that the single farm payment is an essential cash-flow pipeline for many farms. What will happen to agriculture in Northern Ireland in general should the Executive fail to agree a model for the future single farm payment and on 1 August we go to that default position, which is a single region with no transition?

**Mrs O'Neill:** These are major decisions. It is a massive change for the industry. People are watching carefully as decisions are taken. They want clarification, and rightly so. We have been anxious in decisions taken to date to communicate that message and that people fully understand those decisions. I am mindful of the bigger decisions still to be taken and the need to have them taken sooner rather than later. We are working through that. There is a political process and process of government to go through, which we are actively doing. As soon as I am able to confirm the rest of those decisions, I will do so.

As I said, I hope that it will be sooner rather than later that we are able to confirm for people what the future holds. This is an industry with massive potential; it can grow, and it is asking the Executive to support it. I want to see the Going for Growth strategy paper agreed. Let the industry see that the Executive are serious about it. There is a lot of work to be done, surely, but we are in the process of government, and I hope to be able to get things clarified sooner rather than later.

## Animal Welfare

4. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the adequacy of the mechanisms within councils for the delivery of the welfare of animals. (AQO 6009/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The provisions in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 strengthened the role of councils in dealing with local issues, as dog wardens and environmental health officers had previously dealt with dog control issues. Councils had experience and a presence in residential areas, where most welfare offences in respect of domestic pets are likely to occur. The involvement of councils has been a major step forward as it is the first time that the North has had a dedicated manpower resource to investigate animal welfare complaints in respect

of non-farmed animals and a budget to fund the work.

Councils enforce the Act on a regional basis through five groups. Nine animal welfare officers work across the whole of the North if necessary. These officers were appointed following an open competition publicly advertised in line with council recruitment procedures. Essential and desirable criteria included relevant experience and qualifications in the professional care, management or handling of animals. Successful applicants came from a variety of backgrounds and with a range of skills.

These officers have completed a rigorous training programme compiled and delivered by the RSPCA, which has many years' experience of animal welfare enforcement in England and Wales. Additional training in areas such as equine handling and evidence gathering has been undertaken. They are supported by management, administrative and legal support. Depending on the circumstances of the case being investigated, they can also seek the services of veterinarians and specialist animal care providers with whom they have a contract.

I am encouraged by the positive approach taken by councils and by the close and effective partnership working between councils and DARD officials in putting in place the necessary arrangements.

**Mr Maskey:** I thank the Minister for her comprehensive reply. Who or what organisation is responsible for the enforcement of animal welfare issues in respect of non-farmed animals?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The PSNI has responsibility for enforcement in respect of wild animals, animals fighting and welfare issues where other criminal activities are involved. Councils have responsibility for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals such as domestic pets and horses. Councils have nine animal welfare officers to enforce the Act across the North. The powers in the Act allow council animal welfare officers to take a range of actions to address any animal welfare case, including providing advice, giving a warning or issuing a legally binding improvement notice or prosecution. The circumstances of each case will determine the most appropriate action.

It is important that the PSNI, councils and my Department be involved in the enforcement of the Act, as it provides a new duty of care and allows inspectors to issue improvement notices for animals not being properly cared for. That

would not be appropriate work for the PSNI. However, should the PSNI wish to investigate and prosecute any animal welfare complaint, the Act provides the powers for them to do so. Importantly, only the PSNI can make arrests in a matter where an offence has been committed under the Act.

**3.00 pm**

**Mr Campbell:** Will the Minister make available senior officials from her Department in the north-west, where a public representative has been approached by a landowner who lived in England and whose land was vacant but was used by others to graze livestock? Some of the livestock perished because of neglect. That landowner is seeking redress and a resolution to the problem upon return to that land. Will she ensure that, after I have approached her Department, officials will be available to try to alleviate that situation?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Member will be aware of the normal practice. If he contacts the Department, I am sure that officials will make themselves available to discuss that individual case. It is not appropriate for us to discuss it across the Chamber today.

**Mr Kinahan:** I thank the Minister for her answers so far. She is probably aware that Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary, which last year was trying to find homes for some 200 horses and other animals, is owed a large sum by Belfast City Council. That is still to be sorted out. However, she has indicated that she is happy with the mechanisms. Will she use all the influence that she has in the Executive and with councillors and others to ensure that councils get contracts in place and pay so that they look after animals and places such as Crosskennan are not put in danger?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Crosskennan does a great job. It is not for me to comment on its contractual issues with Belfast City Council. I do not think that that would be appropriate. However, I am hopeful that they can perhaps find a solution. I know that there has been a public element to the matter, but I think that it would be inappropriate for me to comment. Suffice it to say that, in all these arrangements and the contracts that councils have to deliver on the welfare of animals, it is important that everyone is very clear on their contractual responsibilities and the financial remuneration that accompanies those. I will leave it at that. I hope that Crosskennan can resolve the dispute with Belfast City Council.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. In light of recent court cases and the widespread dissatisfaction with the lightness of sentences imposed, and given that the Minister introduced the relevant legislation, will she raise the matter with the Minister of Justice as a matter of urgency?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Yes. In light of the public concern about sentencing, particularly in the east Belfast case, I wrote to the Minister of Justice and the Lord Chief Justice about the sentencing guidelines. I think that we have fit-for-purpose legislation. However, sentencing is where, in my opinion, that case fell down. I have written to both those parties, and I intend to meet the Minister of Justice for further discussions on how we can work together to improve matters. However, I believe that the key failing in the east Belfast case was the sentencing as opposed to the legislation that is in place.

## Going for Growth: Exports

**5. Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she intends to meet the strategic policy in the Going for Growth action plan to increase agricultural exports by 75 % to £4.5 billion by 2018. (AQO 6010/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Going for Growth is the industry-led strategic action plan developed by the Agri-Food Strategy Board. Development of the plan is a priority 1 commitment in the Programme for Government, and agrifood is also highlighted as a key growth sector in the Executive's economic strategy. That demonstrates the importance of the sector and the key role that it will play in rebalancing and rebuilding the North's wider economy.

Going for Growth outlines significant targets up to 2020, including an increase in sales outside the North by almost £2 billion to £4.5 billion. The report also targets an increase in turnover of £2.5 billion to £7 billion, an increase in value added to £1 billion and 15,000 additional jobs.

The report identifies significant opportunities for export growth, with a focus on growing markets in the USA, Africa, and the Middle and Far East. I have already visited China to talk to officials about the quality and safety of our produce. In addition, the First Minister and deputy First Minister recently visited Japan, where they promoted our local food and drink. My Department is also supporting access to new markets through the efforts of supply chain development and veterinary services. Most

recently, Singapore announced that it was opening its markets to beef from the North and Northern beef sourced from Southern cattle. I am confident that others will follow.

Irrespective of the proposed market, any growth must be sustainable, and I welcome the view of the Agri-Food Strategy Board that growth must be based on sustainability and profitability of the entire supply chain, recognising the importance that each part plays in producing high-quality and traceable food.

I am fully committed to delivering on Going for Growth and, along with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I have brought proposals to the Executive on the way forward for this important report.

**Mrs Cochrane:** I thank the Minister for her answer and welcome the number of issues she addressed. Specifically regarding increasing agriculture exports, will the Minister detail any other small programmes that she may have in place to encourage this, what funding might be in place and how she plans to monitor the success of those programmes?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Export sales and the export market are at the core of the Going for Growth strategy, and there is collective Executive effort to target those markets. You can see that by the visits in which I, OFMDFM and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have been involved. It is about getting out there and selling our wares. It is about promoting what we have: a clean, green image, and a fantastic product that people desire. That is the job of the Executive.

As to how we move forward, support the industry and fund the Going for Growth strategy, we have taken forward quite a number of areas of work and are not just sitting and waiting for Executive approval. Whilst these are smaller things, they all add up to form the bigger picture. As far as supporting Going for Growth and its financing is concerned, had I been able to transfer the money from pillar 1 to pillar 2 in the rural development programme, which was blocked, we would have been in a better financial position with respect to funding some of the measures that we would like to take forward.

I am still very much committed to the Going for Growth document and to delivering what we have set out, particularly the supports for the farming industry. We are now working through the shape of that support. Until we have a better understanding of the financial position, it

is harder to put more meat on the bones with respect to what we are doing. The Member is on the Agriculture Committee, and I am happy to make sure that she is kept informed of decisions as we take them.

**Mr Frew:** How does the Minister expect anything to grow, let alone farm businesses, when she procrastinates on CAP reform issues? Why has she not brought proposals to the Executive to give them a chance to assess them, and why has she turned her face away from the farming community and the farming organisations that represent them? Why has she advised colleagues in her party not to attend public meetings?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Many questions there. I said earlier that there are major decisions to be taken regarding CAP reform. As I have taken decisions, I have tried to put as much clarity as possible out there at each stage, because I understand that farmers are concerned about their future and about what this means for them. We have taken quite a number of decisions, put them into the public domain, and you do not need me to detail them now. There are still some core issues that need to be addressed. There is a political process in place, and the leader of your party in Question Time, just before me, talked about how there are discussions ongoing. This is something that we are working our way through. There is a process of government that we have to go through. I want to be able to take these decisions sooner rather than later, but I will take decisions that are fair and are based on equality.

I have listened: I have been involved in so many consultations around CAP reform. We have engaged: we have had over 850 responses and there have been numerous public meetings. So, views have been very well aired and very well heard.

I will take decisions based on equality and on what is best for the future of this industry. I am very much committed to this industry being able to grow. That was why I brought forward the Agri-Food Strategy Board report, why I put that firmly on the agenda and why I said that the Department is an economic Department. I do not think that anybody can question my commitment to this industry.

There are big decisions to be taken, and I will not be forced into taking them just to please some people. I will take decisions when it is right to take them and when they are fair and equal. I will also be mindful of the process of

government that I have to go through, and those discussions are ongoing.

**Mr Byrne:** I welcome the Minister's answers thus far. Will she state whether the Going for Growth implementation plan has been sufficiently agreed, with timescales and moneys attached, and is it contingent upon agreement on CAP pillar 1? Is she still committed to a single-zone region with perhaps a short transition period of four years?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I said earlier that the Going for Growth paper has been with the Executive since December. I and the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister signed off on it, and it is with the Executive. I am hopeful for a discussion on that sooner rather than later. I am frustrated that it has not been discussed yet and that we do not have a response for the industry. I do not think that is good enough. The industry is sitting and waiting. We did a fantastic piece of work, and it is up to the Executive to show they support the industry moving forward and the growth and potential that exists.

We will work our way through that. I hope to have those discussions. There are ongoing discussions about it coming to the Executive, but hopefully that will be sooner rather than later, because we cannot miss the opportunity of creating 15,000 extra jobs and growing sales by 60%. The potential is there. It is up to the Executive to support it.

I said earlier that I wanted to transfer money in, which would have been used to part-fund some of the work that we would do under Going for Growth. Unfortunately, that is not the case, so those discussions are ongoing. Given that that was blocked, the Executive need to step up to the mark for the industry. The Executive need to put the money up front, centre stage for the industry, which has fantastic potential.

**Mrs Dobson:** Almost a year after the publication of the strategy and with all of the time in between and the problems with the agri-loan scheme, to many it seems to have been a wasted 12 months with virtually nothing to show for it. Minister, it is time for honest answers. What priority do you and the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister really place on the strategy? Do you accept that the longer both Departments string it out, the poorer our agriculture industry will be for it?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I hope the Member is not suggesting that I am ever anything less than honest. I have said very clearly that I am very

much wedded to the strategy. I want to see the Executive deliver on it. I am frustrated that there has not been agreement to date and hopeful that that will come in the near future. A fantastic piece of work has been done, and it is now up to the Executive to deliver on it.

We have not sat back and waited until the Executive agree. There are quite a number of areas of work that have been taken forward over the past year. We have had the deferral of the introduction of the export health charges, which were identified in the document as a barrier for the industry and an obstacle to export. We have been proactively promoting our produce right across the Executive, with all of the visits to China, Japan and all of the different markets that we are trying to reach into. We have had an increase in DARD-funded postgraduate courses. We have created a dedicated contact point at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to assist local people in drawing down EU funding.

Nobody is sitting back on their laurels waiting for the Executive to agree that piece of work. We need the financial backup to be able to deliver on some of the bigger key issues of the strategy, but there has certainly been quite a lot of other work taken forward in the meantime. I am hopeful that we can get agreement. It is incumbent on the Executive to say to the industry, "We support you, and here is the financial contribution to do it".

## **Public Bodies: Female Representation**

6. **Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to increase the representation of women on public bodies related to her Department. (AQO 6011/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I recently met the Commissioner for Public Appointments, John Keanie, and discussed his report on under-representation and lack of diversity in public appointments. As his report makes clear, women, young people, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are under-represented on the boards of public bodies.

I have instructed my Department to initiate a review, led by senior officials, to address the under-representation of women on the boards of DARD's five non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and to prepare a report specifically recommending actions, goals and timetables. That work will also inform how we improve diversity more generally on our departmental

public bodies and other fora for which my Department is responsible.

**Ms Ruane:** Cuirim fáilte roimh an bhfreagra sin agus roimh an obair atá déanta. I welcome that answer and the work that has been done, but we all know that we need to get targets for increasing representation of women in public bodies. Will you outline what DARD's targets are?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat. In 2011, DARD published its audit of inequalities and accompanying action plan, which runs from 2011 to 2016. That action plan has two gender targets for 2016: to improve representation by women on DARD NDPBs and associated bodies to 50%, and to improve representation by women on internal decision-making teams and groups to achieve a fair 50:50 representation. In 2012, DARD published its strategic plan, which runs to 2020 and which clearly sets out the direction for the Department's work in coming years and the significant work streams. The strategy also reaffirms the Department's commitment to equality and its section 75 obligations and to working towards meeting the targets set out in the audit of inequalities.

I totally agree with the Member about targets. You have to have clear targets so that people can work to them. When I met the commissioner he presented a different way of looking at how we actually recruit. If we do not have enough women coming forward, it is hard to select. You can't select women if there are no women coming forward. Some of the areas that we need to look at are advertising and how descriptions are set out, so that people can see how they fit in and how they would probably be a good person for that role. There are a number of challenges for all Departments, but I am certainly committed to taking that forward as a key area of work in the time ahead.

**3.15 pm**

**Mrs Overend:** Will the Minister consider following in the positive steps of my colleague Danny Kennedy, the Minister for Regional Development, and move away from what has become the almost automatic reappointment of board members for second terms and make all reappointments subject to public competition?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Those are all areas of work that we are looking at. That is key, because, if we keep reappointing people, how will there be any opportunity for new people to come in? We need to take on board what I said earlier to

Caitríona. Look at how some of those posts are advertised; they actually discourage people from coming forward. We need to look at all that. There are very simple steps we can take that will, hopefully, widen the pool of people that comes forward, particularly for women, ethnic minorities and young people, the groups that are absolutely under-represented.

## Waterlogging

7. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the extent of the damage caused to agricultural land by waterlogging over the past 12 months. (AQO 6012/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** In comparison with 2012, there has been no widespread damage to agricultural land as a result of waterlogging over the past 12 months. Waterlogging causes damage to agricultural land through a deterioration of soil structure and an increased risk of soil compaction. I recognise that there were wet weather conditions during the early part of 2013, which may have caused localised waterlogging damage to soils. However, the subsequent dry summer and autumn resulted in an improvement in soil structure, which allowed agricultural land to recover naturally. The drier weather gave farmers and growers the opportunity to take remedial action, such as soil aeration, subsoiling and drainage improvement works. Those conditions lasted until most livestock was housed, and that meant that there was less damage caused by poaching, compared with the previous autumn.

The high rainfall between December 2013 and March 2014 caused some localised waterlogging. However, the impact on agricultural land was less than that in 2012. That was because most livestock was housed during the period and less field work was needed as most crops were successfully harvested in the autumn.

Looking ahead, if spring conditions continue to improve, early season damage to agricultural land from waterlogging should be minimal. However, if needed, my Department will, through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), provide support and training to farmers and growers who are affected by poor weather conditions. We offer training to help farmers improve their knowledge of soil structure, compaction and drainage issues. In addition, CAFRE development advisers are available to meet the specific training needs of farmers in their local area.

**Mr Speaker:** That concludes questions for oral answer to the Minister. We now move to topical questions to the Minister. Questions 5 and 10 have been withdrawn. Patsy McGlone and Jonathan Craig are not in their place to ask questions 1 and 2.

### **Common Agricultural Policy: Update**

3. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the CAP decisions. (AQT 1033/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** As I said earlier, a number of decisions have been taken and we have tried to be very proactive in making sure that people are aware of those decisions. We have a question and answer section on the website, and that is updated fairly regularly on the back of the questions that farmers ring in and ask.

We have made a number of decisions on entitlements: all existing entitlements will be cancelled at the end of 2014 and new entitlements will be allocated in 2015; entitlements held on 15 May will be used to calculate the initial value of entitlements allocated under CAP reform; the option to restrict the number of entitlements to the area of land declared in 2013 will not be used. We have provided clarity around eligible land, the minimum allocation of entitlements and claim size at three hectares, the siphon on entitlement transfers, the regional reserve, greening, the small farmers scheme and the active farmer test. So, we have been able to seek and provide clarification on those more technical issues.

I encourage farmers with any questions to feel free to contact us at any stage. We will continue to update the Q&A section of the website, because I accept that it is a time of change and concern as people take business decisions on the right way forward for them.

**Mr McAleer:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer. I acknowledge and commend the progress that has been made to date on CAP reform. The Minister will be aware that there are very strong voices in areas such as the Sperrins, which I represent, where farmers want a fair outcome from CAP reform. Can the Minister assure those farmers that that is her intention?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Absolutely. At the heart of my politics is equality. Therefore, I will make sure that equality is at the core of any decision that I take. I very much believe in the industry. I

believe in fairness in the supply chain. I believe in supporting everybody in the industry. Any decisions that we take on the way forward will be based on that premise. As I said, it is a time of change. I accept that people are worried about what it means for them. So, the sooner we have political agreement on the decisions for moving forward, the better it will be for the industry. I am committed to making sure that we do that.

### **Single Farm Payment**

4. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to speed up the single farm payment review of decisions procedure. (AQT 1034/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Member may be aware that, over the past year, we have actually improved things greatly, particularly at the first stage. We are also working on the further stage. So, there is an ongoing piece of work. I do not have the figures with me now, but I can certainly say that they will speak for themselves and will show the improvements that have been made. I am very happy to provide that to the Member in writing.

**Mr D McIlveen:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she find it acceptable that farmers in many of our rural communities have been waiting in excess of six months for a decision? I am sure that, like me, she has constituents who have been waiting in excess of six months. Does she believe that that position is acceptable or that it should be continued into the future?

**Mrs O'Neill:** No, I absolutely do not think that it is acceptable. That is why we had a review of the whole process and why we have improved things significantly. I am happy for the Member to write to me outside Question Time about the case that he is dealing with. However, we have improved things, and we will continue to improve things. There has been massive change, particularly at the first stage, and the second stage is an ongoing piece of work.

### **Beef Sector: Concerns**

6. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she shares his concerns about the beef sector. (AQT 1036/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Absolutely. It is a difficult time for the beef sector. The drop in prices over the past number of weeks has very much been a

topic of conversation and is at the forefront of everybody's mind. We all want to see a strong, profitable red meat sector, and that can be achieved only if farmers receive a fair return for their quality traceable produce. Pricing is a commercial matter and is not within my remit.

We have seen proposed changes for the incentive structure for inspected cattle recently. I met the processors and put forward my view very strongly. This is not something that they can impose on farmers, particularly given that farmers may have paid high prices last autumn when they were not aware of the potential changes. So, in my opinion, that was poor business on the part of the processors. I am happy that they appear to have taken the decision off the table for the moment at least, but I think that it is very important that we stand strong together on the changes that they are trying to bring in. These are massive decisions that should not be taken without full consultation with the industry. The way in which it was proposed to be done was totally unacceptable, and I made sure that they were very clear of my view on that.

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer. I am sure that she will agree with me that we should be addressing this on an all-Ireland basis. Can she give some details of her discussions with Minister Coveney?

**Mrs O'Neill:** We have had ongoing discussions. At the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting last Wednesday, we had a discussion on what we could do together. The major supermarkets set down the specifications, and I feel that we need to hold a round of meetings with those people to talk to them about our views. We need to make sure that we are speaking with one voice — a strong voice to support the industry. If things such as this are allowed to happen now, what will come next year and the year after? There could be a domino effect; therefore, we need to be very strong now to make sure that we use whatever influence we can with those people. Minister Coveney was certainly up for that. He also had a meeting with his stakeholders towards the end of last week, and we have agreed to pick up our conversation at the start of this week to agree what we can do together to face the issue.

## **Common Agricultural Policy: Reform**

7. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the uncertainty

in the industry about the implementation of CAP reform, when she will bring the CAP reform proposals to the Executive, bearing in mind the many consultations and the fact that this has been known about not only for months but for years. (AQT 1037/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I know that the Member is not closely involved in all the discussions on CAP reform, but the detail is being clarified bit by bit from Europe. We have been very much engaged at European level, and we have been very much engaged with the industry and have listened to its views. This has been a massive consultation and a massive piece of work. These are potentially major changes for the industry, so it is important that the decisions that are taken are right.

We are involved in political discussions about some key issues that we still have to take decisions on. As I said, we have clarified what we can clarify, and I will continue to do that when possible. I have listened to and taken on board all views. We require political agreement on the issue, so discussions are ongoing. I intend to make final decisions as soon as possible.

**Mr Girvan:** I appreciate the Minister's answer, but it does not go any way towards addressing some of the fears of those in my community who tell me that they believe that the Minister or the Department is playing politics with their livelihood.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I would not expect you to say anything different. However, I assure you that I have listened and will continue to listen to everybody's views. The decisions that I take will be based on fairness, equality and what is best for the industry. We are working our way through the process. As I said, we have to go through a political process, and I want to be able to take decisions on those issues sooner rather than later. The deadline for notifying Europe is August, but we want to be able to say that we have taken a decision way before August.

## **Rural Communities: Building Rights**

8. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, given the fact that the definition of an active farmer will change, she is concerned about the impact on rural families that want to build on their own land. (AQT 1038/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I recently received a letter from the Minister of the Environment seeking clarification

on that, and I asked my officials to engage with his officials. It is an important issue. Everybody who represents rural communities has been fighting a long battle for rural people to be able to build on their own land. It is important that any changes that come about as a result of the active farmer definition do not impact on people who want to build on their own land. I will engage with the Minister of the Environment to make sure that that is the case.

**Mr Milne:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Mo bhúiochas leis an Aire go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer thus far. Will she ensure that there is full correspondence between her Department and the DOE so that, post-CAP reform, there is no grey area for rural people who want to build?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Absolutely. I can give that assurance. As I said, I also represent a rural community and the same constituency as the Member. We are very used to dealing and having heated discussions with planners about rural people being able to build on their own land. I will ensure that those conversations are had at every level — ministerial and official — to make sure that there is no confusion about people's entitlement to be able to build on their own land.

**Mr Speaker:** Dolores Kelly is not in her place. That concludes Question Time.

A number of Members were missing from the Chamber during Question Time this afternoon. I can understand that Members' minds might be somewhere else at this time, but if Members are putting down questions to Ministers, they should be in the House. There is a responsibility on Members to be in the House. Today, I believe that up to six Members were not in the House to ask a topical question or a question for oral answer. I hope that those Members will come to the House to give a reason for that and to apologise, especially to our Ministers. Let us move on.

## Private Members' Business

### Praxis Care

*Debate resumed on motion:*

*That this Assembly acknowledges and commends the work carried out by Praxis Care; asserts that the transfer of the publicly owned assets at Hillsborough Castle should be conditional on securing the future of Praxis at this location; and calls on the Secretary of State to explore all possible avenues to ensure that the employment provided and the work carried out by Praxis at Hillsborough Castle remain on site. — [Ms J McCann.]*

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the outset, I want to say that my party and I fully support Praxis Care on this issue. A number of weeks ago, I attended the protest at Hillsborough Castle that was organised by Praxis and local people. I was impressed by the anger and frustration that local people felt about the issue and the fact that the Secretary of State was refusing to listen to reason.

I will put it into context. Praxis is a major provider of services for adults and children with a learning disability, mental ill health or an acquired brain injury, and for older people, including those with dementia. The Secret Garden is a Praxis Care-run project that provides a work skills programme for service users, and individuals are able to gain work and skills. It is a very useful project, and Praxis does a fantastic job.

As someone who worked for many years in the voluntary sector in my constituency and in my city of Newry, I know that Praxis has facilities that cater very well for people with a variety of complex problems, and I think that it needs all the support that it can get and, indeed, deserves.

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

In the debate, my colleague Jennifer McCann, who proposed the motion, talked about all-party support for the motion. I say again that we were disappointed at the number of Members present at this very important debate. It affects some of the most vulnerable in our society and, as such, Members should have paid better attention to this issue and, indeed, had a better attendance.

### 3.30 pm

Jennifer McCann said that the Secret Garden cafe should be included and supported, not excluded, as seems to be the design of the Secretary of State. A measure of a society is how we look after our most vulnerable — the young, the old and people with disability. She said that one in four people in our society has mental health or learning disability problems; it is a common form of disability. The project provides vital day-care opportunities. We should be supporting it and ensuring that the 16 people involved can continue what they do. The asset should be transferred only if those people and the project can remain.

She talked about Historic Royal Palaces normally catering for the Tower of London and other landmark buildings in Britain, and she talked about not getting any joy from meetings with the Secretary of State and the NIO. If people were cynical, they might think that this was about moving towards the privatisation of this project. She talked about social interaction and about Sinn Féin having made representation to the NIO. She talked about the responsibility of those in government to set proper standards of equality and fairness. She said, rightly, that the decision is unjust and callous, and called on the Chamber to present a united front conditional on Praxis remaining.

Fearghal McKinney talked about Praxis providing services for almost 1,500 vulnerable children and adults; day-care work in the walled garden; and the seven staff and 16 people with learning difficulties. It is a unique project that should be maintained. He talked about Transforming Your Care and about the Health Minister, who has visited the project, promoting the Praxis ethos. He also talked about the Bamford action plan and promoting effective social inclusion.

Minister Edwin Poots, speaking as a Back-Bencher, was grateful for the opportunity to speak. He talked about the NIO appearing to be fixed in its views and said that that was regrettable. He had met Theresa Villiers and did not feel any positivity from that meeting or from meetings that he has had with her. He said that he felt that his meetings with Historic Royal Palaces had been more encouraging.

He talked about having visited the Secret Garden and said that Praxis have used it very well, how it is supported by the local community, and how it is seen as a community resource. The cafe is well used and has massive positive potential. He talked about the opportunity to open the castle doors to the

public but said that there should be an opportunity for that to exist alongside the cafe remaining. He talked about works to be carried out, so there may be a temporary move. He also talked about his Department's willingness to look at a temporary situation to ensure a degree of continuity.

Michael Copeland supported the motion. He talked about the facility provided by Praxis and the need for this issue to be dealt with effectively. He talked about a situation that is "mind-bendingly stupid", of the NIO and Secretary of State to have let it go this far, and I think that we would all agree with that. He said that it was not within the moral rights of the NIO to impose this decision, which, it is patently obvious, is a wrong decision.

Trevor Lunn welcomed the motion and said that the House should send a message that it disagrees with this decision. He talked about Praxis having moved in 13 years ago and the cafe being well worth a visit. He said that the lease had been given under a Labour Government and that there had been a facility for an extension but that was no longer there. Why the NIO and Historic Royal Palaces need the entire site is not quite clear. He also talked about plans for an extremely expensive slip road off the dual carriageway. Given that a timescale is involved, why was there a rush to put Praxis out? He talked about supporting the continued possession by Praxis, even though he felt that, at this stage, doing so may be illegal to an extent. He asked the NIO and Historic Royal Palaces to think again and talked about proper relocation costings, if that were the case, and compensation.

Caitríona Ruane, who also supported the motion, shared the disappointment of all parties. She also talked about the 16 people being put out of a job, saying that the NIO is out of touch and that what it is doing goes against the spirit of equality and human rights enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. She said that there was no EQIA in this situation because of the potential of its having an adverse impact on people with learning disabilities. There are already widespread difficulties with education etc for people in this position, and closing doors is absolutely the wrong thing to do. She said that the Secretary of State should lead from the front and reverse the decision. She also said that it was time for the rest of us to stand up with Praxis and be counted.

Basil McCrea said that he was disappointed that more Members were not present. He has visited the Secret Garden often and said that

the NIO had put itself into a poor PR position, which, of course, it has. Mr McCrea also said that the intention was good when the lease was granted but that this does not reflect well on the Secretary of State or the NIO. He pointed out that there is some light at the end of the tunnel, with the prospect of some movement towards a resolution that may involve the Department of Health, and that there is general agreement on the Floor of the Assembly. Mr McNarry intervened to say that, as a result of the debate, a lobby should go to the NIO, as the matter needs to be resolved as soon as possible.

The big society was mentioned in the debate. Indeed, one reason that the Secretary of State gave for the moving of Praxis is that Hillsborough Castle should be open to the public because it is part of the big society. I am not sure that the so-called big society is about excluding vulnerable people. In statements, the NIO has mentioned the misinformation, which it said was rife, circulated on the issue. I am not sure what misinformation it means, as I have heard none of that in this debate. Where does the so-called big society stand on issues that affect the most vulnerable?

This is wrong. We need to give Praxis Care our full support. We should indeed take an all-party lobby to the NIO and the Secretary of State in order to have this decision reversed, a decision, which, as Mr Copeland said, is patently wrong and "mind-bendingly stupid".

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly acknowledges and commends the work carried out by Praxis Care; asserts that the transfer of the publicly owned assets at Hillsborough Castle should be conditional on securing the future of Praxis at this location; and calls on the Secretary of State to explore all possible avenues to ensure that the employment provided and the work carried out by Praxis at Hillsborough Castle remain on site.*

## **Mental Health**

**Mr Principal 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 in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

**Mr McCarthy:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly believes that mental health should be taken as seriously as physical health; urges the Executive to take action to end stigma against mental health; further believes that psychological therapies should be at the heart of the mental health services agenda; and calls for the current underfunding of child and adolescent mental health services to be addressed.*

I regard this as a very important motion, which not only touches on a very important aspect of our health service but has wider implications for our economy and society. I am grateful for the Minister's presence in the Chamber this afternoon.

Mental health conditions affect a considerable number of people, with around one in four people facing such issues at some stage of their life and around one in five people being affected at any one time. Not least given the legacy of the Troubles, mental health conditions are more prevalent in Northern Ireland than in any of our neighbouring jurisdictions. Despite this, mental health remains the poor relation in the health system and is sometimes referred to as the Cinderella service. We must do everything in our power to change that. However, it is important to recognise that there has been some rebalancing of mental health expenditure from acute inpatient services towards the delivery of services in the community, including some, but not yet enough, additional funding for key areas such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and psychological therapies. That said, funding challenges do not lie only in the rebalancing of a fixed budget. We need to show how the overall funding package can grow. In that regard, although we acknowledge and welcome some recent improvements to mental health service funding, quality and access, mental health services are still underfunded in comparison with services for physical illness and in comparison with the rest of the UK regions. We are still investing a lower share of health spending on mental health in general, compared with other regions. In particular, pressures remain in some areas such as psychological therapies and child and adolescent services.

The Alliance Party recognises the move to community-based mental health services away from the historical inpatient model and we support its implementation, provided that there is consultation with families and carers, which is vital and paramount. Nothing should be forced on people against their will. There must also be a focus on ensuring recovery for those experiencing mental health conditions.

However, it is vital that resources are successfully transferred across to the community setting to support the development of the full range of community services. Sufficient access to home treatment teams across the lifespan is required, including for children and adolescents. In addition, rehabilitation services are urgently needed for people recovering from severe mental health problems. It is vital that such services are carefully and transparently planned.

The views of users and carers must be included in the development and planning of all mental health services, including rehabilitation services. There should be seamless access to community mental health services across the statutory, voluntary and community settings with appropriate signposting for individuals, their carers and their professionals. In addition, an appropriate and sufficient level of provision of inpatient acute mental health beds must be retained. It should be remembered that people who live in rural areas and who suffer with mental health difficulties require equity of access to the full range of community mental health services.

Although funding is important, this debate is not simply a narrow one about the level of resources. We must recognise the benefits to better physical health, individual self-esteem, the economy, our communities and society as a whole that come from positive mental health. Through placing a greater priority on assisting those who have mental health conditions or are at risk of deteriorating mental health, we can derive many other benefits. The risk of physical illness is increased with incidence of mental illness and vice versa. An emphasis on mental health as being central to the public health programme will facilitate people to adopt healthy lifestyles and, indeed, reduce health risk behaviours. This shift will allow prevention of physical illness and will promote mental health and well-being across the lifespan.

Helping people to stay in work or to access and sustain employment will improve their mental health and helps our economy. I very much welcome the fact that the Minister for Employment and Learning is devising a disability employment strategy and that he and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are devising a strategy on economic inactivity for the Executive. Social deprivation and economic inequalities are known determinants for mental and physical illness; these health inequalities impact on mental health, causing transgenerational mental health and physical illness, which creates a vicious cycle leading to further inequality.

Investments that can be made in social housing, education — including, in particular, early years interventions — and promoting social inclusion more generally are all crucial. A central theme has to be combating the stigma that many people with mental health conditions perceive and, indeed, experience. Having a mental health condition should be regarded as and taken as seriously as having a physical condition, but unfortunately that is not the reality for too many people. Stigma and associated discrimination must and should be tackled throughout our society so that it no longer remains a major barrier to equality nor impacts on the ability to seek help early and the possibility of recovering and well-being. We must be clear in our message that people can continue to lead meaningful lives despite mental health conditions.

### **3.45 pm**

The Bamford report on mental health and learning disability provides the overarching framework for addressing mental health issues in our society, though we should note that it is now almost a decade old and, indeed, much work remains to be done. I welcome the Executive-wide Bamford action plan 2012-15 and support its full implementation. That rightly indicates that a number of Departments have critical roles to play in achieving positive mental health outcomes. Every Department should place mental health and well-being and the elimination of stigma and discrimination at the core of policy development. It is also important to acknowledge the crucial role that is played by a number of organisations in the community and voluntary sectors in the provision of advocacy and advice and the delivery of services in a range of different contexts.

Mental health issues can cover a wide range of conditions and require a range of different interventions. Psychological therapies are indeed central to improving the mental health and well-being of all people in Northern Ireland across their lifespan. We support the psychological therapy strategy and call for the appropriate funding stream for the full range of psychological therapies, including psychodynamic psychotherapy. There is also a need for greater awareness of mental health issues, including liaison and follow-up for patients who arrive for treatment in A&E facilities. Self-harm and suicide, including the high rates of suicide in young men, must be tackled through addressing issues such as socio-economic inequalities, the legacy of deprivation from the Troubles and the effects of the recession, and by providing early interventions for families in disadvantaged

communities. The Protect Life strategy is therefore a key mental health intervention.

We also support the forthcoming introduction of the Mental Capacity Bill. Rather than two separate Bills dealing with mental capacity and mental health, there are considerable advantages in having a single integrated piece of legislation, and we look forward to its early completion. One major advantage is the elimination of stigma for those with impaired capacity associated with mental health problems. We in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to become a world leader in that respect.

There are also different types of challenges in providing appropriate mental health interventions for different groups of people, such as children and adolescents, older people and those with learning disabilities. Child and adolescent mental health services have historically been underfunded. Young people amount to almost one quarter of our population but have not benefited from an equivalent share of funding. As the number of older people in Northern Ireland continues to grow, there will be an increasing need for appropriate mental health services, including equity of access to high-quality primary care and community-based services. Sufficient services will be required for older people with a range of mental health issues and for people specifically suffering with dementia.

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

**Mr McCarthy:** It is important that mental health support for carers, including older carers, is enhanced and easily accessible. I ask for support for the motion.

**Mrs Cameron:** As a member of the Health Committee, I am very happy to speak on this issue today. There is no doubt that mental health and well-being is only now beginning to receive the kind of attention that has been badly needed for many years. I welcome the development of that now. I believe that much of that is down to the number of voluntary and community sector organisations that have been involved in campaigning, coupled with the highly effective use of social media to promote mental health well-being.

Over the past few years, I have seen for myself how the trauma of a mental health condition can go undiagnosed for decades and how it can dominate and dictate how an individual can struggle to live their life trying to manage the

condition without support of any kind. There are, of course, infinite reasons why an individual can suffer from mental health problems but, for me, the important thing is how to get that condition diagnosed in the first instance and then ensure that sufficient support is in place to help those who are diagnosed to cope with that condition.

I am of the firm view that we must do more to recognise, diagnose and support people who suffer from mental health issues and learn how to effectively promote mental well-being among our children and young people to ensure that they get the best possible start in life. Of course, we also need to tackle the associated stigma that is attached to mental health issues. There are huge benefits to be gained, not just for the individual who is treated, but for society, particularly in places like Northern Ireland where history has delivered to us all a set of circumstances that have led to huge mental health suffering over decades.

I have seen how someone who has been dealing with a depressive illness for decades is only now getting the right diagnosis and treatment, and it has to be said that getting that diagnosis and treatment was not an easy journey. In fact, it took almost a year for the person to get an appointment with a counsellor, such was the demand on local services. Yet, in only a relatively short period, that person is learning new practices that are making a real difference to how they manage their depression. That is why I want to see a much greater emphasis being put on mental health issues; I can see for myself what a difference the right treatment can make to an individual's life. Years of medication is not the answer for many people, as it merely manages the condition without doing anything to resolve the issues or rescue the sufferer. The truth is that, through proper counselling and the use of such techniques as mindfulness, there is a real possibility and evidence that lives can be changed. I am convinced that this is something that we must resource and promote now, because it works. I will of course urge the Minister and the Department to make this an urgent priority.

**Ms Maeve McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important debate. Mental health and increasing levels of mental health problems in our communities must be a concern to us all. We must move away from the notion that mental health resourcing and funding is the poor relation in the health service. With that in mind — and there have already been a number of comments on the general issues around mental

health — I would like to concentrate my comments on two aspects of mental health: the need for a rehabilitation strategy and the pending Mental Capacity Bill.

The Bamford action plan stated that there were 150 long-stay patients in psychiatric wards who could be resettled. A total budget of £2.8 million had been allocated towards that, but it was viewed that the total cost of resettlement is, and will be, significantly higher. The report also, importantly, identified about 100 people in mental health facilities, with quite challenging behaviour, who would require long-term rehabilitation before they could be considered for community placement. Indeed, the Royal College of Psychiatrists suggests that that group requires a specialist service for rehabilitation. Rehabilitation exists in some form in all trusts, but it has not been included in any current strategy. That must change, and a recovery-based approach will be, and is, required.

It has been suggested that people in receipt of good rehabilitation services are eight times more likely to achieve and sustain successful community living. In the North of Ireland, over 20% of children under 18 years of age suffer significant mental health problems. There has been, and is, a failure to adequately resource appropriate mental health services. In 2012-13, only £19 million was allocated to child and adolescent mental health services. That equated to simply 7.9% of the total planned mental health expenditure for that period.

In 2008, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern about the continued treatment of children in adult psychiatric wards. It is well recognised that factors associated with the conflict, and with society emerging from conflict, have impacted severely on child and adolescent mental health. The incidence of mental health problems among vulnerable groups of children and young people is disproportionately high. Currently, there is no forensic inpatient children's psychiatric provision in the North and only limited inpatient adolescent facilities. Almost 200 children in the North were detained in adult psychiatric wards between 2007 and 2009, and, from January 2012 until December 2012, there were 91 admissions of children to adult psychiatric wards in the North. That is despite a commitment that the Department of Health made in 2009 that it would make age-appropriate mental health detention of children a priority.

It is estimated that there will be a shortfall of £800 million in the health budget in the North of

Ireland in 2014-15. We are extremely concerned that the provision of services to children and adolescents will deteriorate further rather than being urgently addressed and that children and young people will continue to suffer.

There is also a recognition that the current mental health legislation is not fit for purpose and that it is not compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights in places. Following Bamford, the new combined mental health and mental capacity legislation, which will extend to include the criminal justice system, is being brought forward and is expected to become law in 2017. However, there is a view that it falls far short of what Bamford recommended. The new Mental Capacity Bill will provide a number of important safeguards and protections for people who lack decision-making capacity. However, and this point is critical, all children under 16 years will be excluded from the scope of the new legislation and the non-ECHR-compliant Mental Health Order, which will remain in place for children and young people under 16 who have mental health problems.

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

**Ms Maeve McLaughlin:** I ask the Minister to refer to the legislation as it is brought forward. The Department's exclusion of under-16s from the legislation is not acceptable.

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

**Ms Maeve McLaughlin:** I support the motion.

**Mr McKinney:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I support the motion. The prevalence of mental health problems continues to be an issue here. Indeed, the work of the Northern Ireland Bamford Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing in the University of Ulster has shown that conflict-related incidents have had a direct correlation with high levels of mental illness. It is for that reason that we should place great and greater emphasis on the need for mental health treatment. So, the SDLP agrees with the motion in that regard.

Much good work has been done, and an example of that is the efforts of organisations such as MindWise, which has recently launched its "You can take control" campaign to aid recovery after mental illness. However, there are also major issues of concern, particularly with children's mental health services.

The key challenges that this Government have faced in the delivery of mental health care have been the role of Transforming Your Care, budgetary cuts and the subsequent cumulative effect that they have had on the Bamford action plan.

Late last year, the SDLP noted its concern about the Department's ability, due to financial cuts, to carry out each of the initiatives in the 2012-15 Bamford action plan. Ms McLaughlin referred to some figures, but let us look at some more. In 2009, when the first action plan was embarked upon, the total amount of additional funding that the Department anticipated over three years, including for mental health, was £44 million. However, due to the comprehensive spending review, the actual amount of additional funding that was allocated was £29.5 million. It is the admission of the Bamford action plan itself that the £14.5 million reductions in additional funding had:

*"some effect on the Health and Social Care sector's ability to deliver on actions".*

The only additional funding that has been earmarked for mental health and learning disability over the budget period referred to is £9.2 million, with £2.8 million for mental health. That reduction, in line with the change agenda of Transforming Your Care, has affected the number of services that can be delivered. It is a reasonable contention that it will affect the Bamford action plan's ability to improve mental health services here.

In the Transforming Your Care 'Vision to Action' consultation document, the following was proposed: we should be more joined-up in how we provide mental health services; put in place intensive home and community support; remove beds from hospital settings; and develop six inpatient acute mental health units. However, we do not have concrete evidence of the extent to which that has been done to an appropriate degree, as none of it has been properly measured. As pointed out, it has already been hampered by budgetary reductions. What we have seen is a Health and Social Care Board proposal to relocate services for addiction and subsequent rehabilitation away from the west of the region and into Antrim and Downpatrick. There has been no confirmation of how that may affect the proposed specialist phase 2 mental health facility in Omagh, which is a flagship project for mental health treatment in the North. That is particularly worrying given the high levels of mental health problems in the Western Trust.

**4.00 pm**

Rural mental health continues to be a problem, and rehabilitation has proven that to be the case. Asking people to travel long distances to receive treatment is not acceptable, and it may even exacerbate the problem. The mental health group Suicide Talking, Educating, Preventing, Support (STEPS) has investigated the amount of attention given to mental health across the region. It found that not enough focus was placed on rural areas.

I recognise the Choose Well campaign that is trying to communicate information to the public about where to go when you feel unwell. However, in a survey carried out by the Time to Listen; Time to Act mental health campaign published last month, only 9% of patients and carers surveyed believed that there was adequate provision of information about mental distress. The point needs to be addressed if we are to break the current stigma around mental health issues, as the motion suggests. The Health Department published its service model for the delivery of children and adolescent mental healthcare in 2012. That was in response to an RQIA review that found that no strategy was in place. The SDLP agrees with much of what is planned in the 2012 service model. However, the problems with mental health provision for young people here can be seen quite clearly in the commissioning and resources section of that service model. Transforming Your Care is clearly referenced. That model of care for children and adolescent mental health depends on the deliverance of Transforming Your Care-based funding and the strengthening of the community care initiative.

The motion asks us to support mental health as much as physical health. In funding, infrastructure, commissioning and delivery, it is fair to say that there is an enormous distance to travel.

**Mr Beggs:** I also support the motion. I declare an interest: I am involved in the Carrickfergus Community Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group, which provides counselling for those who need support. Psychiatric therapy has proven to be very effective, as has been recognised by NICE and others. To that extent, it is important that it is highlighted in the motion, and I thank Mr McCarthy for doing so.

One in four people will suffer from a mental health condition at some point in his or her life. The issue is much wider than any of us might at first think. Each of us is likely to know a family member or a close friend who will have suffered not so long ago. It is something that is very real to everyone in the community. We must appreciate and support the issue to ensure that

there are adequate funds to address the need. It affects old and young, irrespective of gender or economic background. However, as was said, socio-economic background can increase the likelihood of mental ill health.

Northern Ireland has about a 25% higher incidence of mental ill health than in England and Scotland. About half of all women and a quarter of men can expect to suffer from depression at some point in their lives. A quarter of people over the age of 65 show symptoms of depression. Some 35% of all GP consultations are thought to have some form of mental issue at their root. It greatly affects our community. We must ensure that sufficient resources are in place to address the matter and to try to take proactive action to lessen the likelihood in the future.

Some 61% of people in Northern Ireland are thought to have experienced a traumatic event in their lives. The Troubles are thought to have increased the number of people with such experiences and may have contributed to the higher level of mental ill health in Northern Ireland. Indeed, many perpetrators may suffer as a result of the horrific actions in which they took part many years ago. It is important that we try to address that very apparent need in our community.

Yet Northern Ireland has lower proportional spend than other parts of the United Kingdom. It is vital that we improve our health and well-being. The Appleby report found that Northern Ireland's spending need was some 44% higher per capita than England's, yet its spending was actually between 10% and 30% lower. As others said, there has been some improvement, but there needs to be considerable additional investment in this area.

Psychological therapy has been proven to be effective. It is recognised by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence that, when appropriate, psychological therapy is very cost-effective. It is important that there be good access to the service as regards both timeliness and from a geographical point of view. Providing support in this area brings a cost to the health service. However, there is also a huge economic loss and cost of lost productivity and the effect that it has on individual lives.

The motion calls for increased funding for child and adolescent mental health services, and I support that. It has been recognised that there has generally been a lack of investment in children's and young people's services in Northern compared to elsewhere. Yet, it is

widely recognised that early investment is very effective and provides better value for money. If you address issues early, you get better outcomes, and issues are not allowed to develop to the same extent.

Mental health appointments have a higher proportion of "did not attends". If you have a physical difficulty, how will you get to a service that is perhaps 30 or 40 miles away and requires you to make several public transport connections? It is important that there be better access and better local services, whether through the new health and care centres or through other partnerships and outreach, so that it is much more localised and so that those who need it can get support. It is also important that we look at health and well-being in our schools and communities —

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

**Mr Beggs:** — and that parents ensure that their children have widespread physical, sporting and outside world experiences to give them resilience.

**Mr Dunne:** I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. Mental health is an ever-increasing issue. Unfortunately, one in four people will experience some kind of mental health problem; practically every family in Northern Ireland will be affected by mental health issues during their lives; and women are more likely to have been treated for a mental health problem than men. The fact that the World Health Organization predicts that, by 2020, depression will be the second leading cause of disability in the world shows the seriousness of the problem and the extent of mental health issues.

Rising self-harm and suicide statistics are also very worrying, to say the least. Sadly, suicide seems to be becoming an ever more common problem across our constituencies. I am sure that all Members will know someone close to them who, tragically, has taken their own life. The startling fact that 10% of children have a mental health problem, and that depression affects one in five older people, highlights that mental health knows no boundaries of age, race, class, wealth or gender.

It is vital that services be put in place to provide care and support to patients, carers and families affected by mental illness, that services be readily available for patients and carers and that they be consistent across all trust areas. The Minister, Edwin Poots, has taken an active

interest in developing mental health services across Northern Ireland. I know that he will continue to pursue what is best for the people whom we represent. At the recent launch of the MindWise charity's You Can Take Control campaign, the Minister rightly pointed out that:

*"The majority of people can and do recover from periods of mental illness and many others learn to live with their symptoms and lead full lives. Fundamental to recovery is social integration, education, training and employment."*

The key message that we need to get across is that mental ill health can be overcome and defeated.

The Bamford review sets out its theme of improving community-based services for mental health patients. It sets out a clear vision for a shift towards community-based treatment. With this vision, it is essential that the right networks exist to support patients, with carers and families at the core. Its main themes are health promotion; promoting independence; supporting carers and family; and the modernisation and improvement of services. However, as with any issue, funding is, unfortunately, limited, and challenges remain to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our mental health services.

I welcome the ongoing progress in the South Eastern Trust area. Recently, the trust prepared a business case for the rationalisation of acute mental health inpatient services, and it concluded that the preferred option is that a single mental health inpatient unit be located on the old Tor Bank site adjacent to the Ulster Hospital at Dundonald. It also concluded that a low-security rehabilitation centre should be located at the Downe Hospital. This programme of works will enable the trust to achieve its vision for the rationalisation of inpatient mental health services and to deliver an equitable and sustainable care model for our population.

I also commend the sterling work of many charities such as CAUSE, Action Mental Health, Awareness Defeat Depression, MindWise and Praxis Care, all of which play a vital role in providing support for people affected by mental health issues. One in five adults in Northern Ireland will show signs of a possible mental health problem. This shows the wide-reaching nature of the problem and highlights the fact that it is vital that we all continue to play our part in helping to tackle it. I support the motion.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the

motion. It is so important that mental health is taken and treated as seriously as physical conditions, as the statistics bear out. Mental health is the single biggest cause of disability in the Western World. Around 450 million people worldwide have a mental health problem, and up to 20% of children and adolescents worldwide experience a disabling mental health problem. Depression is the most common such problem.

Mental health problems adversely impact on many aspects of life, such as work and personal relationships. People suffering mental ill health face considerable stigma and discrimination and, because of this, often delay seeking help. As someone who worked in the voluntary sector for many years, advising people on benefits and representing them at tribunals, I know that the stigma attached to mental health, particularly in rural areas, is so obvious and really needs to be dealt with and overcome. People are often stigmatised, not only by their neighbours and communities but sometimes, unfortunately, by members of their family. It is an area that needs to be taken into the open and addressed very seriously.

Here in the North, we have a higher level of mental health need than other parts, particularly England and Scotland. A health and social well-being survey showed that 24% of women and 17% of men here have a mental health problem, and factors contributing to these rates include persistent levels of deprivation in some communities and the legacy of the conflict. A recent study of the families of the victims of Bloody Sunday, for instance, found persistent effects of these traumatic events on the individuals concerned, with evidence of psychological distress still being found more than 30 years after the event.

The incidence of suicide here has been a particular concern in recent years. The suicide rate increased by 64% between 1999 and 2008, mostly as a result of the rise in suicide among young men. In 2008, 77% of all suicides were males, and 72% were in the 15-to-34 age bracket.

Since I have been a Member of the Assembly, I have heard so much about Bamford that I almost feel that I know the author of the report personally, but it has to be said that little has been done. The Bamford action plan talks about promoting positive health, well-being and early intervention; supporting people to lead independent lives; supporting carers and families; providing better services to meet individual needs and developing structures in a legislative framework. Those are all themes

that need to be addressed and recognised, and, as Gordon Dunne mentioned, there are many very good voluntary organisations such as MindWise and CAUSE, which do tremendous work. They seem to be taking Bamford seriously, maybe more seriously than some of the statutory agencies.

**4.15 pm**

**Mr McCarthy:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. He referred to the Bamford report. I recall clearly the day that Bamford was launched in the Stormont Hotel by the late Paul Goggins, who was Health Minister. The question at that time was about how much Bamford would cost, and the response was £600,000, but there was not one penny in the budget to implement that, so that is probably why we are finding such a struggle even at this moment.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Brady:** I thank the Member for his intervention. The Member has been here longer than I have, so he probably has a better memory of that day.

As others stated, as many as one in four people will suffer from a mental health condition at some point. It can also affect particular groups. As was stated, women are more likely to experience anxiety disorders and depression, whereas men are more likely to experience drug and alcohol addictions, personality disorders and suicide. The direct and indirect costs associated with mental illness are immense. Estimates suggest that the cost in the North is around £2.8 billion. Despite that, funding for mental health services and promotion is disproportionately low, so raising awareness of mental health is crucial.

Encouraging positive mental health can take a general population approach or be targeted at risk groups. Individuals can also adopt a range of coping strategies. Positive mental health strategies and policies should involve the cooperation of a wide range of stakeholders. Developing community mental health services and good access to primary care support are also important.

Cognitive behavioural therapy is recognised as one of the most successful ways to deal with depression. In my constituency, for instance, it is not easily or readily accessible. That needs to be addressed because it is recognised as a way of people getting help for their condition.

I have to comment, in a debate like this, on those carers who look after people with mental health problems 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I recently attended a meeting in my constituency that was facilitated by CAUSE. It is heartbreaking to listen to stories of young couples, one or other of them having mental health problems, who have young children and are trying to cope on a daily basis. Financially, they get very little help. They get carer's allowance. It is so important that the work that they do and the money they save the health service is recognised. It also has to be recognised that they need support as much as anybody.

I support the motion and ask the Minister to look favourably and sensibly at the motion.

**Mr D McIlveen:** I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in favour of the motion. I congratulate Mr McCarthy on bringing it forward. I know that it is an issue that is very close to Mr McCarthy's heart, and I pay tribute to him for seeking to bring some good on the back of a personal tragedy.

Many in the Assembly will know that my upbringing was in a church manse. Growing up, whenever the phone rang in our house, it was seldom a social call. It was not unusual to pick up the phone and for the voice on the other end to be in deep distress, whether it was a mother or father, a son or daughter, or a husband or wife, giving us the news that their relative had been taken into hospital or, perhaps worse still, had left this scene of time.

There was no difference in the distress of those relatives' voices as to whether their relative had taken a heart attack, had a stroke, been diagnosed with cancer or had been taken with a mental illness, whether depression, schizophrenia or some other of the well-known forms of mental illness. Therefore, the sentiment behind the motion is the right one in that it is wrong to differentiate between these illnesses, because the effect that they have on loved ones who have to deal with the illness and the effect it has on their relative or loved one is, in many ways, the same. Therefore, I think that the sentiment behind the motion is correct.

I welcome the work that has been done by many Departments on this issue. Indeed, I was heartened to hear Mr McCarthy refer to the work that the Employment and Learning Minister is doing, because I believe that providing work and opportunities for people with mental illnesses so that they can get into some sort of mainstream employment to perhaps help

them focus their minds on being productive in the workplace and so on is an excellent way of dealing with these issues. I welcome that news because, unfortunately, a number of schemes that provided the flexibility that patients with mental illnesses need within the workplace have ceased or been done away with. I welcome the news that new schemes are perhaps going to be put in place.

Another issue that has not been touched on yet is the challenges of mental illness in rural communities. A lot of services are quite urban-centric, and I know that there are good reasons for that — of course you have to follow the population base. However, there are issues, particularly within our farming community, where, over the past number of years, there has been an alarming rise in the rate of depression. Unfortunately, that has manifested itself in a number of farmers taking their own lives. Therefore, we have to ensure that that issue is dealt with.

At the start, I mentioned relatives and loved ones, which moves us to the issue of respite. That issue is brought to me quite regularly. Of course, when it comes to respite, we are dealing with people with very severe mental illnesses — those who are almost completely incapacitated by their illness. Respite services are important and, indeed, I have corresponded with the Minister, who has given me a number of assurances about good work in my constituency that is going to continue.

Whilst I pay tribute to Mr McCarthy and believe that, in proposing the motion, he was very sincere, one or two of the other contributions — one in particular — have risked veering into the realm of, I suppose, playing politics with this issue. I think that we have to be very cautious of that when it comes to an issue as sensitive as this. The Minister has been very supportive of schemes such as Grangewood in Londonderry, a new facility that was opened at the tail end of last year. That constituency and area should perhaps reflect on that. They have been very well facilitated in that regard.

When it comes to Bamford, we have to accept the fact that 83% of the proposals and the progress have been implemented. None of that progress is not going to happen. One or two elements have been slightly delayed. I will end my comments there; I know my time has run out.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Indeed. Thank you very much.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh míle maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle as an deis cainte a thabhairt dom ar an cheist rithábhachtach seo faoi shláinte intinne. Éirim ar an ócáid seo le tacaíocht láidir a thabhairt don rún. Thanks very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on this very important issue. Of course I support the motion, and I pay tribute to Mr McCarthy for bringing it to the House.

It is often said that mental health is one of the Cinderellas of illness. It still suffers the sort of stigma that was associated with cancer until recent times. I believe that, as the motion states, we should do all in our power to reduce and remove that stigma.

I was in the company of Mickey Brady and Willie Irwin when we met CAUSE in Newry. Indeed, that group highlighted to us the issues that carers have, especially in dealing with people who have serious mental illnesses.

We gave the group an undertaking that we would highlight the issues they brought to us, and we asked the Southern Health and Social Care Trust for a meeting with carers to give them the opportunity to highlight their issues.

CAUSE shares a lot of issues with other mental health charities and advocates. It launched its manifesto 'Transforming our care' earlier in the year. That manifesto outlines carers' needs, the need for services to work with carers and to see them as an asset in supporting the recovery of their loved ones from mental illness rather than feeling excluded and sometimes left to cope alone without the actual help they need.

The manifesto was drafted through a number of meetings with carers across Northern Ireland and outlines three main areas for consideration: greater assistance and support for carers, first, as equal partners in care, secondly, as supporters in recovery and, thirdly, as advocates for change.

During the meeting, we talked about serious issues around, for example, carers assessments, the absence of respite for carers and, as they describe it, a complete lack of funding for mental health services. They relayed very clearly to us the issues caused by confidentiality and the sense that carers are not valued and are not listened to. They asked us to ensure that Transforming Your Care took cognisance of their issues.

We know that health and social care services are changing radically. There is increased emphasis on the home being the hub for

treatment under Transforming Your Care. CAUSE expressed to us the growing concern that, under Transforming Your Care, pressures on carers will increase and not decrease. Serious mental illness can result in significant life changes for everyone close to it; obviously, the patient and family members.

The manifesto highlights the strong assertion that carers need to be more involved in care planning as they provide a valuable perspective that can really help to support recovery when working with professionals and with their loved ones.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am sure that the Minister will listen carefully to all the points raised here today, and there has been a wide range of them. I do not think that anyone is using this issue as a political football. All Members who spoke have a genuine interest in improving services.

**Mr Gardiner:** The Assembly has debated mental health before. Last November, the leader of my party proposed a world class mental health facility in Ormiston House. It was a good idea then and, six months later, it remains a good idea. My party leader was right to link mental illness with the after-effects of the Troubles and how we deal with the past. Another colleague, Mr Copeland, drew our attention to the fact that welfare reform was also leading to a lot of mental health problems in deprived households.

We have a great deal of hidden prejudice to overcome in dealing with mental health problems. When this subject was debated in the Welsh Assembly, we received the recent research carried out by Time to Change Wales which showed: first, that one in four people believe that those with mental health problems should not be allowed to hold public office and, secondly, that one in 10 people believe that those with mental health problems should not be allowed to have children.

Those attitudes are very badly informed. In the context of mental health, I often think about our greatest Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who suffered throughout his life from serious bouts of depression — the "black dog", as he called it. However, where would we be without Winston Churchill? His contribution to our survival as a country was enormous, yet he had mental health problems.

**4.30 pm**

He was not the first Prime Minister to suffer from such illnesses. Over 260 years ago, William Pitt the Elder, another of our greatest Prime Ministers, also suffered from mental illness. He had a complete nervous breakdown and for two years sat in his chair simply staring at the window. The fact that that happened a long time ago makes no difference. His suffering was just as real as people's suffering today. His great contribution to the United Kingdom remains the same. Both those men were great servants of our country, despite having mental health problems. We would do well to remember that when we debate mental health.

I think that we need to seek a broad political consensus on dealing effectively and compassionately with mental health problems. I support the motion and hope that our Minister takes swift action to facilitate the people here in Northern Ireland especially.

**Mr Wells:** First of all, I apologise to the proposer of the motion, Mr McCarthy, for not being here for all his contribution. He has always been a great stalwart and supporter of mental health initiatives on the Health Committee. You can guarantee that if he spots an opportunity to raise that important issue he will always take it. However, I wish to correct him on one figure that he quoted. He suggested that the implementation of Bamford could be done for £600,000. I understand that the Minister is a bit of a wizard with the economics of health and has been able to strip out £500 million worth of savings, but not even Mr Poots on his best day could implement Bamford for £600,000. I suspect that the figure was £600 million. I just want to correct that, because I do not want people to believe that it is just as simple as that.

We should look not only at solving the problems that are raised by the increasing mental health issues in Northern Ireland but at the causes. If we as a society are determined to undermine every bedrock and building block of our society, is it any wonder that mental health problems are increasing? We make alcohol available to our young people at ridiculously low prices. There is a very clear link, unfortunately, between alcohol dependency and mental health issues. We make it cheaper than water. We sell it at 35p a tin, and we allow young people to develop that addiction. We allow them ready access, unfortunately, to soft drugs and then on to harder drugs.

We undermine the principles of marriage. We do nothing whatsoever to bolster and support marriage and to nurture children within loving,

faithful, married relationships. Then we wonder why so many of our young people are either feral or are completely disorientated about where they are coming from and where they are going to. We put the most enormous pressures on people in their workplace, and then we wonder why there are so many difficulties with mental health issues. We need to address those causes, as well as to address the outcomes of those causes.

I accept, as everyone said, that mental health spending in Northern Ireland has been the Cinderella, as quoted by Mr Bradley, but it has not been Cinderella; it has been Cinderella's mouse. There has been even less spending than in other jurisdictions where it is also the Cinderella of health service spending. The reality is that, for every Minister, both direct rule and, more recently, devolved, faced with a clamour from the Nolans of this world demanding more expenditure on the big-ticket items in health and social services, which, of course, are A&E and acute care, there is always a temptation to pump money into those big, high-profile aspects of the Department to the detriment of mental health provision.

Unfortunately, although this should not be the case, the Minister will never be hauled across the coals for reducing mental health provision and spending, but he will always be criticised when it comes to our A&E hospitals. That is the difficulty that we face in Northern Ireland. As a result of decades of direct rule, we are in a position where everyone agrees that expenditure on mental health is grossly underfunded in Northern Ireland.

An opportunity to address those fundamental issues is now coming before us: it is, of course, legislation. It is no exaggeration to say that the Mental Capacity Bill will be the biggest single piece of legislation faced by the Assembly and will require the most enormous efforts by those on the Health Committee and the Justice Committee, and by me, who is on both. Once introduced, the Bill will dominate the work of those two Committees. It would be very helpful if the Minister, in his response, could give us a cast-iron guarantee that the legislation will be introduced in time and processed before the next Assembly election. I have been given, at the last count, seven different dates for its introduction, long before the present Minister came to power. We really need certainty on the issue. It is absolutely essential that the Bill is brought through and expedited. Unfortunately, I was in the Chamber in 1983 when the previous Bill went through. Little did I think then that — what, 29 years later? — I would be back, sitting through the second Bill. I can assure you that I

have no intention whatsoever of being around in 25 years' time for the third Bill.

**Mr Maskey:** Are you sure?

**Mr Wells:** You never know.

We have a wonderful opportunity to address those important issues, put right the lack of emphasis on mental health in Northern Ireland

---

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

**Mr Wells:** — and build into the Bill opportunities that will make certain —

**Mr McCarthy:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Wells:** I certainly will.

**Mr McCarthy:** I acknowledge that I made a mistake. I ought to have said £600 million.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mr Wells:** Thank you very much for the extra minute, Mr McCarthy. You are absolutely right to correct that.

To all those who have been very quick to ask the Minister to spend more money on mental health, which is the right thing to do, I say this: the Minister will find it very difficult to deliver the budget within the present constraints, but, if we go down the route that we may do on welfare reform and start to strip out large amounts of money to fund someone's fad or support the barriers that have been put up to welfare reform, the money simply will not be there — full stop — to implement any form of healthcare never mind welfare reform. Before you call for extra money for various services in health, remember that you cannot do that and then demand that we block welfare reform changes, which none of us wants, but, unfortunately, we have to do. Just remember that.

Finally, the Minister should be very careful about the small number of people — about 100 — who are still left in institutions such as Muckamore. The resettlement of those individuals —

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

**Mr Wells:** — must be treated with the most enormous care and consideration.

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I am grateful to the honourable Members for raising such important issues and welcome the contributions made.

It is widely recognised that Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental ill health than any other region in the United Kingdom. It is estimated that one in four adults in Northern Ireland will suffer from a mental health problem at some stage in their life. Many in the Chamber today will have a friend, family member or colleague who has experienced a mental illness. Mental ill health does not discriminate. It affects people from all walks of life. Despite recent advances in the treatment of mental illness and the better outcomes that people with a mental illness can now experience, stigma is still attached to mental illness and prevents many from coming forward to seek help. The majority of people who experience mental illness consistently identify stigma as one of the main obstacles to seeking help and making a recovery. Hopefully, many of you have seen the Public Health Agency's mental health campaign featuring a boxer, which urges people to "talk about it". The campaign has been very well received, and it encourages people to talk about their feelings, seek help and promote recovery.

The motion is timely, as the Cycle Against Suicide initiative commences today in Dublin. The cycle will go around the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland raising awareness of suicide prevention, decreasing stigma and promoting help-seeking. The cycle will spread the message that it is OK not to feel OK. Next week, it will bring that message to Northern Ireland.

My Department will continue to work closely with the Public Health Agency to tackle stigma and to encourage people with a mental illness to talk about how they feel and seek help. We in government will continue to tackle stigma by ensuring that policies and services enable people with a mental illness to live full and purposeful lives in their communities. We will also support our local mental health charities that work tirelessly to educate the public about mental health issues. My Department provides almost £700,000 to those organisations.

The Bamford review set in motion some of the most significant changes ever seen in mental health services. Those changes have transformed how we care for people with a

mental illness and have significantly improved the outcomes that are achievable for those people today. The Bamford vision is that people with a mental illness should be treated in the community close to their friends and family unless there is a clinical reason for not doing so. Inpatient care should be provided only for acute cases or where someone needs to be detained for their own safety and well-being. In line with the Bamford recommendations, the focus in the last number of years for mental health service development has been on early intervention, home treatment services and the development of psychological therapy services. Since Bamford reported in 2008, an additional £40 million has been invested recurrently in mental health services, bringing current expenditure to around £240 million a year.

At the time of the Bamford review, we were spending 60% of the mental health budget on hospital services and 40% on community services. The balance of that expenditure has shifted, and currently we spend 44% of the mental health budget on hospital and 56% on community services, with the aim that a shift to 60% spend on community services will be achieved by March 2015. Significant reform and modernisation of mental health services has taken place, but much more needs to be done. Transforming Your Care endorses the Bamford approach to service development and will take this agenda forward into the future.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), Public Health Agency (PHA) and trusts are rolling out the Implementing Recovery through Organisational Change (ImROC) programme. ImROC is all about embedding recovery-focused practice throughout all mental health services in line with the Bamford vision. The concept of recovery is also central to the mental health service framework, published by the Department in 2011 and endorsed by Transforming Your Care. Recovery-focused practice will allow individuals to take control and to build socially inclusive, connected lives that are satisfying, fulfilling and enjoyable, even if they continue to experience symptoms related to mental ill health. The challenge for professionals and service providers is how we can better support the people whom we serve in their recovery journey.

One of the key developments in mental health services in recent years has been in the provision of psychological therapies, or talking therapies as they are commonly called. In 2010, my Department published a strategy for the development of psychological therapy services. The HSCB and PHA have led on the

implementation of that strategy and the key actions flowing from the strategy have largely been implemented.

The strategy was underpinned with recurrent funding of £4.4 million. Today, some £6.5 million is spent on those services. That funding provides a range of services, including psychology, psychotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and trauma therapy. The HSCB estimates that between 75,000 and 80,000 face-to-face therapy sessions are provided each year.

Recent investment has been focused on the training of existing staff in psychological therapies and the establishment of primary care talking therapies. Primary care talking therapy hubs bring together GPs, mental health clinicians and third-sector providers into a single service consortium. Those hubs will improve access to care for people with common mental health problems. The HSCB is investing £1.4 million into that initiative and is committed to incrementally building those hubs as a new way of working over the next three years.

Psychological therapies do not just help those with mental health problems; they can also help those with physical health needs, such as those with pain management needs, cancer patients, patients with HIV and older people. The HSCB recently invested around £300,000 to enhance psychological therapy services for those with physical health needs.

The Bamford review also set out the strategic direction for children's mental health services and supports cross-sectoral collaborative working among key agencies and Departments. Child and adolescent mental health services are delivered through four community based teams. The Belfast team also provides services for the South Eastern Trust population.

For children and young people who cannot be treated effectively in the community, there is a 33-bed children and adolescent mental health inpatient unit at Beechcroft.

#### 4.45 pm

In July 2012, my Department published a stepped-care service model for CAMHS, which promotes a more consistent, person-centred approach to mental health service delivery for our children and young people. Improvements to CAMHS will include an increased focus on early intervention, better multidisciplinary working and better collaboration with the community and voluntary, education and youth

justice sectors. That will ensure that our children and young people have access to the full range of support that they need, no matter where they live in Northern Ireland.

The HSCB recently invested an additional and recurrent £2.27 million in CAMHS, which will greatly assist in the implementation of the service model. That recent investment brings the total figure currently invested in CAMHS to some £19 million, which is double what was being spent in 2006. That figure does not include investments made by the Public Health Agency in a wide range of children's services, such as family support services, safeguarding and primary care services.

It is vital that people with a mental illness are supported to take control of their life and live a purposeful life in their community. However, support for people with a mental illness is much wider than health. It is a societal issue and, therefore, a government-wide issue. It is about education and training. It is about housing. It is about employment. It is about the day-to-day issues that are important to us all.

Although our mental health services have come a long way since Bamford, we still have much more to do. Further reform will require further funding. Some of that can be found by moving resources from hospital services to community services. However, new money will also be needed, and that is difficult to find in the current economic climate and given the range of pressures across the entire Health and Social Care system, particularly when we are losing money from the health service to pay for welfare reform.

I want to respond to a number of Members. Pam Cameron raised the issue of promoting good mental health and well-being for children and young people. The Public Health Agency is taking forward a range of programmes to promote mental health and emotional well-being in our young people, including the roots of empathy courses in school and the iMatter pupils' emotional health and well-being programme. The next suicide prevention strategy will also include an early intervention section, which will include promoting good mental health and well-being in our young people.

Maeve McLaughlin raised the issue of resettlement: 44 long-stay patients are to be resettled from long-stay wards in psychiatric hospitals; and 46 delayed discharge patients are to be discharged to the community. The HSCB has advised that it has the funding to

discharge the long-stay and the delayed discharge patients by March 2015.

Ms McLaughlin mentioned the new Mental Capacity Bill, as did Mr Wells. That will be publicised for consultation over the next few months. Mr Wells asked for a cast-iron guarantee on that, to which I heard Mr McCarthy say, "Hear, hear". I cannot give a cast-iron guarantee because, up to now, this has been held back by the Department of Justice. So Mr McCarthy's "Hear, hear" might assist in getting the Department of Justice up to full speed with the Department of Health, and then perhaps we can give the guarantee that Mr Wells was looking for.

Mr McKinney raised the issue of the Bamford action plan. We are looking at how we can ensure that Bamford is fully implemented, and we have made considerable progress. To assist us in doing that, there will be a meeting of the Bamford ministerial group this Thursday. The action plan is largely on track for achievement. We will update the group at that time and identify any other work that needs to be carried out.

David McIlveen and Mickey Brady raised the issue of mental health in rural communities. It is recognised that there can be particular mental health issues in such communities. The farm families health checks scheme has been very beneficial and assists in ensuring that farming families can receive free health checks, sources of support and information at a local level. It has been widely used at farmers' markets. Lifeline has also been working recently to raise the profile of its helpline services for anyone in distress in rural areas, and the community-based approach of the Protect Life suicide prevention strategy ensures that services are available at a local level in rural communities.

I thank Members who raised these important issues. I assure Members that service development will be informed by such issues, and I am always happy to listen to proposals and ideas that will help improve the lives of vulnerable members of our society.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank Members for their contribution to the debate on the motion tabled by my party colleague Kieran McCarthy. The Alliance Party has sought to put the issue of mental health firmly on the Assembly agenda, and, indeed, to put forward a simple motion that states clearly that we, as an Assembly, will take mental health as seriously as physical health; that we will work tirelessly to end the stigma against mental health; and, indeed, that we will

seek to address underfunding for child and adolescent mental health services.

I congratulate my colleague Mr McCarthy on having this issue put on the agenda today, and I pay tribute to his tireless work on this issue. He highlighted the underfunding of mental health compared with physical health issues, and with other regions in this jurisdiction regarding child and adolescent mental health services. He also highlighted the need for improved funding for psychological therapies.

Consistent issues were raised by all contributors to the debate, one of which was for community mental health services to be signposted as much as physically possible. In that regard, I commend the work of the East Belfast Partnership in my constituency. It has created an east Belfast health framework, which the Minister has supported, that aims to deliver healthy hearts, bodies and minds in order to build good health and well-being in our neighbourhoods.

We also want to see the preventative power of good mental health being utilised to achieve positive outcomes in other areas, including to access and sustain employment, and to tackle social deprivation and unemployment in many areas, which Mr McCarthy referred to as a vicious cycle that must be broken. Members also referred to other policy areas, such as good housing, education and social inclusion that must be levered to address this issue. I have been raising, in particular with the Minister of Education, the need for improved counselling services at primary-school level for our children and young people. It is a statutory provision at secondary level, but many educationalists think that we need to address that at primary-school level to have early intervention around many of these particular issues.

Mr McCarthy also identified the critical challenge that we face to combat the stigma in our society, which many other Members referred to. Pam Cameron mentioned the excellent work that is done by voluntary and community sector organisations in campaigning to tackle stigma in our society and, indeed, to encourage people to talk about mental health issues. She stressed also the importance of early diagnosis and support for people with mental health issues. Indeed, she has seen, first hand, the difference that good early diagnosis and treatment has made to putting people on the road to recovering good mental health. She urged the Minister to prioritise mental health provision. To her credit, despite the Minister being her party colleague, she frequently advocates and fights for many of

those issues, which are close to her heart. We welcome the call that she made today.

Maeve McLaughlin, the Chair of the Health Committee, identified two key areas that need improved: rehabilitation and the forthcoming legislation. Maeve McLaughlin said that we need to have a recovery-based approach, and I am glad that the Minister endorsed that as well. Indeed, she highlighted the fact that, although £19 million was spent on child and adolescent mental health services in 2012-13, it equated to around only 8% of mental health expenditure.

Fearghal McKinney also focused on the need for adequate and well-coordinated information about mental health service provision. He noted that, while we have seen improvements in child and adolescent mental health services as recently as 2012, it is somewhat concerning that it has taken us until then to start better coordinating that provision. He identified funding, commissioning and infrastructure as three key areas for improvement in mental health services provision.

Roy Beggs MLA also acknowledged the role of psychotherapy and talking therapies in addressing the issue and put forward the useful statistics provided in the Appleby report: although there is a 44% higher per capita need here, we have 10% lower spend than in other, neighbouring regions.

Gordon Dunne put forward the startling information that the World Health Organization has indicated that depression would be the second leading cause of disability by 2020. That highlights the link between mental and physical ill health, as if we needed it even more. He referenced the good practice of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in identifying areas for single mental health units and indeed for focused rehabilitation centres in his area.

David McIlveen rightly said that the Assembly must send a clear message that it is fundamentally wrong for us to differentiate between mental and physical ill health. Sam Gardiner backed that up with some startling statistics that show the full extent of the problem of hidden prejudice in our society, where studies have shown that one in four people believe that the mentally ill should not be allowed to hold public office and that one in ten people believe that people with mental health issues should not be allowed to have children. Those are startling statistics that show that, as Dominic Bradley also said, we must reduce and remove this stigma. Dominic Bradley also usefully emphasised the need for

us to do better in our support for carers for people with serious mental health issues. There is strong agreement in the Assembly on that.

Jim Wells identified some realism for the debate in the difficult choices that the Assembly has to make in order to fund these resources. A lot of the time, that does not come into the debates around these issues. However, we have some difficult policy issues ahead of us with the Welfare Reform Bill, and I would add to that the fact that, of a childcare budget of £12 million, to my understanding £9 million has gone unspent in the Budget period 2011-15. We know of the high cost of division to our society here in Northern Ireland and, if we needed any issue to focus our minds on dealing with and tackling many of those issues that cost us huge amounts of money every year, hopefully this one will lead people to realise that we need to get agreement around some of those vital issues so that we can invest as much funding as possible in key issues such as mental health provision.

I welcome the Minister's contribution today and the commitment that he has given to tackling the stigma around mental health issues. He rightfully referenced the good work of the Public Health Agency's mental health campaign. In my constituency, YouthAction has a Young Men Talking project. Young men in particular, and men in general, are a key constituency for us to interact with in making people feel comfortable in discussing these issues. The Public Health Agency's campaign, which uses images of boxing and good sporting issues, will hopefully make people feel more comfortable about discussing this type of issue.

The Minister endorsed a recovery-based approach to mental health provision and the need for more collaborative working in relation to CAMHS. He referenced the £19 million a year invested in that area. However, as I said, that has been raised as a relatively low percentage of the mental health budget, and I think that all Members of the Assembly will receive frequent inquiries from their constituencies about children and adolescent mental health services, which is an area that we need to see improved provision in.

I also want to reference the good work of Action Mental Health, the Assembly's charity of the year last year. I found interaction with this organisation extremely helpful, particularly around the workplace and good mental health in employment scenarios. I would like to credit them for the good work that they do.

**5.00 pm**

MindWise's 'You Can Take Control' campaign has been mentioned and I encourage anyone in our community who has experience of living with and recovering from mental health issues to visit the MindWise website and post their stories to encourage others to come forward.

The Children's Law Centre also offers free legal advice and representation for children with mental ill-health and plays a crucial role in policy development in these areas.

I welcome the focused and unanimous support for the motion and I look forward to seeing the Minister deliver on many of the calls that have been made from the Assembly for improved mental health service provision.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly believes that mental health should be taken as seriously as physical health; urges the Executive to take action to end stigma against mental health; further believes that psychological therapies should be at the heart of the mental health services agenda; and calls for the current underfunding of child and adolescent mental health services to be addressed.*

*Adjourned at 5.01 pm.*

## WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

*The content of this ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the Official Report (Hansard) process.*

### Environment

#### **PPS 23 — ENABLING DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CONSERVATION OF SIGNIFICANT PLACES**

*Published at 12.00 noon on Monday 14 April 2014.*

**Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment):** I am pleased to inform Assembly members that the Executive, at its meeting on 7 April 2014, agreed Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 23 'Enabling Development for the Conservation of Significant Places', which I am now publishing today.

PPS23 provides planning policy for proposals for 'Enabling Development'. This is development necessary in order to secure the long-term future of a significant place, which includes all parts of the historic environment of heritage value including scheduled monuments, archaeological remains, historic buildings (both statutorily listed or of more local significance) together with any historically related contents, industrial heritage, conservation areas and historic parks, gardens and demesnes.

Northern Ireland is blessed with a wealth of significant places, be these historic buildings, parks or gardens; scheduled monuments, or reminders of our rich industrial heritage. The cost of maintaining or renovating these places can be prohibitive and frequently exceeds the value to the owner or the market value following renovation. Funding for the conservation and upkeep of these important places is therefore difficult to secure from traditional sources. As a result, many of these important places are left to deteriorate and ultimately may be lost forever.

Enabling Development can therefore provide an important source of funds to make good this 'conservation deficit' and ensure that these important places are secured for future generations. PPS23 provides policy and guidance which will create additional certainty for developers, planners and other stakeholders to understand when enabling development proposals are acceptable to safeguard the future of heritage assets.

The final policy has been revised following consultation on Draft PPS23, which was first published in January 2011. There were a total of 62 responses to the public consultation.

When published in draft form PPS23 made provision for a wide range of development types that could be considered to benefit through proposals for 'Enabling Development'. These included schemes for the provision of educational, community and leisure facilities, including social and health infrastructure. This went much further than the established use of Enabling Development in other jurisdictions, namely to finance the conservation deficit in relation to proposals to secure the upkeep of a significant place.

A wide variety of detailed comments were received to the public consultation but the key issue to emerge was opposition to applying the principle of Enabling Development beyond places of heritage value. The opinion was expressed that Enabling Development should only apply to proposals to conserve significant places of heritage value in the public interest.

I have taken on board these comments in the finalised policy which now relates Enabling Development solely to schemes for the conservation of significant places of heritage value. This is in line with planning practice elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.

In line with the RDS, PPS23 enables developers to present proposals, which meet their entrepreneurial objectives and at the same time delivers wider public benefits by ensuring the future of Northern Ireland's significant heritage sites. It will create clarity for all those involved in the process to understand when proposals might be considered acceptable and indeed how they will be assessed when a planning application is submitted. The Department of Regional Development have advised that PPS23 is in general conformity with the Regional Development Strategy.

Under PPS23 proposals for Enabling Development can be permitted even when there is divergence from other planning policies, provided it is demonstrated that they are necessary to secure the long-term future of a significant place in the public interest. Whilst the policy allows for enabling developments that are contrary to established planning policy, it contains the safeguards that the enabling development does not harm the heritage values of the significant place or its setting and that it

does not result in detrimental fragmentation of the management of the significant place.

The finalised version of PPS23 contains one operational planning policy – Policy ED1 ‘Enabling Development’ – which sets out the criteria that proposals for enabling development will have to meet if they are to be considered acceptable. Under the policy proposals for the re-use, restoration and refurbishment of significant places will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated by the applicant, in the submission of a Statement of Justification to accompany an application for planning permission, that all of the following criteria are met:

- a) the significant place to be subsidised by the proposed enabling development will bring significant long-term benefits according to its scale and location;
- b) the conservation of the significant place would otherwise be either operationally or financially unviable;
- c) the impact of the enabling development is precisely defined at the outset;
- d) the scale of the proposed enabling development does not exceed what is necessary to support the conservation of the significant place;
- e) sufficient subsidy is not available from any other source;
- f) the public benefit decisively outweighs the disbenefits of departing from other planning policies;
- g) it will not materially harm the heritage values of the significant place or its setting;
- h) it avoids detrimental fragmentation of the management of the significant place;
- i) it will secure the long term future of the significant place and, where applicable, its continued use for a sympathetic purpose; and
- j) it is necessary to resolve problems arising from the inherent needs of the heritage asset, rather than circumstances of the present owner, or the purchase price paid.

The Best Practice Guidance ‘Assessing Enabling Development’ accompanying the PPS will also be taken into account in considering proposals.

I believe that PPS23 will make a real difference to how we secure the future our historic cultural heritage. Its publication represents my Department’s continuing commitment to preserving and enhancing the Region’s rich past so that it can continue to enrich the lives of this and future generations.





Published by Authority of the Northern Ireland Assembly,  
Belfast: The Stationery Office

and available from:

Online  
[www.tsoshop.co.uk](http://www.tsoshop.co.uk)

**Mail, Telephone, Fax & E-mail**

TSO  
PO Box 29, Norwich, NR3 1GN  
Telephone orders/General enquiries: 0870 600 5522  
Fax orders: 0870 600 5533  
E-mail: [customer.services@tso.co.uk](mailto:customer.services@tso.co.uk)  
Textphone 0870 240 3701

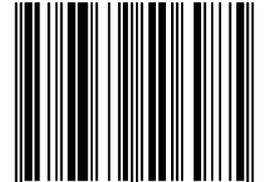
**TSO@Blackwell and other Accredited Agents**

ISSN 1463-7162

Daily Editions: Single copies £5, Annual subscriptions £325  
Bound Volumes of Debates are issued periodically during the session: Single copies: £90

Printed in Northern Ireland by The Stationery Office Limited  
© Copyright Northern Ireland Assembly Commission 2014

ISBN 978-0-339-50698-5



9 780339 506985