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Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 3 June 2014

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998, I wish to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) inland waterways meeting that was held in Enniskillen on 3 April 2014. The Executive were represented by me, as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and by junior Minister Jonathan Bell from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The Irish Government were represented by lead Minister Dinny McGinley TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht Affairs, and by Jimmy Deenihan TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The meeting dealt with issues relating to inland waterways and their constituent agency, Waterways Ireland. Ministers had a discussion on various priorities within their remit and noted that those will be contained in a report that is to be considered at a future NSMC institutional meeting as part of the ongoing review into sectoral priorities. Waterways Ireland delivered a presentation to Ministers entitled 'Ireland's Inland Waterways — Building a Tourism Destination'. The presentation provided an overview of the progress that Waterways Ireland is making in placing waterways and the waterway experience at the centre of the tourism offering in Ireland and internationally.

The Council received a progress report from Dawn Livingstone, the chief executive of Waterways Ireland, on the activities of Waterways Ireland. Those include the planned maintenance and repairs during the winter season; a public consultation that was undertaken on the proposed canal by-law amendments in the South; the completion of a

built heritage study of the Lower Bann navigation and a geographical information systems-based navigation guide for the Lower Bann; the donation of two barges for recreational and community use; the development of a strategic development plan for the Grand canal dock, Spencer dock and plot 8; the winning by Waterways Ireland of the 2013 environmental award at the Docklands Business Forum awards for its continued work in restoring, protecting and promoting the heritage dockland assets; the continuation of towpath development and work on the cycleway from Ashtown to Castleknock; and work with others to utilise three unused navigation properties for community and recreational use.

Ministers noted the position with the 2013 business plan and budget. They also noted that Waterways Ireland has undertaken a public consultation on the draft corporate plan 2014-16; the preparation of the draft 2014 business plan by Waterways Ireland; and that the plans will be reviewed after the public consultation is analysed. They also noted that sponsor Departments will continue to work with Waterways Ireland to finalise the business plans and budgets for 2014 and the corporate plans for 2014-16 that will be presented for approval at a future NSMC meeting.

The Council received an update on plans to restore the Upper Lough Erne to Clones section of the Ulster canal and consented to a number of property disposals.

Ministers approved the Special EU Programmes Body business plan and budget 2014 and corporate plan 2014-16. The Council agreed to meet again in inland waterways sectoral format in October 2014.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. I note that she referred to a presentation from Waterways Ireland, titled 'Ireland's Inland Waterways: Building a Tourism Destination'. I recall that the Minister's June 2013 statement talked of Waterways Ireland's new website and how it could be used to promote the waterways as a major tourist attraction and a valuable

recreational and educational resource. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made on realising that tourism attraction ambition?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to tell the Member that, even going by the presentation that we received at the sectoral format meeting, a lot of schools, community groups and local councils are involved. There is absolutely no doubt that the potential for tourism, particularly around waterways, is vast. We need to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to realise the potential to make connections. Also, the educational value of the website will, undoubtedly, be invaluable, particularly for children and young people involved in education. I am happy to provide an update on progress to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and to Members after future meetings. I am also happy to forward a link to the website, if the Member does not already have it, so that he can see it at first hand.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sí dúinn ar maidin. What are the main priorities for Waterways Ireland in the 2014-16 period?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Some of the main priorities are about making sure that the management and maintenance of the navigation are safe, and that it is open and accessible to people using the waterways and as a recreational space. As I said in a previous answer, it is also about making sure that more people have better knowledge of what is available to them around and on the waterways, particularly the rich environment and the heritage attractions.

There will also be a focus on unlocking the opportunities for growth in the economy; on social and recreational growth; and on reorganising and optimising the resources that should be there for public use, but certainly within the budget efficiencies. We will look at other funding opportunities for the Ulster canal in particular, but not exclusively, and how we can better maximise investment in our waterways to get a better return for everyone.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her statement. May I take this opportunity to ask her to convey to Waterways Ireland my deepest appreciation for its endeavours to transform what was a drainage system into a first-class tourist amenity? I am talking about the River Bann, which will, I hope, one day emulate the River Shannon in its ability to draw tourism. In her statement, the Minister referred to:

"the completion of a Built Heritage Study of the ... Bann".

Is she aware that many of the artefacts that have been recovered from the bed of the River Bann at Kilrea have been stored for many years? Will she undertake to raise that with those who are conducting the study to see whether those artefacts can be recovered and become part of a very important study?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his comments, and I will happily forward them to Waterways Ireland. That is an example of it doing a job and doing it well.

I note the Member's concern about the potential preservation and maintenance of any artefacts that have been found. I will happily raise that and update him on progress, where those artefacts are and, more important, if they are of value, where they can be stored and displayed. That is also part of the narrative and a good story about what we have in our waterways and how they can link in with other public services such as the arts centre in Limavady and libraries and whatever else in Coleraine. If they are of value, they can be displayed in those local public services. That is where we need to seize the opportunities and make the best use of them.

Mr McGimpsey: I suppose, to use a nautical term, we are looking at steady as she goes, and are managing the asset and taking what advantage we can out of it. That is progress in itself, because of the advantages of a canal system.

Minister, in your statement you referred to:

"an update on plans to restore the Upper Lough Erne to Clones section of the Ulster Canal."

That is another important piece of work. Given the financial constraints that the Department is working under, how realistic is it to be talking about updating and raising ambitions with that? Will the Minister give an indication of a notional plan or date for moving that forward?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. He is right to raise the issue of expectations. As he will be aware, the Irish Government originally said that they would fund the entire restoration project but have had to rescind that offer because of the financial situation that they are in. However, I was not content to leave it at that; I wanted to see what

DCAL could do to enhance the opportunities for even a part restoration, perhaps through a phased approach. To that end, the economists in DCAL have looked at the business plan. We are looking at a final draft that could go to a final final draft, but the point is that an interagency body has been developed to look at other ways that council, European and heritage funds can be used to try to start the process of land acquisition and construction.

Every Member, from across the parties, has mentioned the value of restoring the Ulster canal. We need to put our best efforts forward and try to look at other ways of starting that project. That is where my commitment is.

Ms Lo: Michael has stolen my line — again. We seem to be very interested in the same things and always want to ask the same questions. I will move on to something else, Minister, although I am very interested in canal development and restoration.

In your statement, you mentioned:

"working with others to utilise three unused navigation properties for community and recreational use."

Will you elaborate on that, please?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will write to the Member with all the details, but, for example, Scouting Ireland is using one of the barges that were mentioned, and it is also being used by community groups, I think in Dublin. It is about working with local councils, schools and community groups on the local environment, the flora and fauna and our waterways.

I am happy to provide the Member with the details, but, suffice to say, although Waterways Ireland does not have the budget to maintain and bring some of those properties back to life, it is not letting them rot. They are trying to make them safe, and they are trying to make them into an asset that can be used by the community, albeit not maybe for what it was originally intended to be. I think that this is a good way where all local public bodies can come together around an area that is of interest to them all to see how they can make best use of assets, not just to preserve and maintain the asset but to make sure that it is used for good public service. I will happily write to the Member with all of the details.

10.45 am

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I welcome the progress that the Minister has talked about in relation to the Ulster canal. Can the Minister provide some update to members of the Committee around that issue in a more expansive way than has been outlined here today in the Chamber? On the matter of going forward with super-councils coming on stream, can the Minister advise on whether she is having ongoing discussions with super-councils on the development of the canal in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to the canal along the stretch at Stranmillis up to Lisburn?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I will take the last part first. The Member will be aware through his connections with Belfast City Council that I have had very good working relationships with Belfast City Council in relation to the Lagan. Those discussions will be ongoing. We have had good discussions with Fermanagh District Council in relation to the Erne and Clones route. I will happily provide an update to members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and, indeed, a current update on where the draft business plan is in relation to providing options around how we can commence work and land acquisition around the restoration of the Ulster canal.

The Member will know that, both here and in Clones and Monaghan, planning permission around the restoration has been granted. We need to make sure that, while planning permission has a shelf life, albeit of a couple of years, we put our best efforts together collectively to try to have this work commenced. I will happily provide a better and more detailed update to the members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers up to this point. An dtig liom iarraidh ar an Aire an dtig léi a rá cad atá déanta ag Uiscebhealaí Éireann maidir leis na fadhbanna ag baint le jet skis agus rudaí eile atá ina bhfadhbanna ar Loch Éirne? Can the Minister advise us on what action Waterways Ireland is taking to address the speeding issues relating to jet skis and other craft on Lough Erne?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Waterways Ireland's inspectorate is responsible for enforcing the Lough Erne by-laws, which include speeding. Jet skis and boats are asked to carry registration numbers,

which are issued by Waterways Ireland. I know, because a report was given, that any complaints are very robustly followed up. I also acknowledge that, since the Lough Erne by-laws were introduced in 1978, the numbers of vessels and the popularity of Lough Erne have grown. I also know that Waterways Ireland is planning to amend the Lough Erne by-laws, and these changes include proposals to create no-wash areas and minimise the risk of high-speed collisions, particularly with some of the larger seagoing vessels.

I am happy to keep the Member and, indeed, other members of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee updated on those. Certainly, Waterways Ireland is acutely aware of some of the complaints, as is Fermanagh District Council, that it has received from people enjoying sport and leisure on Lough Erne and who have been disrupted by speeding boats and jet skis.

Mr Campbell: On the issue of the lower Bann built heritage study, the Minister will be aware that the Bann estuary, the north coast and the wider north-west is probably the jewel in the tourism crown of Northern Ireland. What productive use is the built heritage study going to be put to in order to develop that jewel in the crown to attract additional visitors and tourists to the region?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, it is indeed one of the most beautiful parts of this island, but I think that every Member, including the Member's colleague at the back, would have something to say about their own constituency.

The undertone of the Member's question is whether the study will sit on the shelf and not be of any use. The answer is no; it is not going to sit on the shelf. It is going to dictate what we already know, which is that the tourism potential in those areas needs to be better utilised. The Waterways Ireland Riverfest took place in Coleraine, in the Member's constituency, in August, and there were over 100 participants and 7,000 visitors. We need to capitalise on that event and make sure that it grows each year. However, in relation to the study, we need to make sure that the schools, community groups, anglers and local councillors are involved and that they all can make use of the study. It is about making sure that we have better use, better knowledge and better investment in our waterways. I would not like any study to be brought forward, only for people to acknowledge it, note it and then do nothing about it. I do not think that anyone wants that.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her statement. Given the reprofiling of moneys through the Waterways Ireland budget, will the Minister give any reassurance that she will talk to ministerial colleagues in Northern Ireland to try to make sure that we get the Ulster canal opened up from Lough Erne to Lough Neagh, which would be the jewel in the tourism destination crown if it could be exploited?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The part of the canal from Lough Erne to Lough Neagh is not on Waterways Ireland's schedule of work. I appreciate that it is of tourism value, particularly for local councils and the surrounding area. However, it is the Lough Erne to Clones section of the Ulster canal that is to be restored. As the Member may have heard when I responded to other questions today, we face huge challenges in having the finance to secure that end, despite the fact that the commitments were made to do it some time ago.

I am optimistic in all of this, and if we are successful in attracting European funding, and canals are seen as having extreme value in heritage and tourism, I think it will lift the bar for other Departments and other bodies to look at what else can be done. If I had the option to look at what else we could do, I would look at the Lough Neagh canal and make those connections so that we could go right from the Foyle — from one end of the island to the other — and enjoy our waterways, promote tourism and generate the economy, particularly for areas that do not enjoy the investment that they deserve.

Mr Allister: The statement says that Ministers noted the position on the 2013 business plan and budget. That is almost identical language to the communiqué of last June when they also noted the position of the 2013 business plan and budget. What is that position? Why is it that financial anarchy continues in that cross-border body and that, almost in the middle of 2014, we still have not had the 2013 budget approved? The Minister may not care much about it, but will she explain how expenditure, therefore, was even legal if the budget was never approved?

Ms Ní Chuilín: First of all, the spending is legal, and I am the anarchist in this case because I am refusing to implement additional cuts. I have no qualms in saying it: I am totally reluctant — totally reluctant — to agree to additional cuts that are above and beyond what both Finance Departments have agreed. Until we can come to a resolution on this, the

position will remain unchanged. I make no apologies for that whatsoever.

Mr Allister: Is it legal?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Absolutely; it is totally legal.

Mr Allister: How? How?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have received legal advice —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Ní Chuilín: — and, thankfully, you are not a person I would seek advice from on any subject. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Thank you: Members should make their remarks through the Speaker's Chair.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers to date. Can the Minister provide some detail of the real benefits that sponsored events have on and around our waterways?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Some of the examples that I gave in answering questions from John Dallat and Gregory Campbell, particularly around the Coleraine Waterways Ireland festivals, show how we can use our waterways, in conjunction with investment from local government, to attract visitors. Not even that, these festivals have proven, time and time again, to grow, and that is good news for us all. We need to make sure that we take a collective approach of seeing the asset in and the potential of our waterways and invest in them wisely, because the return has proven, yearly, that such money is well spent and that tourist and local attractions continue to grow. People feel part of something that is local to them and that the opportunity for investment will certainly be better secured if people have better use of their good public services.

North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. With your permission, and in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998, I wish to make a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Language Body meeting that was held in Enniskillen on 3 April 2014. The Executive

were represented by me, as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and by junior Minister Jonathan Bell from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The Irish Government were represented by lead Minister Dinny McGinley TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht Affairs, and Jimmy Deenihan TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. This statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The meeting dealt with issues relating to the language body and its two constituent agencies. Ministers had a discussion on various priorities within their departmental remits and noted that these will be contained in a report to be considered at a future NSMC institutional meeting as part of the ongoing review into sectoral priorities.

Ministers noted progress reports from the chairpersons and the chief executive officers of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, which included the following achievements relating to the period from November 2013 to March 2014. Foras na Gaeilge has selected the six new lead organisations and has met them to agree the extent of the functions in their respective areas. Core funding for 10 of the existing 19 core-funded organisations will continue to 30 June 2014. The six lead organisations, An tÁisaonad and two community radio stations will continue to receive funding under the new funding arrangements after that date. Three advisers have been appointed by Foras na Gaeilge: a change management consultant to provide advice to all 19 organisations to facilitate the necessary changes in their organisations; a language planning adviser to lead the six lead organisations and the language development forum on language planning issues; and a strategic planning adviser to advise the six lead organisations on strategic planning issues.

Information from the survey on public attitudes to Irish has been put into the public domain, as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge, to illustrate the continued and growing goodwill towards the language. Funding has been awarded to 13 publishers under the Irish language books programme. A meeting of the working group on the strategy for reading has been held and a draft report is being discussed.

The Ulster-Scots Agency delivered a successful Burns Night concert on 25 January 2014 at the Waterfront Hall, in conjunction with the Ulster Orchestra. The concert featured Eddi Reader, with performances from the Ulster-Scots

Agency juvenile pipe band and Markethill Ulster-Scots dancers.

The agency is developing an Ulster-Scots innovators' gallery, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Science Park. This will be installed in the Thompson dock, where the Titanic was built, and will be launched at the Belfast maritime festival in May.

The agency's 'Fair Faa Ye' touring drama project completed a run of 100 performances in schools throughout Ulster in March 2014. A full post-project evaluation will be completed by the end of April. Initial feedback from schools has been positive, especially regarding learning outcomes for the children.

The agency has developed two levels of accreditation for Lambeg drumming, which have been approved by the Open College Network (OCN). The agency is going through the process of being recognised as an OCN centre.

11.00 am

The 2014 music and dance funding round was completed in January, and 233 applications were received. Following eligibility checks, 170 applications were assessed, with total funding of just under £310,000 awarded. The agency awarded three community impact grants to local groups in Kilkeel, Newtownstewart and Belfast towards the cost of full-time community development workers who will support and develop Ulster Scots in their respective areas. Grants to a total value of £104,360 were awarded in February, with the groups expected to secure combined match funding of £26,250.

In January 2014, the agency relocated its Belfast headquarters from Great Victoria Street to the Corn Exchange Building on Gordon Street in the Cathedral Quarter area. This move will provide the agency with improved office accommodation at a lower cost.

There was revision of a joint equality scheme, including updating of the safeguarding policy on cyberbullying, and a joint project in the integrated schools sector. Both agencies held preliminary discussions with the NI Council for Integrated Education in January regarding the development of this project.

Ministers noted the position on the 2013 business plan and budget. They also noted the progress being made by both agencies on their key strategic direction and objectives in their respective draft business plans and budgets for 2014 and corporate plans for 2014-16. They

noted that sponsor Departments will continue to work together with the agencies to finalise the business plans and budgets for 2014 and the corporate plans for 2014-16 that will be brought forward for approval at a future NSMC meeting.

Ministers noted that the 2011 consolidated language body annual report and accounts were laid in the Houses of the Oireachtas and in the Assembly on 6 February 2014. The Council noted that the 2012 accounts for both agencies are being finalised by the Comptrollers and Auditors General, and it is envisaged that the consolidated language body annual report and accounts for 2012 will be laid by the summer of this year, also noting that the fieldwork audits on the 2013 accounts will begin in summer 2014.

Ministers acknowledged the ongoing cooperation with the independent offices of the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions, as a result of which, 11 consolidated annual reports and accounts for the language body were published from 2005 to date.

Ministers approved the revised codes of conduct for staff and board members of Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch, which have been reviewed and updated, in particular to take into account issues relating to potential conflicts of interest.

The Council noted the continuing progress in regard to the publication of a new English/Irish dictionary, including an online version on www.focloir.ie in January 2013. Ministers approved, within the existing budget, a revised timetable enabling additional material to be developed, which will exceed previously agreed project targets, on an incremental basis by the end of December 2015, with publication of a printed version in 2016.

The Council agreed that its next language body meeting will take place in October 2014.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. The statement refers to the appointment of a consultant and two advisers to advise the six lead Irish language organisations and the language development forum following the consolidation of core-funded organisations in the new funding model. Has the support provided by those advisers allowed progress to be made by the six lead organisations with regard to development activities in Northern Ireland, given that they are based primarily in the Irish Republic?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The groups that are recipients in the new funding arrangements are all-Ireland in their complexion. While they may have headquarters primarily in Dublin, their work covers the length and breadth of this island. I have been assured that 25% of their work will occur in the North. That is slightly more than was guaranteed previously.

Regarding the change management process and the consultants, I am waiting for an update on how people have engaged and on progress thus far. It saddens me that at least three of the groups in the North have not engaged with that process to secure the future of their work or amalgamate with the six lead funding organised bodies. I know that Foras na Gaeilge has attempted to meet with those groups as well as engaging with the change management process.

Before the recess, I hope to have another progress report, which I will happily share with the Member and the rest of the Committee.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an dara ráiteas a thug sí dúinn ar maidin. I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she outline the position on the annual reports and accounts?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I outlined in the previous statement, we have noted the business plans and the accounts. Although we have made great gains by catching up on previous accounts that had not been approved, there are difficulties with finding agreement and moving forward. The good thing is that we are trying to work our way through them. That is why they have been noted rather than approved. As I have said before and will say again, I am reluctant to go beyond the efficiencies agreed by both Finance Departments. Until we get agreement, the position will be to note them. The matter will be discussed fully at a future full NSMC meeting.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas chuimsitheach sin. Ba mhaith liom ceist a chur i dtaobh na gcomhairleoirí atá ceaptha ag Foras na Gaeilge agus an ról a bhéas acu i dtaobh an phróisis bainistíochta. I thank the Minister for her wide-ranging statement. My question is about the advisers who have been appointed by Foras na Gaeilge, particularly the change management consultant. Will the Minister outline in some detail the aim of the process and its said outcomes?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The primary reason behind the change management process was to have people who are highly skilled in and knowledgeable of change management. It was as basic as that. The aim was to help groups, businesses and companies to move from one process to another. Those people continue to emanate from the private sector.

The purpose is to get groups together to agree on a way to amalgamate, on what governance arrangements will look like, on what possible future alliances will look like, and on how government agencies and Departments can respond to that change management. As I said in answer to a previous question, not everyone has been involved in that, and some people have refused to take part, which is regrettable. The Member is not a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, but I will happily write to him with an update, because I know that he is genuinely committed to and concerned about the development and funding of the Irish language.

However, it remains the proposal to ensure that every group involved in the delivery and development of Irish language support and resources has the opportunity avail itself of that expertise. Whether it was a massive all-island group or a small group in receipt of core funding, there was equality in what support you could get. It is regrettable that not all availed themselves of that, but, as I said, I will happily provide the Member with further details.

Mr McGimpsey: The Minister is aware of the disquiet among Irish language activists in Northern Ireland about the setting-up of six bodies as the core-funded organisations, all of which are based in Dublin. I note that the statement says that core funding for 10 of the 19 core-funded organisations — four in the North and six in the South — will continue until June 2014, which means that the money is about to run out.

What is going to happen to those organisations, particularly the four in the North, bearing in mind the old adage, "You shouldn't change a winner"? With those organisations in Northern Ireland, you have had a success story as far as promoting and developing the Irish language and widening the scope of participants is concerned. It would be a shame to see those organisations disappear. How is the Minister going to ensure that those organisations continue to thrive?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is not my responsibility to make sure that those organisations thrive. That is the organisations' responsibility. I provided

those organisations with the opportunity to be involved. Three of them have refused to be involved in the change management process on lead funding. What concerns me most is that — the Member will be aware of this from his own time and it has continued — a lot of funding was going into salaries and administration and not much was going into the development of the Irish language or support for core work in the communities. That was always a rub across the length and breadth of this island. Those groups are aware of that, and, indeed, they attracted additional funding from other Departments. However, I find it disappointing and I am curious to know why they have not engaged in the process, considering that they claim to have, and do have, a duty of care to the staff they employ. What have they done to help those staff not just to secure and maintain what they have but to provide additional opportunities in the future? Not to engage, in my view, shows them to be lacking in their duty of care to their staff and the work that they do.

Ms Lo: I am very pleased to hear that there is cooperation between the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge. The Minister mentioned a joint project in the integrated schools sector. Will she give us a bit more detail on what that project intends to do, when it will start and how long it will last?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy to write to the Member. She is obviously not aware of it, but that project had been ongoing for some time now. It talks about the different perspectives of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency. As outlined in the statement, the Ulster-Scots Agency has brought its play and works to at least 100 schools this year, and that number has increased year-on-year. I think that the work that both agencies do in explaining who they are and what they are about, as well as the work that they do collectively to build good relations and on equality and inclusivity, has been one of the success stories and something that not everybody picks up on. You can even hear today that people have a particular interest in certain things, but this is one of the success stories, and I believe that Members need to lift it up a bit higher and shoulder it a bit better. Given the perspective and background that those agencies come from, I would like to see their work expanded across many schools. With help and support, and maybe additional funding, they will be in a better position to do that. Certainly, it is one of the good news stories from this.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her statement and her answers so far. Given that the Ulster-Scots Agency is already facing a funding disparity compared with Foras na Gaeilge, what are the budgetary implications from the outworkings of this meeting for the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge for the foreseeable future?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The funding was based on identified need going back to the establishment of the two agencies. That has been the situation ever since. The Member will be aware of what my position has been and will continue to be. I know that his party colleagues are also acutely aware of that, because they were at the meeting. I find regrettable the call to burden those two bodies, which are doing excellent work, with additional efficiencies. I think that there are other ways, and I do not believe that those other options have been explored fully and to their best potential. I will keenly consider that when it comes to thinking about what else we can do.

I will respond to Anna Lo and others who asked about the work that those bodies do. That work could attract funding, even from other Departments. The work that they do in building, developing and maintaining good relations could certainly attract support from other Departments. To satisfy the Member's concern, let me say that I am aware of the funding situation that the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge find themselves in. I am not happy about it and I will do everything that I can to ensure that the situation does not change. However, I do not have full control of the outcome of this, but I will certainly be arguing their corner. I know that the agency and Foras na Gaeilge have appreciated those efforts.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas arís leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus a freagraí ar maidin. An dtig liom iarraidh ar an Aire an bhfuil sí sásta go bhfuil an amlíne chéanna ann go fóill mar a bhí ráite ag an tús don sainmhaoiniú?

I thank the Minister for her statement and answers. Is she satisfied that the same timeline is in place for the new funding arrangements?

11.15 am

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am happy thus far that everybody who is engaged in the process has appreciated, respected and, indeed, accepted that some of the programmes have been developed and delivered within that timeline. I

am concerned and, as I said to Michael McGimpsey, I hope that some groups, particularly the three that have not been involved in this process, will see this as the last opportunity to become involved with Foras na Gaeilge in discussing potential options.

I will receive an update report before the North/South ministerial meeting on exactly where the groups are, despite the fact that the funding comes to an end this month. If there are any signs that the timeline will be extended, I have not seen them. If that is the case, it will be extended for everyone, I assume. However, it is a hypothetical question, and I cannot give anything other than a hypothetical answer. Needless to say, the groups that have engaged in the process are acutely aware of the timeline, the deadline and the pressure and have responded to that appropriately.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat. The Minister hit on this earlier, but will she give us some more details of the business case?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I fear that I am repeating myself, but I will. The business cases have been noted and will continue to be noted because I am being asked to agree additional cuts to those agreed by both Finance Departments. I am really reluctant to go beyond that, so, until we get a resolution of this one way or the other, the business plan and the rest will continue to be noted.

Mr Allister: I am glad to see that the Finance Minister is now in the House because I want to return to the question of the financial anarchy prevailing in these cross-border bodies. The Minister has just told the House that, deliberately and calculatedly, she is refusing to approve business plans and budgets, not just for this year but for last year. I repeat the question: how, therefore, is the expenditure even legal? She has not answered that question.

I want to ask her a further question. Her minder, Jonathan Bell, was present when she refused to give approval. Did he go along with refusing to approve the budgets and perpetuating the financial anarchy in these institutions?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I want to make it clear that that question is addressed to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and she can choose how she responds.

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer to the Member's first question is that I have received legal

advice, and the expenditure is legal. I could not possibly answer his second question.

Executive Committee Business

The Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 be affirmed.

The order, under section 84 of the Land Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, seeks to adjust fees charged by the Land Registry to ensure that they cover the costs of registration activity in line with the requirements of the Act. The fees set down in the order will replace those currently in force under the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Members will wish to note that the statutory rule is brief. In accordance with statutory regulations, the changes have been endorsed by the Land Registry rules committee, which is chaired by a High Court judge and includes representatives of the Bar Council and the Law Society of Northern Ireland.

Under the Land Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, there is a legislative requirement for Land and Property Services (LPS) to recover the full cost of the registration services provided.

Recent indications are that, although there has been slow recovery of the property market, bringing with it a small increase in income, that will not be sufficient to cover the cost of providing the staff resource required to complete the increased number of registration applications and to carry out the two-year programme of work required to positionally improve the Land Registry map.

The positional improvement of the Land Registry map is required to ensure that the map and the positionally improved Ordnance Survey maps are coincident. Land Registry is required by statute to use the Ordnance Survey map as a base for the Land Registry map that is part of the register. The maps are required to be realigned to ensure that good, secure title can be provided to landowners and to lending institutions. The legal title to lands will not be affected by this exercise. An inaccurate Land

Registry map would stifle the property market, which is in the early stages of recovery, and could lead to an increase in claims for compensation by customers unable to buy or sell land.

The draft order increases registration fees for transfers of whole, transfers of part, charges and first registration by £10. New fees of £20 are introduced for releases of charges, releases of parts of charges, releases of inhibitions and cautions. Those fees are introduced to ensure that there is no cross-subsidisation in respect of the work required to release certain interests in land.

There is an increase of £1 to the standard search fees and for copy maps and documents. For example, the cost to register a transfer of property in the current average price bracket will now be £220 if the application is made on paper and £160 if made electronically. The differential in paper and electronic applications is being maintained to encourage more electronic applications.

Members should also note that the proposed order will have the second-lowest scale fee of the four home registries for properties being transferred in the average price bracket and the lowest fee for properties transferred in the maximum price bracket.

The proposed fee increases are designed to cover the cost of the provision of registration services and to pay the fixed-price cost of the positional improvement project, which has been spread over a five-year period. Should the current fee increase generate sufficient income to satisfy the fixed price of the positional improvement work in a shorter time, a new fees order will be introduced to reduce fees.

While I consider that any fee increase should be avoided where possible, I am content that the order strikes a fair balance and will continue to encourage LPS to drive out inefficiencies and improve customer service with the provision of the positionally improved maps.

In line with the convention of giving the legal profession prior notice of the implementation of new fees, I propose that the new order come into effect on 8 September 2014.

My Executive colleagues and the Committee for Finance and Personnel were advised of my intention to make the statutory rule (SR). The Committee is content with the statutory rule. I therefore recommend that the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 be affirmed.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

The policy proposals in this SR were considered by the Committee for Finance and Personnel at its meeting on 14 May 2014. As part of its scrutiny, the Committee was briefed by DFP officials, who set out the context and rationale for the proposals.

The Committee noted that, under the Land Registration Act 1970, Land Registry is obliged to raise fees to cover the cost of providing the registration service. In particular, DFP officials explained that the current cost of operating the registration service and completing the required positional improvement project to update the Land Registry map to make it coincident with the updated Ordnance Survey lease map cannot be met through fee income received under the Land Registry (Fees) Order 2011.

The Committee considered the statutory rule formally, together with a note from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules stating that he had no points to raise by way of technical scrutiny. While agreeing to recommend that the order be affirmed by the Assembly, the Committee sought further information about the methodology applied by DFP in determining the level of fee increases.

In its response, the Department advised that three options were considered by the Land Registry rules committee. The first was to raise all Land Registry fees by £4.16; the second was to raise fees for transfers of whole, transfers of part, charges and first registrations by £25 and introduce fees of £10 for release of charges, parts of charges, inhibitions and cautions.

The third option — the chosen option — was to raise fees for transfers of whole, transfers of part, charges and first registrations by £10; to raise land information fees for searches and copy documents by £1; and to introduce fees of £20 for releases of charges, parts of charges, inhibitions and cautions. I hope that you all understand that.

As the Minister said earlier, the Committee noted that there is cross-subsidisation on charges as a result of no fee being charged for the release of charges in full or part, inhibitions and cautions. The proposals in the order will see the introduction of a fee for such releases and ensure that such costs are equally shared.

The Committee notes that the proposed approach is considered by the Land Registry rules committee as the most equitable option and as one which implements very modest fee increases. Moreover, it was noted that the Land Registry fees compare favourably with those set by counterparts in the rest of Ireland and in Britain. Therefore, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Cree: The Committee Chair really has spoken on behalf of the Committee, as he said, and covered all the points. On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I certainly support the review of the order.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Minister, if he finds anything there to respond to, to conclude the debate.

Mr Hamilton: I was a bit worried that Mr Cree was going to raise an objection or a very technical question about this. However, I am pleased with the consensus of support across the Assembly for the statutory rule. I thank the Finance and Personnel Committee, and the Chair in particular, for the constructive manner in which the Committee has dealt with the matter. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Land Registry (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2014 be affirmed.

Private Members' Business

Transforming Your Care: Implementation Concerns

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 in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr McKinney: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the considerable public concern at the pressures on emergency departments and GP waiting times, which have arisen during the period of the Transforming Your Care change agenda; notes with concern that the implementation of Transforming Your Care has not been fully assessed; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review and measure the implementation of Transforming Your Care to assess its effect on patient outcomes.

I welcome the opportunity to introduce this important debate today. The health service here looks after just shy of two million people in a service that costs up to £4 billion a year. In that sense, every pound that is spent has to be valued against its productivity. Every pound is important and has to be measured.

I note the amendment, and the SDLP is happy to support it. In our view, it neither adds substantially nor takes away from the original motion, but it does give its proposer extra time, which I hope he will use to express the genuine concerns of many of the extra 2,000 health service staff who have been employed since 2011, and the many others who share the concerns reflected here today. Indeed, I ask this question: did Transforming Your Care (TYC) envisage employing those 2,000 people when it was announced? We simply do not know. The ambition of the amendment is vague, but that actually serves to underscore the purpose of the original motion, which is about measurement, accountability and efficiency in the health service.

The health service here employs nearly 55,000 staff who are dedicated and professional and

work to the highest standards in often difficult situations. Their commitment, energy and compassion must receive the highest praise, and I think that we should all acknowledge that today.

Let us remember why we are here today. It is because of severely stressed circumstances that have been rehearsed over and over in the public mind, among health professionals and, indeed, in the Assembly Chamber many times. I do not propose to dwell much further on them, but only to say that, in our view, those A&E difficulties with, at the worst end, patient deaths potentially caused by system stress and the frail and elderly often humiliated and neglected — all those stories — are, in fact, the symptom, not the cause.

The SDLP has been consistent on that point and it is why we have proposed the motion today.

11.30 am

The biggest single change agenda in the health service here is Transforming Your Care. Authors considered future demand and present stresses, and they consulted and came up with a plan. In simple terms, TYC aims to shift the provision of healthcare from centralised institutions and into the community to facilitate people better closer to their homes. For the moment, let us leave aside the financial arguments and people's views about hidden agendas such as privatisation. If TYC is about anything, it is about the strategic future of health provision here. This morning and this afternoon, we will hear lots of individual stories about treatments, cost, time taken and stress, but I would like the debate to stay focused on the strategic future.

The plan itself is a high-level strategic document that initially had 99 proposals, and, because we could find no evidence of it, we recently asked for a measurement of the TYC journey. We got this tabulated document. We can see little or no measurement in it either. A bit like the DUP amendment, there is plenty of woolly narrative and not a lot of substance. The response we got included a wonderful mechanism whereby the original 99 targets:

"will...be subsumed within the business commissioning and transformation processes highlighted...and reporting will be undertaken on this basis."

Basically, they will be swallowed up by wider health policy.

Let us look at some of the updates given on the 99 targets in the April 2014 report. Proposal 5 is about incentivising integrated care partnerships to support evidence-based health promotion. The update is:

"Work on this proposal has been deferred awaiting implementation and subsequent evaluation of the...Integrated Care Partnership model."

Proposal 10 is about a reduction in residential accommodation over the next five years. The current position is so circular that it is difficult to see how much progress has been made, and the Health Committee's current work on older people and accommodation only solidifies that argument. In fact, in pursuit of proposal 10, the Northern Trust closed its care homes independently, that led to a public outcry and the Minister reversed the decision.

Proposal 13 centres on more community-based respite care. Where does that lie?

"Local commissioning groups are currently developing plans for unscheduled care pathways"

There is no concrete measurement.

Proposal 18 is on personalised care. It points in the direction of direct payments, but there is little uptake and most initiatives are still at the pilot stage, and that is two and a half years later.

Proposal 21 aims to create better partnership working with patients with long-term conditions to enable greater self-care and prevention. The current position is:

"Pathways are currently being finalised."

Once again, that is two and a half years later.

Proposal 46 is a new head start programme for children aged nought-to-five. Where is it?

"Services, including parenting skills, are under development"

Proposal 59 is a typical TYC proposal. It aims for a shift in the balance of spend for mental health between hospital and the community. This proposal captures the very essence of TYC. What is the current position?

"This is an ongoing requirement over the course of the TYC implementation period. Work is progressing on developing a

systematic monitoring process and monitoring will take place during 2014/15."

Note that work is not progressing on the issue itself. We have not even developed how we will monitor the shift of moneys to the community.

Finally, proposal 98 is about the overall reallocation of funds. It aims for a 4% shift into the community. Once again, we are told that this is an ongoing process but, importantly, we are told nothing about the process itself. What are they developing? A monitoring process. Plenty of process, little product and certainly not a plan.

It is for the above reasons and more that the SDLP wants Transforming Your Care properly measured and why we proposed the motion today.

My concerns are shared by the unions, professionals and the public. Let us look at what the three leading health unions say. NIPSA said:

"'Transforming Your Care', despite its visionary rhetoric, is ... creating the space within which universal provision is undermined and the toxic presence of the private sector ... is encouraged."

Representatives from the highly respected Royal College of Nursing (RCN) presented to the Health Committee recently. They asked what it was because, despite studying the document, they still could not outline what it was or what it was doing. Once again, that is two and a half years into the process, and they are at the front line.

UNISON stated:

"TYC fails to control critical risks, and is cost rather than clinically driven. Therefore the TYC model as presented requires fundamental reconsideration."

That is the considered opinion of three leading health unions, two and a half years into the process. It all reinforces the fact that the public must be shown how TYC is working, if it is working at all.

Last week, the Health Committee was faced with the prospect of health service bids in the June monitoring round. I have to say that, as a public representative, I have serious concerns about a Department that puts its hands out for more money when we are not sufficiently measuring what it is doing with the funding already. We are simply not being told how

much the change agenda is costing or saving. All we are being told is, "If we do not get more, the system is under threat". Last week, it was even down to the basic visit to a doctor.

Officials were asked about how the lack of funding is affecting TYC, and they were not able to tell us. We are left in the position, as public representatives, of facing a demand for money and a threat that, if we do not pay up, the service will collapse. That is another reason why we need good, solid, prudent measurement of this massive change agenda. That is the pressure that we all feel as public representatives, and it is what spurred the SDLP to ask those prudent, rational questions over how this vast amount of money is being spent on a change agenda. How is the money being measured, and, importantly, how is the product being measured?

Everybody has an answer, but it is their answer from their perspective, largely from their bit of the wheel. That is why there is a greater onus on the system to provide a measured and balanced view on the outcomes. The public cannot see Transforming Your Care change, but they feel it. It is the public who sit in line in a stressed A&E service. It is the public who cannot get an appointment. It is the public who pay for the system that is not delivering what they are asking for. It is all the more reason why we must have it explained in detail how the change is being measured.

There is no doubt that the issue of welfare reform will appear in today's debate from the opposite Benches, but that issue exists outside of today's debate.

The TYC plan was established in 2011. It is a failing when a health service puts out its hand for more and we do not know what it is for and whether it is consistent or not with a plan that is real or not.

This morning, we heard about a human rights assessment of what is going on. That may not be the only future inquiry into these plans. We need a health service that delivers cost effectively and for patients, and we need to see full transparency and accountability in the plan that underpins that.

Mr Wells: I beg to move the following amendment:

At end insert

";welcomes the progress made on patient waiting times, including the significant reduction in those waiting longer than 12 hours in

emergency departments to be assessed, treated and admitted or discharged; pays tribute to the dedication of hard-working health and social care staff, including the 2,000 additional staff employed since 2011; and further calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reinforce across the health and social care system the necessity for transformational change to respond to the challenges of an ageing population, and to encourage and maximise involvement and leadership from health care professionals on the ground in delivering change from the bottom up at an accelerated pace."

I need to remind Mr McKinney and Members from his party of why we are here and how we have got to this position. Normally, I would say that it would be unreasonable to expect the honourable Member for South Belfast to know about this because he was not a Member of the House when this was all being discussed but, of course, he was a leading journalist working for a major television company, and he was very much across what was going on in health during his time in that elevated position. Therefore, he should have known that this document, 'Transforming Your Care', has to be one of the most consulted upon pieces of paper in the history of health service provision in Northern Ireland. There were public meetings, private meetings, briefings to the Committee and several statements by the Minister to the House. Everyone had a full opportunity to know exactly what was going on and what it was going to lead to.

I have to say, Mr McKinney, that members of your party on the Health Committee sat through that entire process and agreed with what was being suggested and supported it, and only now are coming forward with concerns. I do not want to embarrass the honourable Members by naming them, but one is a very prominent lady from Upper Bann, and one is a very prominent Member from Londonderry. Those folk sat throughout those meetings perfectly happy with what was being proposed. What they realised is that we could not go on the way that we were going in health.

There is a phrase often used in health service provision called the ladder of healthcare. The problem is, in Northern Ireland, that there are far too many people too far up that ladder commensurate with the needs of their health.

Every time you step up another rung of that ladder, the cost more or less doubles. If we had continued the way we were going, the health service system in Northern Ireland would have collapsed under its own weight by 2025.

We could not continue. Indeed, Mr McGimpsey, the previous Health Minister, recognised that as well, because he was proposing a similar review.

Mr Allister: He did not do it.

Mr Wells: He did not get a chance to implement it — I accept that — because, obviously, the election came, and Mr Poots was appointed. The point is that he recognised that there were severe structural problems in health.

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I certainly will.

Mr McCallister: Thanks, Principal Deputy Speaker. I agree that Mr McGimpsey recognised that and legislated to create a Public Health Agency (PHA). Why are the Member and his party so against the Public Health Agency?

Mr Wells: We certainly are not against the Public Health Agency. The Public Health Agency is an important and integral part of healthcare provision in Northern Ireland. We all accept that unless we get very early intervention, and stop people adopting lifestyle choices that lead to poor health, more problems will be created in the future. I have always been a very enthusiastic supporter of the PHA. We certainly did not oppose the establishment of that body. I am one who would like to see a further enhancement of its powers, so you will not get me on that one, Mr McCallister, I can assure you.

The fact is that we all accepted that we could not go on the way we were going; we all accepted that it required radical reform; and we all accepted that the basic premise of what John Compton was saying in the original 'Transforming Your Care' document was the best way forward. Not only did we accept that, but so too did the unions, tacitly, and the royal colleges, enthusiastically, and many of the NGOs and the charitable sector were extremely keen on Transforming Your Care. Behind the scenes, everyone is still telling me at all the various —

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member accept that his point that we all agreed that something had to be done is entirely reasonable? We all agreed with the original proposals, of course, but that is not what is under debate today. What is under debate today is how we have gone about it and whether it is being measured. How do we

measure it? Is it succeeding? Is it failing? Can we address those points, and not have a smokescreen about what we all agreed? We all agreed that we would build the car, but what have we got and where is it going?

Mr Wells: That is a perfectly reasonable point. If the Member for South Belfast is saying that he requires more information from the Minister and the Department on the implementation of Transforming Your Care, that is a very reasonable request. However, I have to say that the stats show that the present Minister has been before the Health Committee far more times than any other Minister has been before any other relevant Committee in the Assembly. His door is always open; he comes to us at the drop of a hat to give full explanations; and he well remembers that marathon session that we had one night when we questioned him and kept him until 7:00 pm. He simply said, "My diary is open. I will stay here for as long as I can to answer your questions". That is the issue.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Finally, for one last point, yes.

Mr McKinney: Has the Member read this document? Does the Member recognise any measurements in it of a substantial nature?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Can I intervene? You should not be debating across the Chamber, putting questions to each other. For the benefit of the House, address your commentary through the Speaker.

Mr McKinney: Apologies, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, but this is the document, and I am merely asking the Member whether he has read it. If he has read it, can he point out the substantial measures within it that can convince us that this is the right way to travel?

Mr Wells: If the honourable Member wishes the Minister to come before the Committee to explain the document in detail, I am sure that he will, once again, make himself available. But it is inevitable that there is going to be a period of transition between the old system that we have and the full implementation of TYC. There will be pain, confusion and difficulties. There is no way that you could carry out such a major transformation of a health service anywhere in the UK without that confusion, difficulty and pain, but there is complete transparency amongst the Department about how it will be implemented.

Some of what Mr McKinney is alleging has been caused by TYC has not. It is simply that the demand for health service provision in Northern Ireland continues to grow, and we would have had many of the problems that he has outlined regardless of whether there was TYC. The problem was that there was not going to be a long-term solution to dealing with them. We have to face the reality: we have a 1.9% real term growth in finance for health. Depending on how you read it, demand is growing at between 5% and 6%. That is the inevitability of the problems that have been stoked up in Northern Ireland's healthcare system over the past 20 or 30 years. Therefore, there are pressures.

The Member mentioned last week's hearing on the monitoring round. I accept that the Department has put in a very large bid, but that reflects the increase in demand. The fundamental difference between the present Minister and the previous Minister, Mr McGimpsey, is that the present Minister has been able to find £600 million of savings within the Health Department's budget to balance the books in the first three years.

11.45 am

The fundamental difficulty is that the amount of low-hanging fruit now left from which to make savings is, unfortunately, a very low figure. As demand continues to increase, a bid has, quite rightly, been made for, I think, £160 million in the monitoring round, as the Minister is perfectly entitled to do. While all of this has been going on, we tend to have a lot of gloom and doom from members of the party opposite, the public and the Stephen Nolans of this world about health. Let us look at some of the figures. The 12-hour waiting list, which, when the Minister came to power, stood at 4,489, has been cut by 80% in three years. MRSA and clostridium difficile infections are down by 43% and 14% respectively since the Minister came to power. Standardised death rates from heart attacks have been reduced from 79 per 1,000 of the population to 61 over the past four years.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Beggs: The Member is reading out a lot of statistics. Why are you not telling us about the waiting time for a first appointment or treatment? It is easy to pick out one or two individual statistics from areas in which things are going well. What is the global picture? Does he accept that there are major difficulties?

Mr Wells: If I had the time, it would not be one or two, because a litany of successes has occurred over the past three years.

The Member is simply indicating that demand, as we all accept, is rising dramatically. However, in answer to his question, I say that, although demand is rising, on many of the outcomes by which you measure the success of a health service in any Western democracy, Northern Ireland is doing very well. We have the highest survival rate for breast cancer, at 81%. There are 25,330 clients who receive domiciliary care, a figure that is up by 1,800 since 2011. In December 2013, 12,400 individuals were receiving residential care. That is up significantly from 2011.

I could go on and on. In a situation in which the budget is constrained, the number of consultants that we have is up by 160 since the Minister came to power. That is a 12% increase. The number of middle-grade doctors is up by 69. That is an increase of 20%. The number of nurses and midwives is up by 531. That is a 4% rise. Those are excellent statistics, given the —

Mr Allister: What about the complaints?

Mr Wells: — difficult financial situation we are in. The Minister has been able to take a greatly restricted budget and make it go much further. I am not saying that there are not complaints.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes. One last chance.

Mr McKinney: On a fundamental point, the Member talks about the employment of doctors. If there was not stress in A&E, there would not be the need to employ those doctors, and there would not be that stress around the demand for them. We still do not know what has caused the problem. Those are symptoms, not the cause. We need to rehearse further —

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I speak in favour of the motion. I acknowledge that the amendment does not detract in any way from the motion. It is our collective responsibility to pay tribute to the dedication of the front line staff. That goes without saying.

It is worth noting that we are debating the motion at the same time as the Human Rights

Commission has announced an inquiry into emergency care. It is very serious when a human rights commission feels that it must investigate the people seeking emergency care in our hospitals. We need to stop and think about what that means. It means that patients, many of whom are in desperate need of medical intervention, are being so mistreated in A&E that what happens to them there may be a breach of their human rights. Such a scenario would be totally unacceptable in any state institution, but in hospitals, which should be dedicated centres of care, it is an utter disgrace. However, it is nothing new. As some Members said, the College of Emergency Medicine, trade unions, the College of Nursing, the College of GPs, front line staff, patients, families, politicians and the local media have been flagging the issue for over two years. I suggest that what we see in our emergency departments is only the front window of a system that is failing.

Let us look at the facts across the system, which the Minister will point out, and let us look at the public opinion of Transforming Your Care. The system has simply staggered from one crisis to another. We have seen a crisis with children in care and child sexual exploitation; a ban on blood donations from the gay community; court cases on adoption and on banning trade unions from appointments; a crisis in residential care; 15-minute care packages; crises in our emergency departments; concern about children's heart services; concerns about a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanner; and serious adverse incidents resulting in deaths in the Royal hospital. We now have the mess that is the payroll system for our front line staff.

Whilst the shift left of the £83 million for Transforming Your Care is laudable — let us be very clear about that — it is clearly lacking any measurable outcome framework. There needs to be a particular focus on health inequalities. In short, what will be the impact of this shift left on, for example, residential care, domiciliary care, our emergency departments, access to GPs, access to connected health and health services staff? It is unacceptable that that work was not developed alongside the proposals to move towards Transforming Your Care so that wider communities could have confidence in this system. In its absence, as I stated, we have simply staggered from one crisis to the next.

I want to make particular reference to the Put Patients First campaign. The recent Patient and Client Council report on access to GPs found that 26.5% of people were dissatisfied

with the access that they had. The Royal College of General Practitioners has clearly warned that that situation is not going to get better and that it will, in fact, get worse. On average, and I say this in the context of the wider TYC situation, GPs in the North of Ireland carries out around 12.4 million consultations a year. According to the Health and Social Care Board, there has been a 7% rise in that activity over the past 12 months.

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Again, the College of GPs said that the situation will get worse. My request to the Minister today is simple: act now, because patient suffering and neglect are simply not an option.

Mr Beggs: I thank Mr McKinney for tabling the motion, and I indicate the Ulster Unionist Party's support for it. As regards the amendment, I think that it is right that we should pay tribute to our hard-working staff in the health service. However, regrettably, not enough is being done.

Whilst there is some progress with 12-hour waiting times, I do not know why there should be any such waiting times. They rarely exist anywhere else in the UK, and we should not find them acceptable here. There are other measures on which we are significantly behind what the public would expect.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I am just starting, if I may.

The vision of Transforming Your Care was wonderful. There was to be more preventative care; earlier intervention; patients would get the right care at the right time; treatment would happen sooner; and conditions would be less costly to treat, because they would be addressed earlier, but that is not what patients are seeing.

We have seen a series of crises — I will use the word "crises" — in our emergency care, where emergency procedures have had to be enacted to bring in additional staff to deal with the excessive waiting times. As we know, when there are excessive waiting times in our A&Es, there are huge risks. There are huge pressures on staff, and there is a danger that a change in a patient's condition might not be spotted. So it is essential that we have appropriate waiting times.

Look at the type 1 waiting times provided by emergency care departments. I notice that, in recent months — January, February and March of this year — in Altnagelvin, Antrim, the Royal, the Mater, and the Ulster hospitals, the proportion of patients treated within four hours did not move out of the 60% bracket, yet the target is 95%. In fact, all of our hospitals are a long way from that target. As I said earlier, excessive delays mean risks to patients.

A&E departments do not exist in isolation. They operate within the rest of the hospital system. It is also interesting to look at what is happening with other waiting times. The waiting times for first appointment are also growing. In March 2014, over 127,000 people were waiting for their first appointment. That is a significant increase of 27% on the figure for March 2013. For patients waiting more than 15 weeks, there is also a trend that gives rise to concern. As of March 2014, some 19,000 patients had been waiting more than 15 weeks. That is a 5.6% increase on the figure for March 2013 and another worrying sign.

Waiting times for inpatient treatment/admissions are also increasing. There is a growing trend of patients waiting more than 13 weeks, and that must be of concern to each of us who relies on the National Health Service. Look at the patients waiting more than 26 weeks: at the end of March 2014, there were 4,312 patients who had been waiting more than 26 weeks. That is a 30% increase on the previous year. All these trends are going in the wrong direction. Where is Transforming Your Care? Where is the transformation?

In the last financial year, over £100 million was given to the Department of Health in in-year monitoring — rightly, as far as I am concerned — to try to address some of the difficulties that it had been experiencing. Recently, the Health Committee learned that the Department has bid for £160 million in the June monitoring, when the total given out last year was £80 million. That also shows that there is a huge pressure on our health service.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Beggs: It is important that we provide additional funds earlier and support GPs appropriately. I notice that, on occasions, there have been reductions in funding to GPs in Northern Ireland. Elsewhere, funding has been increasing, and patients have been treated at an earlier point of their condition and at a more appropriate time.

Mr McCarthy: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the motion. On a stand-alone basis, the sentiments of the amendment would be worthy, particularly its tribute to the dedicated and hard-working staff. It is a pity that the staff cannot all be paid the proper salary for which they have worked excellently for the health service. However, the effect of the amendment, relative to the motion, is to deflect from serious concerns about the implementation of Transforming Your Care. That said, Alliance continues to recognise that the status quo in certain sectors of the health service is not sustainable. As such, we continue to support the broad thrust of Transforming Your Care while sharing the growing concerns about how it is being delivered.

Transforming Your Care offers the potential for a much more strategic and integrated approach to the changing health needs of our population. People are living longer, which is good, and the balance of types of conditions that will dominate is changing. New diagnostics, better technologies, drugs and better procedures are becoming available. As such, we need to be prepared to rationalise some existing services in order to create new opportunities to do things more efficiently, effectively and timely.

12.00 noon

It is right that we try to make greater investment in public health to address health inequalities; focus more on prevention and early intervention; and try to shift towards supporting people in the community, as our community wishes. We also need to shift more resources into mental health. One in four people will experience a mental health condition at some stage in their life. Despite that, Northern Ireland continues to make smaller investments per head in this area than other parts of the UK do. Bamford must also be kept at the top of our mental health and learning disability agenda.

We all acknowledge and appreciate that there are huge financial pressures on the health service. There is more demand for new drugs, new medicines etc and patients are absolutely entitled to avail themselves of those if and when required. It often seems that these pressures are getting worse. So, in many respects, change cannot come quickly enough if we are to make the most of what is essentially a fixed budget.

Concerns regarding the implementation of Transforming Your Care tend to focus on a number of particular angles. One is scepticism over the extent to which resources will follow the shift in emphasis towards the provision of

services in the community — I think of the reduction in community time and the community meals offered to our population. Unless that happens and is transparent, the perception will be of cuts to existing acute services.

The implementation of proposals around the future of residential homes has already been subject to huge public anger, rage and debate, so much so that a rethink has been forced on the Minister. Let us hope that the right decisions will now follow.

Another concern is the extent to which staff have been engaged in and have bought into the reforms. One group of health professionals with whom more work needs to be done is our GPs. There are concerns over the capacity of our GPs to absorb further work on what is already a limited budget and a lower share of the overall health budget than in other parts of the UK. GPs are expected to become the hub of the new integrated care partnerships. However, that is not realistic without increased investment in GPs themselves and alternative channels to address existing and future caseloads.

GP practices are reporting significant increases in demand, as are out-of-hours GP services. In turn, increased concern is being expressed about the ability to access GP services and secure appointments. Nevertheless, a properly funded GP service can be the lynchpin of a transformed health system; that is recognised by GP themselves.

The capacity to deliver a transformed system is hampered by ongoing —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member begin to wind up his remarks?

Mr McCarthy: — struggles in A&E and wider problems. We need much more regular and detailed stocktakes of the reform process. If what has been planned in any aspect of Transforming Your Care is not working, let the Department pause and re-examine better ways before blindly following a wrong course.

Mrs Cameron: I speak on the motion as a member of the Health Committee. I believe that Transforming Your Care is still the best means of achieving what we want from our health service, namely a service that provides optimum care for those most in need within realistic timescales and budgets.

It is perhaps because Transforming Your Care is such a radical overhaul of an ageing service

that it is an open target when some aspects of it are perceived not to be working well or changing as quickly as they could or should. That said, I am pleased that the Health Committee is seriously engaged in scrutinising every step of this plan to ensure that it is given every chance to bring real improvements to what is, after all, one of the most challenging and critical areas of public service and public safety.

Specifically on today's motion, I readily agree that more must be done to ensure that we have fewer such scenes that have arisen in A&E departments recently. I am aware that, generally, waiting times came down over the winter compared to previous years. However, that is of little or no comfort to the 1,000 or so people who endured 12-hour waits in what must have seemed to be completely inhumane conditions. That figure for monthly 12-hour waits seems to have increased in the last few months of April and March, which is a worrying statistic. I would be grateful if the Minister would indicate why he thinks that increase is happening.

On waiting times for GPs, I am grateful to the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) for the information provided to me, in which it states that it believes that more funding is necessary to ensure that GPs are sought out as a first option and without delay, which, we all recognise, would take pressure off the A&Es. I ask the Minister to look at the points raised by the RCGP to ensure that it is given the support it requires to deliver the services that are needed.

The subject of waiting times will always have the potential to undermine confidence in the whole implementation of Transforming Your Care, but only when the full range of measures has been implemented will we be able to judge the scale of the improvement. That is why I believe that now is not the right time to call for a review, but that is not the same as saying that the policy cannot be scrutinised. That is why I welcome today's debate and the interest of the Health Committee.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Cameron: Go ahead.

Mr McKinney: Thank you. Is the Member aware of the views of the new NHS English hospitals' Simon Stevens, who believes that community hospitals should now take the burden in the health service? Does she have any view on how that impacts on TYC?

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

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Member for his comments.

There are aspects of the policy that are already displaying positive results, moving forward in areas such as reablement, which is allowing older people to remain at home with proper support and equipment in place to not only ease some of the pressures on the hospital wards or homes but to improve their quality of life. I recently met Friends of Muckamore, who met the Minister to discuss their concerns about a resettlement process for their friends and family members. Although they acknowledged that it was the right thing to do, they had some concerns about the haste with which the change was being implemented. To me that highlights the fact that, in many cases, it is not the end product or the overall aim of TYC that is in doubt; it is the scale of the change required and the challenges of delivering it from the ground. People generally do not like change until they see and feel the benefits for themselves.

I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Brady: I too rise to support the motion and the amendment. First of all, like other Members, I commend health service staff for the tremendous work they do in very difficult circumstances. I also commend carers, because the contribution that carers make to our health service is often forgotten. They save the health service approximately £4 billion per year, and without them I think the health service would have collapsed a long time ago.

Transforming Your Care was first mooted and came out in December 2011. I suppose there are two ways of looking at the 99 proposals. One is that they were a way of reforming and improving the health service. The other way of looking at it was as the privatisation of the health service. The more cynical amongst us — which, of course, does not include me — might consider that privatisation was very much on the agenda.

TYC's key commitments state that it presented us with:

"an unprecedented opportunity to transform our health and social care service. With transformation of such scale there will be difficult times ahead and challenging decisions to be made — it is important to remind ourselves this transformation is

about people and services, rather than buildings."

I think people would have agreed with the shift left and the transfer of approximately £80 million from acute care to domiciliary care. Mr Wells, who is no longer in his place, stated that the Minister had been before the Health Committee more than any other Minister has been before other Committees. With respect, I think that is because he has had to. So many issues have arisen that the Minister has had to come before the Committee and try to explain the situation. Ultimately, the health service needs to be protected at all costs. We need to continue a free service at the point of need. That has to be protected above all.

Transforming Your Care, in terms of the residential, fell at the first hurdle. The trusts were queuing up to see who could close a residential first. When I contacted the Southern Trust at the time to ask why it had issued a statement, I was told that it was in response to a request from 'The Nolan Show'.

It seems that 'The Nolan Show' now has an influence on health service policy, which seems to be a strange way, not to mention a bizarre one, of conducting that policy.

On 19 May, the Minister stated in the 'Belfast Telegraph':

"Since 2011, there are 130 more doctors, 640 more nurses and 320 more allied health professionals."

If that is the case, are they being used in the right way? Obviously, waiting items are a problem, and accessing GPs is becoming an increasing problem. With all the extra staff, we have to consider whether they are being used in the way that they should be.

Ultimately, the health service affects everybody from the young to the very old, and our ageing society — I think it is accepted that our elderly population will have doubled by 2020 — surely highlights the need for services to be improved and continued.

The Human Rights Commission's view of emergency care has been mentioned. The latest crisis is with the payroll system, and staff are not being paid properly. This has been going on for months and does not seem to have been addressed. I really do not understand that. We are being told that it is to do with national insurance contributions, but those are dictated by mainframe computers in Britain.

The Minister really needs to look at the whole issue of Transforming Your Care. He must either bring it back to the drawing board or look at ways of ensuring that it is carried out. Representatives from the Royal College of Nursing were before the Committee very recently and what they said about Transforming Your Care sums it up. They spoke of "a vision without action". There are no measurable outcomes, and that needs to be addressed. As I said, I will leave it to the Minister to answer those questions.

Mr Dunne: I too welcome the debate on Transforming Your Care. It has set out proposals for change across the health and social care system in Northern Ireland and a road map to reshape services to ensure that systems deliver in a more sustainable way in the future.

We need to reinforce across the health and social care system the necessity for transformational change to respond to challenges for our increasing ageing population and encourage and maximise involvement and leadership from healthcare professionals on the ground, so that they can deliver change from the bottom up at an accelerated pace. The Health Committee has had extensive involvement with the whole process of Transforming Your Care and has worked extensively with John Compton, who, along with his team, came on a number of occasions and spent time with the Committee.

We have always been reminded that full implementation of the report will take from three to five years, depending, of course, on the financial resources being available. It is important to keep it in mind that delivering change in health does not happen overnight. It is also important that funding for the resources to manage change is put in place to implement such change and bring about what is needed.

Delivery of Transforming Your Care involves setting up integrated care partnerships, which includes our local GPs, our health and social care providers, hospital specialists and representatives of the voluntary and community sector. Progress has been made in setting up the ICPs, and they are starting to deliver services more effectively and efficiently in local areas.

There is a need for real change, especially to the role of the GPs. On a recent visit to a GP surgery in Bangor with our Minister Edwin Poots, we saw the pressure that GPs are under and listened with interest to their real concerns. They are working in outdated facilities, and I

urge the Minister to look at providing a new health and well-being centre in Bangor. It is long overdue. Our GPs work in cramped conditions, and our patients wait in small areas for long times because of the lack of facilities. We need better buildings, and we need better resources to deliver. This is all part of Transforming Your Care. If we are going to deliver in the community, we need to make sure that the proper buildings are in place.

12.15 pm

The expectations of patients today are so high, and meeting these expectations is a real challenge. To do that, you need the necessary resources, the necessary people and the necessary buildings. It is difficult to manage large surgeries, with GP funding equating to 7.9% of the budget in 2012-13 while the rest of the UK receives 8.39% of the health service spending. However, people in our constituencies all regularly talk of the problems of getting an appointment with their local GP. These are real issues that need to be addressed and addressed effectively and efficiently through TYC.

Our emergency departments have been mentioned already, and we need to keep the focus on that. They continue to be overloaded with patients, with 96,879 new patients going through the Royal Victoria last year and 88,500 going through the Ulster Hospital, which serves my constituency of North Down and is now almost as busy as the Royal. This equates to 264 patients a day coming through the doors of the Royal Victoria. That is a tremendous demand on resources. This highlights dramatically the real challenges and pressures that exist in the health service. It must be said clearly that the vast majority of these people get good care in the health service. The vast majority get a good service and go home content. The vast majority recognise that.

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

Mr Dunne: I believe that, when all is said and done, there are issues to be addressed, but it is important that the balance is put in place and that we recognise that the health service provides a good service to the vast majority of patients.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's health debate. Indeed, the people of mid-Ulster have been very vocal in their concerns regarding health service provision, not least the Cookstown 040 group,

which presented a petition here in this place against the closure of Westlands care home.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises that our health system is in need of reform. Our population is ageing, demand on the health service is increasing and finances are diminishing. It is clear that the current service delivery model is most likely unsustainable. Indeed, the original Compton report said something similar. However, it is light on specific details, and, in the absence of an implementation plan, even though it was created at the very heart of the health service, it is difficult to fully assess the evidence on which this overall review has been based and what it has set itself as achievable targets.

The proposer of the motion raised this issue, and I certainly agree: without targets or an implementation plan, how will the success or failure of Transforming Your Care really be measured? Nevertheless, what should have started as the opening of a root-and-branch review of the health service has now been mired in controversy and has resulted in the plummeting of morale across health staff and, hugely worryingly, has started to impact on the confidence that ordinary members of the public have in the National Health Service.

There are issues that now need to be addressed before Transforming Your Care can progress. First is the money. Again, the original Compton report suggested that service improvements through reorganisation of the delivery of services could have been delivered within the constraints of the current level of funding, supplemented by only £70 million of extra transitional funding. The concept was diverting money from acute care to primary, community and social care services to treat patients sooner so that they would not need to go into hospital, but that has not happened. In fact, it seems that the finances are up the left altogether, with the Minister bidding consistently at monitoring rounds.

Transforming Your Care was dealt another fatal blow when it was revealed that health trusts were seeking to close all their statutory residential care homes, rather than half, as was initially indicated in the original plan. It was very unfortunate that the outworking of Transforming Your Care saw the untimely and badly managed announcement to each resident in Westlands care home that they would have to look for alternative accommodation in the short space of a few months. That caused terrible anxiety to those residents, and the general health of many suffered as a result. The play on the phrase "at least" was a

manipulation by the trusts. We expressed concerns at the original Transforming Your Care proposals to close half the statutory residential homes, and we continued to be concerned at the lack of alternatives that exist or are being developed for the growing elderly population, were the homes to close.

Another contradictory target is the fact that the Health and Social Care Board believes that it can reduce the number of newly referred older people who need long-term domiciliary care by up to 45%. Where is the care in the community? The 'Transforming Your Care' document also specifically mentioned domiciliary care as a potential area for income generation. Therefore, not only was the Health and Social Care Board eager to shut homes but it was keen to reduce the number of domiciliary packages being offered. However, there is also a high chance that recipients will now begin to be charged for those services. I would like to hear from the Minister on that issue and to hear a commitment that domiciliary packages will remain free.

The current failures in the health service affect not only the elderly in care homes, those attending A&E, those on waiting lists and all our constituents but the morale of the staff and their mental health and well-being. In this period of Transforming Your Care, I urge the Minister to take more care with his health transformations.

Mr McCallister: There seems to be general agreement from most sections in the House that it was necessary to debate this and necessary for the Assembly to be seen to be getting some form of accountability from the Minister. I would be surprised if we did not need to visit this subject again and again.

Listening to some of the debate, particularly the Minister's DUP colleagues, you would think that all was well in our health service and that, with a few tweaks needed at the edges, all was going according to plan. I remind some of them that the original time frame that was talked about in TYC was about three years. We are now two and a half years in to that, and it is being stretched up to five years. While that is going on, all that anyone has been told and all that the people on the ground — Mrs Overend talked about all our constituents and all the users of the health service — feel is that the health service is at breaking point. The staff who work there feel that there is a health service that is in crisis and a health service that is stretched to the limit. That is what is going on on the ground, and that is the perception out there.

Other Members mentioned a crisis in various parts of the health service, from our children's care system right through to our A&Es. That is all against the backdrop of trying to change its make-up. We have experienced that in my constituency and, indeed, in the Minister's constituency, with changes to the Downe Hospital and the Lagan Valley Hospital. All that is set against the backdrop of rising demand. When Mr McGimpsey was Minister of Health, we were warned about the difficulties in funding and the relentless rise in demand for our health service needs. What was the DUP's reply? It said, "There is no crisis. There is enough money in the budget, and you just need to manage it better". The coalition's decision at Westminster about ring-fencing at least health spending and the Barnett consequential of that have helped the Minister and prevented complete meltdown in our health service.

Mr Dunne talked about the road map that Transforming Your Care set out. I have to say that the Minister seems to have pretty well got lost on wherever that road happens to be going, because people are not finding that things are improving. They talk about needing more time and money. They have had two and a half years of implementing it. The Minister has been in office for three years, and his party colleague holds the purse strings. According to the First Minister, if they needed more money, it was to be made available. Why has that not come through? Why are we looking at those crises in various parts of the system, even before full implementation? This is moving — I have consistently warned about this — £83 million from acute to domiciliary care. Most people agree with the idea, but I have consistently warned about the sheer management difficulties of moving that size of budget when the one that you are taking it from is in crisis — a deepening crisis.

For the Minister even to go through with TYC, he is still looking at whether to close Daisy Hill Hospital or the Causeway Hospital. Where is he making the changes at A&E units, where there is already a crisis? I have asked the Minister this before: does this not mean that his flagship policy of Transforming Your Care is in crisis itself? Is it not unlikely that he can deliver any of the outcomes with the current policy framework?

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

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Allister: The shine has certainly come off the glossy rhetoric of Transforming Your Care. The public disillusionment and disappointment are accentuated by the fact that those now in charge were those who, when not in charge, made it sound so easy. In the years that were spent vilifying Michael McGimpsey as Health Minister, the constant refrain was that there was not a money problem in the health service, just a management problem, and that, if he had been a better Minister and had had the skills that they thought they had, there would have been no problem whatsoever in the health service. Of course, how different it has turned out to be. There has not been even a by-the-way apology to Mr McGimpsey for their vilification of him over the years; rather, there has been an arrogant pretence: "Well, everything has changed. It was totally unforeseeable". They have, of course, just discovered that running the health service is not as easy a project as they seemed to think it was for so long.

Transforming Your Care has been a great disappointment to many. I am not totally surprised, because it seemed to me from the outset that it was over-optimistic in its view that you could simply devolve to the community so much that was being done in the health service and that you could have care packages that would remove the need for doctors, hospitals, emergency units, visits and everything else.

At the same time, we know that the care packages in the community are essentially meagre. We all hear stories of the carers who have seven minutes in which to do an hour's work. No wonder, then, that, when you build Transforming Your Care on such sand, it begins to sink in the manner in which it has.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he accept that the SDLP position on this has been to get transparency and accountability? Does he therefore share my concern at learning that the board has been putting pressure on media organisations to ignore the negative stories that he is talking about and instead focus on positive stories in TYC and the health service?

Mr Allister: I am not surprised to hear that, and I share that concern.

Another issue in Transforming Your Care is that we were going to solve the problems in A&E departments without having any regard to the fact that we had guaranteed logjams in those departments by, over the past five years, reducing the number of beds in our hospitals by 16% — in some boards by 20%. It does not

take a lot of brain to work out that, if you reduce the number of beds in hospitals on that scale, you will inevitably produce a logjam at the access point of A&Es, and so it has turned out.

12.30 pm

It is supposed to be some sort of creditable, laudable thing that fewer people now have to wait 12 hours: it is scandalous that anyone has to wait 12 hours in an A&E department. Yet, that is turned into some sort of virtue. There is nothing virtuous about the fact that our A&E departments regularly see waits of that length, with the serious adverse incidents that have been connected to it.

Then we take the situation relating to statutory residential homes. The Minister has ducked and dived on this issue so many times, but the fundamental remains that it is his policy to destroy statutory residential homes. He goes through the motions of consultation but refuses to take the elementary step of making the homes have a viable future by removing the moratorium on new admissions. You cannot viably test the future of a home while denying access. It is a means of bleeding the homes to death, and that is the Minister's policy.

The Minister was content to see 100% closure in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust until there was a public outcry. He had advance knowledge that that was the plan. I have it in Assembly answers: he had advance knowledge of the plan of the Northern Trust to shut 100% of its homes, and he had nothing to say until a 90-year-old lady, Mrs Faulkner, blew the whistle and set off a public outcry. Then, he sought to pretend that that was not his policy and it was those unmanageable mandarins doing things that really were against his will. Where does the buck stop in the health service? It never seems to stop with the Minister. Has there been a single issue in his tenure of office for which the Minister has taken responsibility?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Could the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: It seems not once. It is always someone else's fault. It was the Minister's fault when it was Michael McGimpsey, but it is never the Minister's fault now. Strange that, isn't it?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of

business when we return will be Question Time. The debate will recommence at 3.30 pm when the Minister will respond.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Jobs: West Tyrone

1. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of the 11,000 new jobs promoted by Invest NI in 2013-14 were promoted in West Tyrone. (AQO 6245/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest Northern Ireland is working on the presentation of jobs promoted at subregional level in 2013-14, including those in West Tyrone. It intends to publish the information once the figures have been fully validated. However, during 2012-13, 678 jobs were promoted by Invest Northern Ireland in West Tyrone. Those jobs were promoted in projects undertaken by companies such as Allstate, Telestack, Terex and Terramac Fabrication.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer and for the number of jobs promoted. When does the Department hope the Terex jobs will be realised? Given the constraints in relation to land available for industrial development in Omagh, can she give any reassurance about what might happen in that regard?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary. In relation to the Terex jobs, I am hoping that Invest Northern Ireland will be able to give you those figures. I know for sure that some of those jobs have already been created and are in post; I just do not have the precise figures for job creation.

In relation to Terex's desire to do more in the Omagh area, we are working alongside the company to try to identify an appropriate site. I am acutely aware that there is a shortage of land in Invest NI's site in Omagh. The Member will know that we have been attempting to resolve the issue. We have had a number of attempts to acquire land, and unfortunately none of them have been successful to date. However, we will continue to keep looking for appropriate land, and I am sure that the

Member will want to work with us to assist us in that regard.

Mr I McCrea: As someone who represents a neighbouring constituency — Mid Ulster — I know only too well the benefit that the manufacturing industry brings. Will the Minister outline what the manufacturing industry as a whole brings to the economy in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The whole of Tyrone has been very significant in what it has achieved for the manufacturing sector and, in particular, the engineering sector over the past number of years. There are around 50 Invest NI client companies of significant size that are classified as being engineering based in Tyrone alone, and the majority of those are in the materials handling sector. There are another 25 outside Tyrone, which proves that you can have a material handling company outside of Tyrone, although most seem to be placed in Tyrone.

Those companies have proven to be very successful. They had a very tough time at the beginning of the recession. However, they have regrouped, they have come back again and they are working in a number of export markets right across the world. We will continue to work with them to explore new export markets, and that is something that I am very pleased to be able to do when I accompany them on trade missions.

Giro d'Italia

2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the number of visitors from outside Northern Ireland who attended the Giro d'Italia. (AQO 6246/11-15)

10. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the benefits to the economy of hosting large-scale events such as the Giro d'Italia. (AQO 6254/11-15)

Mrs Foster: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 10 together.

The Giro d'Italia has delivered a wide range of economic benefits. In particular, it has attracted out-of-state visitors — both tourists and those travelling with the competition — who spend money in local businesses. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is undertaking the post-event evaluation. However, when final figures

are complete, we anticipate overall visitor numbers to exceed the 140,000 target.

Hosting those successful international events also gives us significant positive global media exposure. That helps to change perceptions of Northern Ireland as a holiday destination and provides a unique marketing opportunity to grow overseas tourism. Indeed the key objective for staging the Giro d'Italia was to showcase Northern Ireland on a world stage. Many hundreds of international journalists and photographers joined the cheering visitors and local people, providing a welcome to Northern Ireland that was beyond the organisers' expectations. I am told that Northern Ireland has very much set the bar for all future "Big Starts".

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her response. I very much welcome the success of the Giro d'Italia. The Minister is aware of the latest tourism figures, which show that numbers of visitors from GB are up but that those from the Republic of Ireland are down by around 15%. Has the Minister any plans to try to increase that figure and change tack to improve the number of visitors coming from the Republic of Ireland and further afield into Northern Ireland? Also, will she tell the House whether those for the Giro d'Italia possibly qualify so that she can set her sights on the Tour de France coming to Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: On the tourism figures that have been recently released, I have to say that, overall, the picture is very healthy. We are up 2% overall in 2013, and we have to recall that 2012 was a very significant year for us and was very much a year when we brought a lot of visitors to Northern Ireland. However, I am pleased that we still managed to increase our numbers last year. In some markets, as the Member said, we have had significant growth. The GB figures have increased by 13%. Unfortunately, the Republic of Ireland (ROI) figures dropped by, I think, 7%. Overall, the trend is moving upwards, but clearly there are issues that we need to identify to deal with the drop in ROI figures. The ROI figures had increased significantly in 2012, so we were at a high level. Now they have dropped back, and we need to try to understand why that is.

As you would imagine, I am very pleased to see the GB figures rise, and indeed the overall number of visitors from outside Northern Ireland has increased by 6%. So, it is a good story; there are some bits to improve upon, but I believe that we can tackle that issue in the future.

With respect to the Tour de France; as the Member knows, we have identified a number of large-scale events that we would like to come to Northern Ireland, because we believe that we have the correct infrastructure now in place. We want to attract more large events like the Giro d'Italia, which, can I say, was a tremendous success for so many reasons, not least the fact that the people of Northern Ireland came out on to the streets, dressed in pink and had a joyous weekend. What a tremendous thing it was to be a part of; I was very pleased to be a part of it.

We will be looking for other large-scale events, and this is something that we hope to make some announcements about in the near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I encourage Members to be brief in asking their supplementary questions.

Mr Newton: As the Minister said, the Giro d'Italia was a huge success, and so was the UK City of Culture. The ability of Northern Ireland to attract those two events indicates that we are punching well above our weight. However, I ask the Minister to comment on the terrorist attack on the Everglades Hotel and what the implications of that might be.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question because it gives me the opportunity to condemn outright what was going on in Londonderry. At the very same time that I was sitting at the Northern Ireland Tourism Awards, watching as the UK City of Culture received the award for the outstanding contribution to tourism, individuals decided to put a bomb into the Everglades Hotel. I think that the difference between those two stories about Londonderry should not be lost on anyone.

I commend the staff of the Everglades Hotel for their excellent work in making sure that everyone was out of the hotel at that particular time. I think that their actions were nothing less than heroic. Of course, it is not the first time that the Hastings family has suffered at the hands of terrorism. We commend them for the fact that they had the hotel open again on Sunday to welcome the marathon, which I understand was a huge success, and I commend them for their determination not to be pushed aside by those who would seek to push us backwards.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagraí. I thank the

Minister for her answers. Will she outline to the House what plans are in place to make sure that, in the future, we benefit to the maximum from the large number of high-profile international events that we host, so that there is not just a one-off, short-term economic benefit from them but long-term gain?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. We are engaged in making sure that we gain a legacy from the events that come to Northern Ireland. I think that we have achieved that, to date, and will achieve it with the Giro d'Italia. With its support and help, we are planning to host the Gran Fondo, a legacy event from the Giro d'Italia that would see a more family-orientated race come to different areas of Northern Ireland for the next few years. We are working with the Giro to make sure that that happens. Of course, the legacy in and around the Giro has been that a lot of people who never thought about engaging in cycling have engaged in cycling. I am sure that my colleague the Regional Development Minister will want to look at what legacy he can put in place from that as well.

Mr McKinney: Would the Minister care to reflect on the damage that the First Minister's recent comments may be causing to her otherwise good work in attracting inward investment, overseas sales and tourism?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The First Minister has reflected on the comments that have been made and has made his position very clear. Therefore, I will move on. I have no intelligence to show that it has had any damage to Northern Ireland's tourism interests, international investment or, in particular, our work to look to markets outside Europe for international exports. That is what I continue to do on a day and daily basis.

Mr McCarthy: On the same train, I welcome the Minister's endorsement of the Giro d'Italia. However, would she advise people who are in the public domain that, whilst we all agree entirely with free speech, they should be very mindful of what they say, where that travels and how it can affect Northern Ireland's tourism potential?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I honestly believe that that supplementary question is well off the mark. However, I will leave it to the Minister to decide.

Mrs Foster: I hope that everybody in the House will do their best to promote Northern Ireland, regardless of where they go in the world. That is certainly something that the First Minister

engages in and certainly something that I engage in as well.

Electricity Prices

3. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's efforts to reduce electricity prices for industrial and commercial customers. (AQO 6247/11-15)

Energy Costs

9. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department and the Utility Regulator are taking to reduce the cost of energy for manufacturing companies. (AQO 6253/11-15)

Mrs Foster: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 3 and 9 together.

Electricity prices are determined by the market, subject to regulation. The principal requirement is that prices should be cost-reflective and apportioned fairly according to consumption. Measures to reduce prices for one customer group will mean that others pay higher prices. That said, my aim is that prices for all consumers should be no higher than necessary to secure our future electricity supplies. Achieving that aim includes east-west and North/South engagement to redesign the single electricity market to meet European market integration requirements; working with the Utility Regulator to examine how network and related charges are currently allocated across customer groups and the impact of reshaping cost allocations; and reviewing the costs and benefits of Northern Ireland's 40% renewables target. That is in addition to the measures I have taken to promote competition, support innovation, implement a framework for energy efficiency and develop our infrastructure through gas extension and electricity interconnection.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she give her assessment of the process of netting, which some energy companies are using to give price-beating quotes?

Mrs Foster: I am not sure that that applies in Northern Ireland, because of course the Northern Ireland market is regulated in a way that the Great Britain market is not regulated. However, if the Member wants to give me the

specifics, I am quite happy to follow up with him.

Mr Moutray: The Minister referred in her answer to work that will be undertaken by the Utility Regulator. Will she outline what the timescale is for the completion of that work and, subsequently, how long it will take for the Department to make the required changes?

2.15 pm

Mrs Foster: I had asked the Utility Regulator's office to carry out a piece of work on the high costs that are associated with our industrial companies and the fact that they are paying high energy prices. I am told that the consultancy work that the regulator has engaged will be completed shortly. I hope that it will be very shortly, because, to be honest, I had hoped that it would be completed by now. I am told that the regulator's office aims to publish by the end of June or the start of July, and then a report will come to me that will include the results of the analysis undertaken. I, of course, will consider the report to see whether I need to make any policy interventions, but again, we are talking about who in the energy framework is going to bear the cost. I hope that the House is ready to have that discussion because it will be a difficult one. We are talking about the high cost of energy for industry, but, as I said in my substantive answer, someone has to pay for the changes, and we need to discuss who that is going to be.

Mr Eastwood: Has the Minister's Department done any work on the impact of increased production from renewable sources on energy prices?

Mrs Foster: Yes. As I said in my substantive answer, it is one of the areas that I am looking at in considering the cost moving forward. The Member knows that we have set a 40% renewable energy target, and I think that we need to understand the costs that are associated with that. That will form part of the work that I will carry forward. Of course, the Committee will very much want to be involved with that as well. I am not pre-empting what that work will bring forward, but I think that it is only right that we should look at it as well.

Mr Agnew: What work is the Minister's Department doing to support businesses in improving their energy efficiency?

Mrs Foster: We do a lot of work in this area, not least in conjunction with the Carbon Trust, which has in the past provided 0% loans to

businesses that want to install energy efficient mechanisms. Indeed, we continue to intervene with the companies to try to identify for them where they can make savings not only on costs but on other efficiencies, not least environmental. So, yes, we work very closely with firms on that because we realise the difference that it can make to their bottom line on occasions.

Mr Elliott: Following on from Mr Eastwood's question, can the Minister advise whether there has been any impact so far, either positive or negative, on electricity prices from renewable energy sources?

Mrs Foster: Of course, there could be a number of answers to that question. He, like me and everyone else in the House, will have had representations from individuals who have, perhaps, received planning permissions for anaerobic digesters or whatever and then have great difficulties in getting them connected to the grid. So, that could be seen as a cost. When it comes to prices, the Member will know that we have renewables obligation certificates, which, of course, are spread not just against the cost to consumers in Northern Ireland but right across the United Kingdom. That is the advantage of being part of the United Kingdom, because we are able to spread those costs across consumers. I want to see what the precise costs are. As I said, we will have that work carried out for us, and I am sure that we will be able to share it with Members.

Employment: Foyle

4. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the resources that have been allocated to the Foyle constituency since the end of the City of Culture year to create sustainable employment. (AQO 6248/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am sure that the UK City of Culture will have created a new confidence that will be reflected in future economic success in increased investment and in a larger number of tourists. Invest Northern Ireland has a regional office in Londonderry, and businesses in the Foyle constituency can call on the same levels of financial and other assistance as any other part of Northern Ireland. Through the jobs fund, for example, as of December 2013, the most recent figures available show that Invest Northern Ireland has promoted a total of 562 jobs in Foyle, of which 454 have been created. Invest NI has also recently offered support of over £2,600,000 to nine companies in Foyle through the loan fund.

I assure the Member that Invest NI is committed to bringing jobs to all of Northern Ireland, including the Foyle constituency and surrounding areas. I was pleased to announce on 17 April this year Convergys's decision to undertake a £10,100,000 million investment in Londonderry, promoting 333 jobs, which Invest NI has supported with £1,400,000 million of funding.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response and her continued efforts to create a good environment for employment in my constituency. Clearly, today's announcement about the City of Culture's legacy, with MTV coming to the city in September, is good. There is absolutely no doubt that it has created a magnificent environment around the city. Unfortunately, however, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) figures for November 2013 indicate that unemployment levels in the city have gone up. Will the Minister outline to the House who will now have the key role in the legacy of the City of Culture, particularly when there has to be a true legacy of employment opportunities?

Mrs Foster: For me, it will be a shared responsibility across the Executive. As the Member knows, Minister Farry and I are looking at economic inactivity, and he has engaged with me on that. I will continue to work with Invest Northern Ireland to bring more jobs to Londonderry and to encourage companies that are already there to expand. The culture and arts part of the legacy will be taken forward by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Therefore, it is a responsibility that we share across the Executive. I suppose that, from the Member's perspective, the One Plan sits very much with the Executive and not just with one Department.

Mr Campbell: I was delighted to hear the Minister criticise those who bombed Londonderry at the weekend. It is always good and appropriate to remind people that they failed in the past and are failing again, however reprehensible their activities.

Following the success of the UK City of Culture, can the Minister, as a Fermanagh-based MLA, outline the importance of jobs being created right across Northern Ireland and particularly in the north-west?

Mrs Foster: Again, I take the opportunity to say that those who engaged in terrorism in the past, and those who engage in it now or in the future, will not succeed because there is a determination, not only in the business

community but in the wider community, that they will not do so.

On the creation of jobs for the north-west, we continue, as I said, to work with foreign direct investors, some of whom choose to come to the city. The Member will know that Fujitsu announced 177 new jobs earlier this year, and Convergys has brought over 330 new jobs. As well as that, some companies that are already here have announced new jobs. Allstate, for example, a significant employer in the north-west, not only in Londonderry but in Strabane, has announced 200 new jobs. Some local companies, such as Fleming Agri-Products and Allpipe Engineering, are creating tens and twenties of jobs, which are very important to the local economy. We will continue to work with those companies to try to create jobs in the north-west, the south-west and right across Northern Ireland.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to the great investment in the City of Culture in Londonderry and the jobs created. Can she also share with us the number of business start-ups that can be attributed directly to that investment?

Mrs Foster: I cannot give him a figure for those directly related to the UK City of Culture because you cannot make the direct link. However, 262 individuals resident in neighbourhood renewal areas in Foyle have set up their own business. That is, I think, probably one of the highest figures for a neighbourhood renewal area. They have been able to avail themselves of the business start grant. Thirty-eight young people aged between 16 and 24 who were not in education, employment or training have set up their own business under the NEET business start grant. Those elements were added in, as the Member may recall, by Invest Northern Ireland and me at the time of the recession. We tried to encourage people to start their own business. I am very pleased with those figures as well.

Going for Growth

5. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the agrifood strategy report: Going for Growth. (AQO 6249/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Going for Growth set ambitious targets and challenges for both Government and industry. We face the equally challenging task of balancing financing all of the actions with competing demands on budgets. My

Department has, however, taken forward all of the recommendations that fall under its remit. Invest Northern Ireland continues to support companies in the agrifood sector, with a record number of agrifood projects in the pipeline. I look forward to making some important announcements in the near future.

I launched the agrifood loan scheme, which is now open for business. It is anticipated that work to provide new gas networks to the west will begin in 2015. Significant progress is also being made on finding solutions for the sustainable use of poultry litter. My Department is also carrying out a comprehensive assessment of marketing and promotion in the agrifood industry and a major review of red tape.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her answer. Going for Growth is vital to local producers and processors to increase their exports. In the Minister's previous answer, she said that she linked it to welfare reform. Is she now saying that it is not actually linked to welfare reform, thereby going back on what she said previously?

Mrs Foster: What I said was, and I will quote the answer that I just gave to the Member:

"We face the equally challenging task of balancing financing all of the actions with the competing demands on budgets."

I rest my case.

Mr Wilson: Farmers across Northern Ireland are increasingly angry at the appalling way in which CAP reform has been handled by the Agriculture Minister. Will the Minister outline what she believes to be the impact of the preference expressed so far for single farm payments to be based on land held rather than production? What impact is that likely to have on her Going for Growth strategy? What discussions has she had with the Agriculture Minister to outline those concerns?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Anyone who was on the doors at election time knows that that is a massive issue. There is not much point in talking about Going for Growth if we cannot get CAP reform sorted. I am disappointed that we have not had a paper from the Agriculture Minister on the issue, as we need to see an early resolution to CAP reform.

In particular, I am very concerned — I have had a number of phone calls about this over the

weekend — about the future of our red meat sector. Beef prices have fallen week on week, and the suckler industry is in real danger of disappearing rather than growing. Of course, Going for Growth looked at growing the industry, and we need to have that link between production and payment. All this will have a long-term impact on our farming industry. However, I am particularly worried about the red meat sector at present, because people in that sector are in distress, and we need to look at how we can assist them.

Mr Allister: Just to follow on from that, I am glad to hear the Minister express concern at the negative impact on the productive sector if we resort to, for example, the default position on single farm payment. Is it, in fact, so serious that it would not only grossly undermine the productive sector in agriculture but emphatically and strategically undermine the very ethos and ideas that lie behind Going for Growth?

Mrs Foster: I would like to shock the House by agreeing with everything that Mr Allister said. This is a fundamental issue. If we got into the default position, we would go to a flat rate immediately, and farmers would end up going out of business. All the banks have indicated that that would be absolutely the wrong thing to do for the industry in Northern Ireland. So, I do not see why we are having any further delay on the issue. I think that we should deal with this very quickly; indeed, we should do so as a matter of urgency. We will look at trying to have the slowest transition rate possible.

Mr Rogers: Minister, bearing in mind the potential of Going for Growth — I realise that we need to develop local as well as global markets. I am also mindful that the Irish Republic is a competitor — what discussions have you had with the Irish Government about the implementation of our agrifood strategy?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, you will have to be brief in your answer.

Mrs Foster: We need to get agreement at our Executive table on Going for Growth before we reach out to other parts of the island to see what they are involved in. For my part, I have implemented all that I can in Going for Growth, and I ask others to do the same.

2.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. We must move on to questions to the Minister of the Environment. Sorry, apologies. It is not so simple. I will correct myself: we must move on

to topical questions, and I am sure that the Minister will be delighted that the first one is from Mr Danny Kinahan.

Turkey: Direct Flights

1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how matters are proceeding with direct flights to Turkey and what markets could such a service open up for us in the future, given that we all noted last week the visit of the Turkish Ambassador and the appointment of a Turkish Consul. (AQT 1201/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. I, too, was delighted to meet the Turkish ambassador and, indeed, our newly appointed Consul General. I take the opportunity to congratulate the newly appointed Consul General, Mr David Campbell, and wish him well in all that he does for Turkish citizens who are here, but also in helping us to achieve an air route to Istanbul. We had discussions about that when the Turkish ambassador was here, and we will continue to have those discussions because I think that it is a real probability. Not only would it open up Turkey for us, it would, of course, open up routes into the rest of the Middle East as well, because Istanbul is very much a hub airport. Indeed, I have used it on a number of occasions when I have been to the Middle East on trade missions.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. What actions has her Department been taking to help get more flights and more work going through our airports here in the North so that we compete with Dublin and can expand here, but without the two airports competing against each other?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member. We have been conducting an air connectivity study in conjunction with the Department of Finance and Personnel. The first phase of that has been completed and we are now completing the second phase, which includes engaging with potential airlines and, of course, our airports to see what we can achieve. It really is about showing them that there is a market to tap into, not just in Northern Ireland but, as I have argued, into the border counties of the Republic of Ireland, from where people can travel from Northern Ireland to further afield. I will put up that argument not only with Turkish Airlines but, indeed, with a number of other airlines that I will be meeting in the near future.

Glen 10 Master Plan

2. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she, her Department or Invest NI have had any discussions about the Glen 10 development master plan in west Belfast. (AQT 1202/11-15)

Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers.

Mrs Foster: Yes. As I understand it, Invest NI has been involved in discussions on that issue. I do not have the details here but, of course, we are always pleased to see local communities bringing forward positive plans for their communities, and we will always interact where we can to make a difference to those plans, as we have done right across Northern Ireland.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat. I appreciate that the Minister does not have the detail, but does she agree that it is important that jobs arise out of this development, given the high levels of unemployment and youth unemployment in west Belfast?

Mrs Foster: Indeed. I hope that that is very much the case. It is about forming a proposition that will attract jobs to that area and encourage those local employers to look for more jobs and to expand. In that regard, I was very pleased to be in west Belfast back in March with Delta Print and Packaging to announce 100 new very good jobs for the area. Of course, Caterpillar also put 200 new jobs in there last year. We will continue to work with the representatives of west Belfast as we do with those in all the other constituencies.

Jobs: DVA Relocation

4. **Mr Attwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether, this afternoon, she can confirm that she will or will not follow the example this morning of her ministerial colleague in the Department of the Environment who announced that he had identified 50 jobs that would be moving to the Coleraine Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) accommodation in an attempt to mitigate the bad decision that was made by London in closing that facility. (AQT 1204/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I join him in saying that it was a bad decision, which I, and he, lobbied on to try and stop not only in this job but in my previous role as Minister of the Environment back in 2007. I congratulate the Minister of the Environment for what he announced this

morning. I think it will make a difference in Coleraine. As I understand it, Londonderry will also benefit from his announcement.

My Department will look to the opportunities that RPA provides us, bearing in mind the plea that has been made by the Coleraine area in particular. We will look to see whether there is anything that we can do in terms of Invest NI and the Tourist Board. I think that the Member will recognise that I and my Department are not a huge employer, unlike other Ministers who are, but we will look at it in that context.

Mr Attwood: I commend the Minister for chiding her ministerial colleagues who, thus far, have not measured up to the standard and leadership shown by Minister Durkan this morning. It so happens that there are over 1,000 jobs in DETI and in Invest Northern Ireland. Can the Minister confirm whether she is going to identify 50 of those jobs to relocate to the Coleraine accommodation? That request was made by members of trade unions in front of this Building only two hours ago.

Mrs Foster: I recognise that the Minister wants to make a political point and grab the headlines; so be it. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry — the former Minister. I have a duty to my employees, and I have a duty to look at this in a strategic way, and that is how I will do it in the context of RPA. That is why I gave the answer that I did in the first instance.

Income Crisis

5. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department acknowledges that in-work poverty is continuing to rise and, if so, how it proposes to deal with the income crisis. (AQT 1205/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In respect of low wages, and I presume that this is what the Member is referring to, I am very pleased to tell him that 40% of the jobs that we have brought into Northern Ireland have been above the private sector median. With higher wages, that drives the economy forward and tries to close that productivity gap. That is what we were determined to do before the recession took hold. When it did take hold, we had to recalibrate and look at creating jobs of any nature, but now we are very determinedly moving forward to make sure that we create higher value jobs and, therefore, drive the economy forward.

Mr Lynch: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her answer. In Question

Time, she covered energy costs. However, what is required is a strategy to address living and energy costs. Will the Minister assure us that she can have a strategy to deal with both?

Mrs Foster: At the risk of trying to take over some of the departmental responsibilities of others, I will work with the Department for Social Development, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Health and its remit to try to deal with the issues that the Member has raised.

Labour Market Statistics

6. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the recent labour market statistics. (AQT 1206/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I was pleased that, for the fifteenth month in a row, we continued to move in the right direction. Some 800 people came off the unemployment register, which is good news, but that does not mean that we still do not have a challenge in front of us: we do. The statistics are around 7.2% of the working population at present, and I believe that we are moving in the right direction.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that response. I welcome all the positive aspects of the statistics in the report. Does the Minister agree that many will see that our local economy is dominated by low-paid jobs, underemployment levels and also the spectre, unfortunately, which is not just peculiar to here, of emigration?

Mrs Foster: That is why, when I answered your colleague's question, I said that we need to drive more higher-level jobs into Northern Ireland so that people who are underemployed are able to find jobs to fit their qualifications.

That is very much our strategy at present. I believe that we are moving in the right direction in that regard, and, with the help of colleagues, we will continue to do so.

Enterprise Zones

7. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the emphasis she places on, and her assessment of, the value of the creation of enterprise zones in Northern Ireland. (AQT 1207/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As the Member will know, Coleraine was recently awarded the designation of an enterprise zone in a very specific area close to the University of Ulster. It was achieved after a request went forward from the Executive to the Chancellor. The Chancellor has designated that area as an enterprise zone. It is a very particular and peculiar zone, because it means that we will be able to apply capital allowances to that specific area alone. That is the benefit, particularly for capital intensive organisations such as data centres, which have to put in a lot of equipment.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer, and I welcome it. Will the Minister consider an enterprise zone for the Dungannon/south Tyrone area, particularly in the Ballygawley area, due to its critical strategic location?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, with its road links, Ballygawley is in a very good location for investment. I certainly will look at the area to see if there are opportunities, initially, for Invest Northern Ireland to purchase land. I understand that the park at Dungannon is going very well and that there may well be a shortage of land in the near future in the Dungannon and south Tyrone area.

Broadband: Newry and Armagh

8. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the roll-out of additional rural broadband provision in Newry and Armagh. (AQT 1208/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I can give an update on not only Newry and Armagh but right across Northern Ireland. BT has been awarded the NI broadband improvement project. They signed the contract for that on 4 February and have commenced an extensive survey and design process that will take a number of months to complete, because it may be that, instead of putting new infrastructure into an area, they may just need to redesign the infrastructure that is available. Until that process is complete, it will not be possible to be precise as to which premises are likely to benefit. Safe to say, however, the project will bring increased and better broadband speeds to over 45,000 premises by the end of 2015.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. Is it still the Executive's intention to ensure that every household has access to 2 megabits broadband by 2015, in line with the Programme for Government commitment?

Mrs Foster: Of course, it is our intention to move towards the Programme for Government commitment. It would not be there if we did not want to make sure that we delivered on it. He will know that, as we get closer to getting to that 100% coverage, it gets more and more difficult. However, we hope that we can do that with the new contract that has been awarded to BT.

Invest NI: End-of-year Performance

9. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to comment on the Invest NI end-of-year performance. (AQT 1209/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am surprised that more Members did not recognise the end-of-year performance today, but there you go. Good news does not always get to the Floor. There have been almost 11,000 new promoted jobs against a target of 7,780, 6,040 of which are in locally owned companies; supported wages and salaries of £190 million, with 45% generated by local businesses; and £239 million of R&D business investment secured. Those are tremendous statistics. I commend the chief executive and all of Invest Northern Ireland for the hard work that they do.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for that response and for that tremendous report. Does the Minister believe that that performance can continue and be repeated in the current financial year?

Mrs Foster: I very much hope so, and we will set targets in that regard. The offers of support that Invest NI has made to businesses across Northern Ireland are at record levels. There has been the highest number ever made in one year. That is a tremendous thing to be able to stand here and say, but we will, of course, continue to work with businesses to make sure that we continue on an upward trajectory.

2.45 pm

Environment

Councillors: Capacity Building

1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the capacity-building programmes for new shadow councillors. (AQO 6258/11-15)

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): Ensuring that all members of

the new shadow councils are trained to deliver existing and, importantly, new responsibilities is critical to the success of the local government reform programme. I have put in place a range of capacity-building measures and have granted generous funding at a local and regional level to enable councillors and, indeed, council officers and other staff to embrace and meet the complex and demanding challenges of reform. Capacity building and training for councillors is a priority. Over the past year, my Department has been working closely with key stakeholders representing the interests of councillors, such as the local government training group, the National Association of Councillors and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to help to identify need and draw up practical delivery programmes.

One of the organisations that we have tasked to deliver some of the training — the local government training group — has presented my Department with a comprehensive capacity-delivery plan, with the first strands of training and induction to begin as soon as possible following the recent elections. It will include training in the new code of conduct for councillors. Future plans to be delivered via the training group include training in corporate responsibilities and governance, equality, finance and audit accountability, decision-making and council representation. The training will be rolled out comprehensively during the shadow period, with a flexible and modular approach designed to fit with the many demands that councillors are likely to face.

With planning responsibilities moving to councils, DOE planning has developed a comprehensive training programme that it will deliver on a subregional basis from September onwards. Capacity building and training will be undertaken through role-play scenarios and formal training sessions. It will make use of the experience of colleagues across the water and down South to make the training as realistic as possible. Full details of the training programme will issue to councils shortly.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his answer. In the light of the capacity-building assistance, will the Minister consider extending the time frames for assistance from his Department, if needed? We have only 10 months for planning training.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the supplementary question. The new councils kick

in on 1 April next year. I certainly do not intend the training to stop there. There will be continuous professional development, if you like, and members must be supported throughout the council term as they come to terms with their new responsibilities and as areas where training might be needed are identified.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. He may be aware and, indeed, might suspect that I have recently spent some time in the close company of a recently elected councillor. Of fundamental interest to her is how she will equip herself by training for the role that she will undertake. Will the Minister detail how the £3 million secured from the Executive will be spent to ensure that new councillors are provided with adequate training to allow them to make the right decisions and in the right time frame?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the question. As well as an allocation of over £500,000 to the local government training group to deliver regionally based capacity-building programmes, new councils have an allocation of £100,000 each, or £200,000 in the case of Belfast. That is for the current financial year. They can use that to develop additional programmes and activities for councillors and staff that are relevant to each area. What is relevant to one area might not be so relevant to another.

I am fully satisfied that the funding will be sufficient, that it will be targeted in the right areas and that its use will be open and transparent. My officials have put in place an accountability mechanism to ensure that any capacity-building proposals my Department is asked to support will require prior approval. To date, however, the number of requests from councils for funding for local capacity building has been relatively poor. Officials are working with the new councils to help them to prepare plans that will, hopefully, allow them to access the funding and identify what it should be used for.

Mr I McCrea: No one doubts the importance of the training needs of many of the new "super councillors", as they are being referred to in some quarters. Can the Minister detail whether the training or certain aspects of it is compulsory? What would happen if a councillor, no matter how much flexibility was in the system, was not trained? What limitations would there be on that council or those councillors?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the question. He makes a valid point. It is important to realise that this training should not be seen as a burden on elected representatives; it is there to assist and ultimately, I hope, to protect them. It is vital that we ensure that people do not fall through the net or, in some cases, try to dodge the net.

All councillors on existing and new councils will be strongly encouraged to attend training associated with the new mandatory code of conduct. In particular, councillors who sit on the planning committees will need to be fully aware of the planning process and the ethical obligations relating to that role.

House-building: Rural Areas

2. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department plans to provide non-farming rural dwellers with greater opportunities to build a house in the countryside. (AQO 6259/11-15)

Mr Durkan: Planning Policy Statement 21 is the main planning policy for development in the countryside. In drafting PPS 21, officials sought to ensure that its policies provided sufficient opportunities for all sections of the rural community, not just those from a farming background. Therefore, although PPS 21 does not include a policy specifically for non-farming rural dwellers, almost all of its provisions provide opportunities for them.

Policies open to non-farming rural dwellers include the conversion and reuse of non-residential buildings as dwellings; replacement dwellings; new dwellings within an existing cluster or ribbon of buildings; social and affordable housing schemes; development within designated dispersed rural communities; and a dwelling to meet compelling personal or domestic circumstances. Furthermore, any farm dwelling approved under policy CTY 10 may be occupied by non-farmers and sold off without restriction. I believe that, taken together, these policy provisions already provide significant opportunities for people from a non-farming background to continue to live in the countryside.

The issue of non-farming rural dwellers was also addressed through my predecessor's review of the operation of PPS 21. As part of his review, he met former members of the independent working group on non-farming rural dwellers. The group was established by Minister Wilson to explore options for non-farming rural dwellers as part of the draft PPS

21. The previous members reiterated their advice that planning policy should not create a special category for the non-farming rural dweller and that planning decisions for single houses should not be determined on the basis of kinship, connection or occupation. The Minister's review concluded that PPS 21 was operating effectively and that the need for a fundamental review did not arise at that time.

Although I endorsed those conclusions, I undertook to examine the issue afresh as part of the consultation on the draft single strategic planning policy statement (SSPS) to ensure that it will adequately meet the needs of current and future generations of farming and non-farming rural dwellers alike.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. The Minister will recognise that the majority living in the countryside are non-farming dwellers. The issue has not been addressed. Given that powers are transferring to local government, barriers will be put in the way of non-farming rural dwellers. How will he address those issues and concerns?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his supplementary. Housing applications from non-farming rural dwellers and, on occasion, farming rural dwellers are often complicated. Many Members have brought constituents to speak to me about particularly complex cases.

I am always keen to be as flexible as possible on such occasions. This was the subject of an Assembly debate on a motion tabled by the Member's party six or seven weeks ago. During that debate, I gave assurances that I would use the SSPS as an opportunity to look at PPS 21 and at what improvements might be made and what assurances could be given to the very constituents to whom the Member refers.

Mr Wilson: The countryside has already been raped by extensive industrial-type wind energy projects. Will the Minister assure us that he will not relax PPS 21 further to allow the kind of open-door policy that is suggested by Sinn Féin, which will lead to even further destruction of the countryside?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question, although I might not necessarily agree with the first part of it. The Member makes a valid point. During that debate, Mr Agnew, I think it was, produced figures for approvals that had been granted to dwellings — it was

yourself, was it? — in the countryside over the past number of years. Those figures do, indeed, indicate that PPS 21 is quite relaxed; it is certainly relaxed in comparison with its predecessor, PPS 14. We need to get the right balance between the needs of those who live in the countryside and those who want to live in it and the need to sustain our countryside.

Mr Beggs: I was interested by the previous question. I understand that it is PPS 18 that gives more direction on where wind farms are located in the countryside. Does the Minister find it strange that such a question came from someone who developed that policy, which was implemented by the Minister who followed him?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question — I thank him very much for it actually. *[Laughter.]* No question from Mr Wilson shocks me. As the Member rightly identifies, PPS 18 deals with renewable energy. I fully expect PPS 18 to be among the policies most mentioned in the 700 responses to the consultation and for it to be one of the more thumbed sections of the draft single strategic planning policy statement.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister might have welcomed the last question, but the Deputy Speaker did not. In future, supplementary questions will be brief and will relate to the question.

Beaches: Quality

Mr Weir: Question 3. I cannot be briefer than that.

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to improve the quality of local beaches. (AQO 6260/11-15)

Mr Durkan: As regards amenity, statutory responsibility for improving the quality of local beaches lies with beach operators, who, for the most part, are the relevant local authorities in the area in which the beach is located. My Department also plays its part. I, personally, chair the good beach summit, which brings together beach operators and other organisations with an interest in healthy beaches from both an amenity and water quality perspective. This group is implementing an action plan covering water quality, beach cleanliness, facilities management and signage, public information and supporting the coastal economy.

My Department published the Northern Ireland marine litter strategy in July 2013 and is coordinating its implementation. The strategy responds to the problem of litter on our coastline and makes provision for concerted action against those who continue to drop litter through education, awareness-raising and volunteering programmes along with promoting a strong system of enforcement.

The Department is also working with Northern Ireland Water to improve sewerage infrastructure across the whole of the Northern Ireland coastline. An estimated £12 million has been allocated for the period 2013-15 to address bathing water areas with infrastructure upgrades planned for Benone, Ballycastle, Ballygally, Millisle, Newcastle and Bangor. In fact, 2013 was the best year ever for bathing water quality in Northern Ireland. All beaches passed the mandatory standard, and, what is more, 20 of the 23 beaches had water quality classified as excellent.

3.00 pm

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I think we will all welcome the improvement in beach quality. Through the beach summits or any other mechanism, are specific targets on beach quality being developed that the Department is then aiming to reach?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. It is important that we set targets, but realistic targets and nothing too aspirational. To that effect, we have. I do not have the detail of those targets, but I will certainly get it to the Member. The issue of beach quality and beach cleanliness came to the fore last summer with a report by Tidy NI on the extent of littering on our beaches. Keeping them clean is something that I take extremely seriously, not just in terms of the environmental damage that litter on our beaches does but in terms of the damage it does to our image and the detrimental effect it might have on attracting tourists here.

Mr P Ramsey: Following on from the main question about the quality of beaches, can I ask the Minister about the quality of access for disabled people, for example? Will the Minister outline to the House any assessment or what steps can be taken to ensure that we have effective and good access to the beaches for disabled people?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. The accessibility of our beaches is something that I have personally raised with my

departmental officials since taking office, and it is being worked on. We have a couple of beaches — I will not name and shame — that remain inaccessible. That is something that we really need to address so that everyone can enjoy our beautiful beaches.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat. In your report, Minister, you talk about the environmental side of things on your beaches etc and the quality of bathing water. In the 'Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful' report, which was done in conjunction with the Tourist Board, there are two beaches glaringly omitted. When I inquired about them, I was told that the report and inspection of those beaches has not been done. They are the beaches of Cushendun and Cushendall. Secondly, Minister, Waterfoot beach is one of the few sand dune beaches, and it is not even in your Department for conservation for money to be spent on those dunes. That is a disgrace —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. This is a very long question.

Mr McMullan: Can I have your view on that, please? Thank you.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his speech — sorry, question. *[Laughter.]* I also thank the Member for bringing that to my attention. It is not something that I was aware of, and I shall have inspections carried out on those beaches as a matter of urgency. The issue around the dunes is something I shall also make inquiries with my officials about.

Driver Licensing

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Driving Instructors Association in relation to proposed changes to driver licensing. (AQO 6261/11-15)

Mr Durkan: My Department has engaged and held discussions with the Driving Instructors National Association Council (DINAC) throughout the policy development in relation to the proposed changes to driver licensing and the associated graduated driver licensing (GDL) scheme. DINAC was established in 2008 as an umbrella organisation bringing together representatives from all of the approved driving instructor associations and acting as a central point of contact for communication with my Department.

A full public consultation was carried out on the proposals over the period March to July 2011. During that time, in May 2011, a departmental official attended a DINAC meeting and provided a detailed presentation of the GDL proposals, and in November 2011 my predecessor met representatives of DINAC to discuss the consultation. In May 2012, Minister Attwood published his views on the way forward for learner and restricted drivers, which included a proposal for a graduated driver licensing scheme. Minister Attwood attended a further DINAC meeting on 25 September 2012 to discuss GDL.

In addition to that, the GDL proposals were discussed at several of the road safety forum meetings, which I chair on a quarterly basis and on which DINAC is represented. The Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill has just completed the second stage of the legislative process. I look forward to continuing to engage with DINAC, which I recognise as a key stakeholder, over the coming months.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. Minister, learners are not necessary young people. Many more mature members of the community learn to drive, and many young people get a licence for identity reasons. Will the new legislation not force all learners to wait for a year? Will it not discriminate against and adversely affect disabled members of our society, pregnant women, jobseekers and people from a low-income background, for example?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question and, indeed, recognise his concerns, which were aired at the Bill's Second Stage by Members from across the political parties. There will be and are already exemptions from and exceptions to the one-year mandatory learning period, and, as we go into the Bill's Committee Stage, they will be open to further interrogation. It is vital that people can learn to drive if needs must. I know that there will be exemptions for people with caring responsibilities, and I take on board the Member's concerns about people with disabilities.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra cuimsitheach go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his wide-ranging response up to now.

Does the Minister accept that, aside from DINAC, which, of course, is an extremely responsible and useful organisation to consult,

he also needs to consult youth organisations and, in particular, rural-based organisations, such as farming organisations? For people in the rural community, driving and the capacity to drive is more than a social event and can be an integral part of the local rural economy.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is another very long question.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. It is vital that we consult as many people and as many stakeholders as possible, and I remain determined to do so. Over the coming weeks and months, I will engage in further consultation as I am sure the Committee will under the chairmanship of Ms Lo. I look forward to that.

The Member mentioned the farming community and rural dwellers. Again, they are on my list of people who need to be consulted. He also spoke about youth organisations, but, as Mr Humphrey pointed out, it is not just younger people who will learn to drive. However, some of the elements proposed in the scheme are specific to young people, so it is very important that we engage with them and ensure that they know that this is not about singling them out for harsh treatment but protecting them and maybe even saving their life.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Does he accept that driving instructors and drivers, particularly those, as we have heard, in rural areas, have different opinions and needs depending on how much public transport is available?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that supplementary question. I am aware that people in different areas have different needs. I am also aware of many differences of opinion on the Bill, even at this early stage, and that quite a few of them have come from driving instructors. I intend to listen to all those points of view and ensure that the Bill we end up with strikes the right balance between improving and increasing road safety and affording people the liberty and freedom of movement that they require.

Councillors: Code of Conduct

5. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has any plans to revise the code of conduct for councillors, in light of future amendments to the MLA code. (AQO 6262/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I am aware of the ongoing review of the MLA code by the Committee on Standards and Privileges and of the Committee's recent consultation on the code. I have asked officials to liaise with Committee staff and prepare a report for my consideration on the outcome of that review.

I will consider whether a revised code of conduct for councillors should be drafted for 2015, when the new councils take on their full role and responsibilities, taking account of any changes made to the MLA code, any lessons learned during the shadow period and the Environment Committee's consideration of the guidance on planning matters to be issued in support of the councillors' code.

Any revised code will, of course, be laid in draft in the Assembly to give Members the opportunity to consider and debate it.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. I would like the Minister to perhaps outline whether he has looked at any other Assemblies or Parliaments throughout Europe, perhaps, more specifically Leinster House, to see whether there is a TD code of conduct and whether any lessons can be learnt for the Members here in the Assembly.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. My Department has been looking at what is done elsewhere, what works elsewhere and what might not work so well elsewhere. I think that it is important —again, I will go back to balance — that the code strikes the right balance and protects councillors as they carry out their functions. The issue around the MLA code and the need to get more of a synergy with that is one that I accept fully. When we debated the code last week, Mr Ross made that point, and I have now instructed my officials to make sure that they liaise more closely with the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr Campbell: The Minister said that he will have a look to see whether a new code of conduct will be required for councillors, and that is welcome. Will he take account of the fact that, since the new election to the super-councils, there has been at least one instance, if not more, of an elected councillor being asked about his attitude to a specific act of terrorism in Londonderry and declining to condemn it? Will he make sure that we have a very strict code of conduct and sanctions for those who might try to sign it and then usurp it later?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question, and I am aware of the incident to which he refers. Indeed, that councillor was in a tiny, tiny minority compared with the people of my city who came out in complete condemnation of that attack. I spoke of how the code can protect councillors, but it is important that it is there to protect the public as well. People in public office should be fit for that office and should abide by the Nolan principles and show the leadership that is required in such a position of responsibility. The gentleman Mr Campbell referred to certainly did not do that last week.

Ms Lo: Can the Minister give an update on the development of the revised mechanism for adjudication and appeal in relation to a breach of the new code of conduct?

Mr Durkan: I thank Ms Lo for her question. Quite a bit of work is still being done around the appeal on the code of conduct. It came about as the result of an amendment to the Local Government Bill here in the Assembly. I am working with the commissioner on that, and I am content that, in the coming weeks, we will, if you like, have more meat on the bones.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Mervyn Storey is not in his place.

Councillors: Power of Surcharge

7. Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of the Environment what plans are in place to abolish the power of surcharge against councillors. (AQO 6264/11-15)

Mr Durkan: It was clear during the making of the 2014 Local Government Act that opinions are divided on the power to surcharge councillors and council officers deemed responsible for unlawful expenditure. Whether this power should be retained has been a matter for much discussion and debate. In light of this, section 109 of the 2014 Local Government Act has provided the Department with a power to remove the legislative provisions relating to the power of surcharge. Rather than legislate immediately for the removal of the power to surcharge, I think that there is a need to build up a body of evidence over a period of some years, while the new ethical standards regime, introduced by the Act, is in operation, to inform any decision on the possible removal of the ability to surcharge. It is only when such evidence has been gathered that I will be in a position to consider the matter fully and make the appropriate decision on whether to retain the power to surcharge.

Therefore, councillors and council officers will, for the foreseeable future, continue to be subject to the possibility of being surcharged.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for questions for oral answer. We will now move on to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Full Circle Power Ltd: Domestic Waste

1. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is aware of Full Circle Power Ltd's ability and willingness to process domestic waste at the Bombardier site in Belfast. (AQT 1211/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the question, and I also thank her for bringing the matter to my attention. I was not aware of it, and I will make it my business to become aware of it. The Bombardier plant that was approved some months ago has tremendous capacity. However, it has been my understanding that it would be for municipal waste rather than domestic, so I will certainly look into that.

Mrs Cameron: Given that the relevant planning permission is in place to process commercial and household waste, which Arc21 is proposing to have incinerated at the highly controversial site in Mallusk, does the Minister agree that the Arc21 proposal is not just unwelcome but entirely unnecessary?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. However, I am not really at liberty to answer it, given that a planning application for the Arc21 proposed development has been received. It has been classified and will be treated as an article 31 application. I have had quite a bit of correspondence on it already, and I am meeting elected representatives from different parties, including the Member's colleague William McCrea MP, within the next two weeks on that very issue.

ASSI Designations

2. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of the Environment to reassure landowners that area of special scientific interest (ASSI) designations are not a national park by the back door, in light of comments from those who tried recently to discredit the SDLP's role in government. (AQT 1212/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for the question. As I have said before in the Chamber, I am fully aware of national parks and the benefits that they can undoubtedly bring to areas, which they have done in Great Britain and on this island. However, I am also extremely aware of opposition to national parks here in the North and landowners' concerns over what designation would mean for them. Given the level of that opposition, I have stated that I do not believe that now is the correct time to proceed with national parks. The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, as amended, which established ASSI designations, is totally different from the legislation that would be required to establish a national park, and there is no link between those separate pieces of legislation. To date, 375 ASSIs have been designated since 1995, and we have no national parks.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answer. If a landowner has land along a river in a designated area and a tree or other bit of debris blocks the river, he has to ask NIEA's permission to remove it, which is a ridiculous situation. Can I have further reassurance from the Minister that the concerns of farmers and landowners within ASSI designations will be adequately addressed?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I thought that he was going to ask this: if a tree falls in a forest and there is no one there, does anyone hear it? [*Laughter.*] In the context of the example that the Member used of a tree falling in a river, I will say that Rivers Agency is responsible for the maintenance and flow of rivers, and if Rivers Agency undertakes work to remove blockages, the landowner will not be required to apply for permissions. Emergency works can also be undertaken without the Department's prior permission. However, landowners are required to inform the Department of the works as soon as possible after their commencement. Other works that a landowner has undertaken, such as pre-emptive works, may require the Department's consent. However, since 2005, the Department has consented to over 90% of the applications received.

Racist Attacks: Community Planning

3. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment, given that he will be well aware of the attacks on minority ethnic groups over the past number of weeks, whether he sees opportunities through the community planning element of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014

to try to encourage those groups to become involved in community planning and to help to address some of the issues. (AQT 1213/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that question. I see community planning as a real opportunity for the whole community to become involved, and I am determined that the whole community does become involved, including those from ethnic minorities, if not especially those from ethnic minorities. The place that we live in has become much more diverse and has, I believe, become much the better for it. It is important that we take on board the views of all our citizens when shaping our future.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Could he give us a timeline of when he will introduce measures for good relations and maybe equality structures in local government?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for that supplementary. It is important that we do so as soon as possible. Councils do not assume this new power until 1 April 2015, but a key part of their training and capacity building will be on issues such as community relations and equality, which I know are very dear to the Member's heart and issues that he has raised with me on a number of occasions. I expect them to be up and running by September.

Planning: Approvals

4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will, in the case of successful planning applications and granting approval in major and contentious applications, ensure that conditioning is a key part of the approval process and look hard at a consistent regime to ensure that planning authorities properly condition approvals in cases where there is a question of the applicant not meeting their proper obligations. (AQT 1214/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McGimpsey for that question. Consistency is the key to success in planning, whether the Department or councils are in charge, as they will soon be. However, the major applications to which the Member refers will still be dealt with centrally. As I said, consistency is the key. Conditions have a vital role in approving applications, and I believe that they should be very enforceable. If someone does not fulfil their obligations, they should not be let off the hook.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. However, I will also point out to him, as I am sure that he is aware, that there are cases in which approvals go through with the conditions absent or poorly defined, particularly on noise pollution, hours of operation and so on. Does the Minister agree with me that to get that consistency and for the benefit of planning officers, he needs to clearly define the conditions in such cases so that we get exactly the outcome that we want?

Mr Durkan: I concur entirely with the Member. These conditions would go some way to providing certainty for the applicant. They would provide comfort for objectors and assistance to planning officials and council officials in environmental health. As planning transfers to the councils, they will look closely at conditions in smaller applications. I will push on this in large-scale applications because a few cases have come to my attention in the not-so-distant past in which conditions were ignored or might, as the Member put it, have been poorly written. That causes me frustration, and it also causes planning officials frustration when such cases come back across their desk.

Planning Service: Ministerial Intervention

5. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of the Environment how many times he has overruled his Planning Service. (AQT 1215/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I am not sure how many times I have overruled it. There have been a few cases. I fully appreciate and respect the guidance that I am given by my highly qualified and competent staff. However, sometimes, I think that they do not take all issues into consideration, particularly public feeling and political opposition to applications where those on the ground, locally elected councillors, MLAs and community representatives, generally know what is best for their area and what will work and what will not. That is one of the huge advantages that I see in planning transferring to local councils.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Could the Minister explain to the House why he overturned planning application C/2013/0078/ on Edenbane Road, Kilrea for a hairdressing salon when the Planning Service recommended a refusal?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I did not think he would have much of

an interest in hairdressers. *[Laughter.]* I received representation from the Member, objectors and the applicant regarding the application. I believe that the service provided by that salon, along with strict conditions, can be sustainable and is sustainable.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Clarke is not in his place. I call Mr Patsy McGlone.

Planning: NIEA Consultations

7. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment what evaluation his Department has done of the efficiency of NIEA consultations, particularly on planning applications. (AQT 1217/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I thank Mr McGlone for his question. I am on record in the Assembly as stating that I am carrying out a root-and-branch review of NIEA and how it works or how often it does not. I have also outlined some of my ideas for improving planning. They will include, and focus largely on, NIEA through consultation responses. I will be setting timelines and timescales for consultation responses, and NIEA will be top of my list.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Aire, as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister very much for that answer. Can the Minister give an indication of when those time frames and deadlines will be applicable for NIEA?

Mr Durkan: I thank the Member for his question. I fully intend and expect the new timelines to be fully operational by the time planning transfers to local government to make it easier for them. I do not want to be here as if I am just slating NIEA; that is your job. Often, however, applications are not done well. Good applications will get processed quickly; applications with information missing or incomplete will not. That is why, going back to my proposed planning improvements, I want to put more emphasis on pre-application discussion so that any potential problems with NIEA or any other statutory consultees can be flagged up early.

National Parks

8. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment, following the question from Mr Rogers, for an assurance that, albeit that it has been temporarily shelved, the national park proposal will never come out of the box again, with the idea gone, because the majority of the people do not want it. (AQT 1218/11-15)

Mr Durkan: I have parked the national park project for now in light of the huge opposition to it here in the North, although I cannot give any assurances as to what future Ministers of the Environment might do. However, it is my opinion that, while recognising the benefits that some other areas have seen through national parks, the damage done to the national park brand here in Northern Ireland over the past year or so would make it extremely difficult to introduce.

There is work to be done with those who have been vociferous in opposition. We need to show them that there could be benefits to it. It should not be imposed on people against their will, and I will not be doing that.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time. I invite Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

Private Members' Business

Transforming Your Care: Implementation Concerns

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly recognises the considerable public concern at the pressures on emergency departments and GP waiting times, which have arisen during the period of the Transforming Your Care change agenda; notes with concern that the implementation of Transforming Your Care has not been fully assessed; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review and measure the implementation of Transforming Your Care to assess its effect on patient outcomes. — [Mr McKinney.]

Which amendment was:

"welcomes the progress made on patient waiting times, including the significant reduction in those waiting longer than 12 hours in emergency departments to be assessed, treated and admitted or discharged; pays tribute to the dedication of hard-working health and social care staff, including the 2,000 additional staff employed since 2011; and further calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reinforce across the health and social care system the necessity for transformational change to respond to the challenges of an ageing population, and to encourage and maximise involvement and leadership from health care professionals on the ground in delivering change from the bottom up at an accelerated pace." — [Mr Wells.]

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): It is good to have this opportunity to discuss this issue. All of a sudden, Mr McKinney believes that it is a very important issue. I say "all of a sudden" because, over the course of his time as a Member, with the exception of one instance, he has not posed written or oral questions on the issue of TYC. So I am glad that he recognises the importance of TYC after all this time as health spokesman for the SDLP.

I have indicated on several occasions that the implementation of Transforming Your Care is a planned journey: it is not a knee-jerk, and it is not something that was ever going to be delivered in one fell swoop. It is a journey that

will take place over the course of three to five years. Many good things have already happened, and we are very pleased with much of the progress that has been made, whilst recognising that much other progress needs to be made. In some areas, progress has not been as quick as we would have liked to see.

I can report that some things have been achieved. Recommendation 86: we have created 17 integrated care partnerships across Northern Ireland. Recommendation 90: we have established a forum to take forward how technology will support the new model of care, linking the service to industry and academia through the ecosystem. Recommendation 87: we have developed population plans for each of the five LCG populations. Recommendation 47: we have conducted exploration through pilot arrangements of budgetary integration for services to families and children, and the early intervention transformation programme has been superseded.

Many more are nearing completion. For example, recommendation 55: we have the provision of clear information on mental health services, making full use of modern technology resources, through a mental health service mapping project. Recommendation 44: we are looking to the completion of a review of inpatient paediatric care to include palliative and end-of-life care this year.

Recommendation 1: a renewed focus on health promotion and prevention to materially reduce demand for acute health services. We have the public health service framework. Recommendation 7: an expanded role for community pharmacy in health promotion. We have had the implementation of the Making it Better strategy for pharmacies.

So it is good to recognise that progress is being made, and, whilst some may wish to not do so, that is clearly the case. I regret that sometimes these debates can become whingeing sessions, with Members wanting to engage in that sort of thing as opposed to identifying where we are moving forward, identifying the positives and where we could be doing better and so forth. That is what these debates should be about, as opposed to some of what we hear. I am very pleased to report that we are making significant progress in health.

Transforming Your Care is working. When I meet real people, as I did in their hundreds on the doors of my constituency over the past month, they bring me the message, over and over and over again, that they have received good-quality healthcare. All this negativity does

nothing for the staff, and I am glad that it took the amendment from the DUP to recognise the work of the staff. The SDLP failed miserably in that instance in its motion.

In a typical day, we have 5,900 outpatient attendances, £10 million spent, 1,700 inpatient day cases and so it goes on. A massive amount of work goes on in the health service, and people do not realise the pressures that are being applied.

As for many of the things that we were being criticised for, people clearly do not understand, do not have the knowledge or do not want to have the knowledge of how things are moving forward. We heard about domiciliary care. If you had listened to the speeches made earlier, you would think that there had been a cut in domiciliary care. Over the past three years, there has been a 10% increase in the hours spent on domiciliary care. That is a fact. In a typical week, a quarter of a million hours of domiciliary care are offered and provided to some 25,000 people. The number of packages has risen by 1,800 over the past three years. I see that my detractors are, all of a sudden, silent, as they are faced with facts as opposed to bluster. It is important that we stick to facts.

The death rate from strokes for the under-75s has been reduced from 14.4 to 12.6 per 100,000 of the population over the past two years. That is Transforming Your Care working. Look at breast cancer: we have an 81% survival rate, which is higher than Britain's and Ireland's. That is Transforming Your Care working. The standardised death rate from heart attack has been reduced from 79 to 61 per 1,000 of the population over the past four years. That is Transforming Your Care working. We can do these things over and over again to demonstrate that, in so many areas of health, we are seeing real and radical improvement.

Mental health and learning disabilities were mentioned. We have made considerable progress in ensuring that fewer people have a hospital as their home address. We are working through the programme very well and seeing the numbers reduce extensively. In 2013, for example, we reduced the number of people in Belfast Trust institutions from 167 to 128. In the Northern Trust, the number of people with learning disabilities in hospital went down to zero; in the South Eastern Trust, it was the same; in the Southern Trust, it was reduced from 25 to four. You can see that real progress has been made on something that Transforming Your Care indicated, which is that hospital should not be a permanent address for

people who have mental health or learning disability issues.

I listened to Mr Beggs and, indeed, Mr McCallister. Mr McCallister has disappeared; I am not sure whether he is away for a meeting with Basil or what is going on. He complained that Transforming Your Care was in crisis after two and half years: they set up a political party, and it was in crisis after two and a half months. Unfortunately, he is not here to hear the response, but he seems to want to cosy up to his former colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party for some reason at this stage. In any event, Mr Beggs and Mr McCallister wanted to talk about residential care homes being closed. They will note that, under Mr McGimpsey's tutelage — Mr Beggs is still a member of that party and Mr McCallister supported it throughout — Foyleville, Drumhaw, Gortmore, Seymour House, Grove House, St John's House, Loch Cuan, Ravara House, Ferrard House and Grovetree House were all given the go-ahead for closure. We had Mrs Overend complaining about the closure of facilities in her constituency. Precisely who closed the facilities in the Mid Ulster Hospital, other than her own Minister, Mr McGimpsey? Not this Minister. We saw crocodile tears from people who supported those closures. Financially —

Mr McCarthy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: I think that we heard enough of you earlier.

Financially, we are looking at a situation where we have had to make savings. Over the last three years, I have never complained about the budget that we had, because there were considerable savings to be made, including the improvement of services at the same time. That has happened. That is a fact. We have more doctors, more nurses and more allied health professionals. We have more domiciliary hours and residential care packages in spite of the fact that money was constrained. However, there were savings to be made, and we made savings of some £500 million over the past three years.

Now we are in a circumstance, as we move to the future, where we have made considerable savings and have absorbed, with a 2% increase in the budget, 6% pressures each year. Now we are in a situation where people say that they want us to make more savings in the health service. That is not coming from the DUP but from the other members of the Executive. They say that we need to find an additional £160 million of savings in the incoming year. I can tell the House now that I am not capable of

finding £160 million of savings in health and social care this year without it having a real, detrimental impact on the care that we provide for people.

On top of that £160 million, a further £50 million is being requested to meet the bill for welfare reform. I say this to the people who seem to be a bit uninitiated on the subject: that money is no longer available to Northern Ireland plc. That money has gone; it is not in our budget. It is nonsense to try to con the public that, if we just go over to London to ask for it, we might get it. That is a con job. You need to be straight with people and say, "We are taking the money away from health to support welfare". I want to know this from the other Members: where do you want to see the £210 million cuts in health applied? Do you want us to remove mental health services altogether? Do you want to cut domiciliary care and just let elderly people be in their own home without getting that support? Do you want to reduce the efforts that have been made in children's services? We are identifying more and more children who are in real need and are at risk. That is good, because it means that social workers are doing their job well. There are more children in foster care now, which offers them better care and protection in a family circumstance, but do you want us to cut that? Do you want us to reduce cancer services? Do you want us to close down the 24-hour cath labs? What do you want us to do?

If you think that welfare reform is more important than health, you need to look at yourselves again. The SDLP and Sinn Féin are putting austerity on to health; they want to drag the Northern Ireland health service down to the standards of the Republic of Ireland. They want an all-Ireland health service that is poorer than the one that is currently being provided.
[Interruption.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: I know that it is annoying and irritating for people to hear the facts on the issue, but, as we move into June and we are losing money every month, the truth is that, if you and the other members of the Executive insist that welfare reform is something that you do not want to do, that is OK, but you must tell the public where you want to make the cuts. Tell them that, on top of the £160 million gap that exists in health, you want to make another £50 million of cuts to health. Tell them where exactly you want us to make those cuts and stand over it.

Mr McKinney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: We have heard enough from Mr McKinney and his opportunistic behaviour when it comes to this issue. We need to hear the facts. The facts are that we are having our funding cut, and we need to do something about it.

Transforming Your Care needs to happen, and it needs to be rolled out. We face immense pressures with our growing elderly population and more and more chronic diseases. We are providing regular care for people each day, and it is very important that we deal with all these chronic illnesses. We can and will do it if we are given the opportunity, but we cannot do it if we are going to be consistently crushed by people who are so blinkered in their approach that they are prepared to destroy this health service, which is free at the point of need to everyone in Northern Ireland, not like the Republic of Ireland where they have to pay for it. Is that what Sinn Féin wants — an all-Ireland policy under which you have to pay to see a GP? Earlier, Ms McLaughlin was complaining about GP services. There are twice as many GP visits in Northern Ireland as there are in the Republic because people there have to pay for them. Do you want to pay for emergency departments? Do you want to have huge fees for prescriptions? That is what could and would happen if we were in a united Ireland. We do not want those policies to be imposed on us, so we need to take our stance on those issues and ensure that the health service is supported and is not destroyed by the austerity imposed on it by Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

3.45 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister must wind up his remarks.

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr D McIlveen: I have to be honest: at the end of the debate, I fear that I agree with very little of Mr McKinney's proposal. I could probably write what I agreed with on a postage stamp. However, there was one thing that jumped out at me that, I think, was a fair point, namely that we should stay focused on the strategic nature of Transforming Your Care. On the back of that, I suppose that I have to say that, if that is the case and if Mr McKinney is genuine in his desire to see that happen — I have no reason to doubt that he is — two and a bit years into a five-year plan is probably not the strategic time to treat it as though it is already a failure. That is effectively what many of the contributions to the debate have insinuated.

In his contribution, Mr Wells made it clear that Transforming Your Care was one of the most consulted upon documents that the Assembly has seen. Mr McKinney, in one of his challenges to Mr Wells, made the point that we did not know what has caused the pressure. I would be the first to admit that I do not see myself as a prime candidate for Mensa, but, when you look at a 6% increase in demand for services and a just above 1% increase in funding, you do not need to be a genius to work out why the pressure is there. We know why the pressure is there: we have a population that is getting older and living longer and is therefore putting more demand on the health service. That is very clear.

When it comes to the contributions that have been made by Sinn Féin, I really do not think that much more needs to be said other than what the Minister has said already. I really wish that Sinn Féin as a group would grasp the fact that just because you disagree with something does not mean that it is wrong. That is where we are at this moment in time. It is not that there is a threat of money being withdrawn from the Northern Ireland Budget; that is already happening. It is not something that will happen next week or next month; it is happening today and has been happening for the past number of days throughout last month, when money was removed.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am a little short of time. If I have time at the end, I will.

We have to accept that those are the challenges and facts that are upon us. I noted with interest Mr Brady's continued fear of the private sector. I could not help thinking to myself that perhaps it is not just the £80 million that is shifting left; Sinn Féin is continuing to shift left. I thought that it could not really move any further to the left than it already was.

Mrs Overend mentioned in her contribution that there were no targets or implementation plan. However, even at last week's Committee, we had Ms Catherine Daly from the Department make it very clear — interestingly enough, in response to questioning from Mr McKinney — that there has been significant progress across a number of areas in Transforming Your Care. Again, I come back to the fact that we are only halfway through the process. The Minister has already given us a fairly comprehensive list of achievements and targets that have been met. Therefore, we have to take that as a matter of fact. The debate is premature in that regard.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: Again, if I have time at the end, I will do so.

We then had a contribution from the Member for North Antrim. I am sorry that Mr McGimpsey is not still here, because it would appear that he has a new best friend. I am sure that Mr Allister has read 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf'. The man who predicted that, by now, we would have a Sinn Féin Justice Minister and that operational policing would be controlled by Sinn Féin is now telling us that Transforming Your Care is doomed to failure. I do not know whether he expects us to take him seriously or not. What I would say to Mr McGimpsey, if he were here, is that Mr Allister used to be our friend as well, and with friends like that, who needs enemies?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: For the record, thank you Mr McIlveen for making a winding-up speech on the amendment.

Mr Rogers: I want to again express the SDLP's frustration with the persistent problems that have occurred in our health service, the additional pressure that has been put on staff and the increased stress and anxiety that patients and families have endured as a result. I concur with Mr McKinney's comments that, in light of recent monumental healthcare failures, we must ask whether our health service is being reformed for the better.

It is becoming increasingly evident that, although many of the aims of Transforming Your Care are valid, the way in which health service management is trying to achieve them is producing inconsistent results and often poor patient outcomes. The ongoing pressures suffered by staff on the front line and the numerous escalation measures and crisis management protocols that have been put in place are clear symptoms of the problem but not the cause.

Transforming Your Care's restructuring of the health service attempts to achieve efficiencies by taking resources out of the front line and relying on community care to balance out patient need. The problem with that is that the community care network has not been bolstered enough to cope with those pressures. Logjams experienced in emergency departments are not being addressed by Transforming Your Care. We cannot afford to allow them to get much worse. There is mounting evidence that the financial cuts

experienced under TYC are not sustainable and are producing poor patient outcomes on the front line.

I call on the Minister of Health to listen carefully to staff, patients and unions when they tell him that the current system is unsustainable and the pressures on staff are intolerable. It is imperative that the Minister re-evaluates the Transforming Your Care model so that the system does not further deteriorate and staff are not placed under further pressures. The time has come to review the path that Transforming Your Care is taking to reform the health service. The public need to be reassured that the current strategic direction is not sacrificing patient outcomes for a money-saving exercise.

In 2011, the TYC review was published with the aim of creating a long-term, sustainable and financially viable model of healthcare. The main goal for the review was to shift health provision focus away from a hospital setting and into a community-based infrastructure, with high-quality care. The result three years on is that the community care model is under-resourced and ill equipped to deal with the needs across the region.

Under TYC, resources such as hospital beds were removed. A&E units, such as the one at the Downe, have closed at night and at the weekend, and others are restricted. Indeed, the unit at the City Hospital has been closed. Implementation of the reforms, however, has been substandard. The community healthcare sector was not suitably strengthened at the outset, and now we are effectively playing catch-up. The sizeable pressures on our A&E departments are clear evidence of this. We know that 30% of people who present at A&E should not be there, but the implementation of TYC is not addressing that. People cannot see their GP quickly enough, and many have little confidence in underfunded community health initiatives, so their only recourse is to arrive at A&E. That is a critical problem.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, at last week's Health Committee meeting, we were informed that there was a request for £160 million in the monitoring round and that, if that money was not forthcoming, patients' safety and waiting lists would be at risk and Northern Ireland's record on providing patients with a good service would be even worse than that of its UK counterpart?

Mr Rogers: I thank the Member for the intervention. He makes his point well.

The word "transformation" implies an improvement. How transforming is it when a patient from Castlewellan, on calling an ambulance, gets an Armagh crew who have been tasked from Daisy Hill and, when they arrive in Downpatrick, cannot find the hospital? That is a reflection not on the crew but on the pressure that TYC puts on them. How transforming is it when a young person with complex medical needs who needs a steady supply of electricity to live cannot get a generator and will have to leave their infection-free home environment to be taken to a hospital if there is a power cut? I can go on about those.

Many people talked about our GPs. Our GP services need to be improved. We need to attract, retain and expand the number of GPs and the number of practice staff and improve the premises from which GPs operate.

I will now come to Members' contributions. I thank everybody for their contributions. Mr Wells led off on the amendment. I will maybe ask Mr Wells the question that Mr McKinney asked him: did he read the 99 targets and where are the measures of those targets? Indeed, Mr Wells highlighted the good points. Every time I stand up to talk in a health debate, I am reminded that I am a good news story, given how well our health service looked after me in the past. Thanks to him for reminding me about that.

The Chair of the Health Committee said that the system had rumbled from crisis to crisis and that TYC lacked any measurable framework.

Mr Beggs said that TYC had a great vision but patients were not experiencing that. He talked about the waiting times and said that only 60% of our patients are treated within four hours and 127,000 people are waiting for their first appointment. He asked this question: where is transformation?

Mr McCarthy put a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention. He said that the Bamford review must be kept on the radar in the mental health agenda. He asked whether resources would follow the need. He, too, has concerns about our GPs and about the help that they have. He said that we need properly funded GP services as they are the linchpin of Transforming Your Care.

Mrs Cameron said that now is not right time to review, and that has come from the Minister as well. She said that more needs to be done to ensure that we have fewer problems in A&E.

Mr Brady said that Transforming Your Care was an important transformation for people and services. He said that the health service must be protected at all costs and that staff must get their pay in time. He mentioned the Royal College of Nursing, which summarised TYC as "vision without action".

Mr Dunne talked about TYC being a road map but said that funding must be in place to deliver the changes. He, too, highlighted the important role of our GPs. He said that our expectations are high. However, we would expect to be seen within four hours in an A&E, and you would not expect to have to wait over 15 weeks for your first appointment.

Mrs Overend talked about many mid-Ulster issues and made some very good points, particularly when she asked the Minister to take more care in his health transformation.

Mr McCallister commented that the Assembly was getting some level of accountability from the Health Minister and stressed that much of the £83 million that was moved from acute to domiciliary care has caused the problem because acute is in crisis.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Rogers: I will, yes.

Mr Wells: It is interesting that Mr McCallister sat through the Health Committee during almost the entire drawing up of Transforming Your Care and did not raise any of his concerns at that point. I do not know if Mr Rogers has been listening to the Minister, because the Minister outlined a raft of the proposals in TYC that have been implemented, such as recommendations 86, 87, 90, 47, 44 and 55. The Minister made that clear, yet the Member is still rabbiting on about the fact that there has not been delivery.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Interventions should be short. The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Rogers: There are many good points, but we have to get better. We must improve.

Mr McIlveen said that we need to have a strategic focus but, if we have a strategic focus, we must have targets to measure it. There is no point waiting five years to measure targets; we need interim targets as well.

Mr Allister said that Transforming Your Care is not a shining light any more. He said that, if you reduce the number of beds, you will cause

a logjam in our service. That is the problem that we have with A&E.

4.00 pm

Finally, I think that it is a sad reflection that the Minister demeaned the debate by comparing it to a whingeing session. Just ask the 40% who are waiting for more than four hours for A&E or the 19,000 people who are waiting for more than 15 weeks for an appointment. Minister, you must listen to the large number of concerns about the current model that patients, staff and unions have expressed and order an independent, evidence-based review of the implementation of Transforming Your Care. Transforming Your Care must meet community needs —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, the Member's time is now gone.

Mr Rogers: — and it must not just be financially driven.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the considerable public concern at the pressures on emergency departments and GP waiting times, which have arisen during the period of the Transforming Your Care change agenda; notes with concern that the implementation of Transforming Your Care has not been fully assessed; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review and measure the implementation of Transforming Your Care to assess its effect on patient outcomes; welcomes the progress made on patient waiting times, including the significant reduction in those waiting longer than 12 hours in emergency departments to be assessed, treated and admitted or discharged; pays tribute to the dedication of hard-working health and social care staff, including the 2,000 additional staff employed since 2011; and further calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to reinforce across the health and social care system the necessity for transformational change to respond to the challenges of an ageing population, and to encourage and maximise involvement and leadership from health care professionals on the ground in delivering change from the bottom up at an accelerated pace.

Racial Attacks

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. Before we move to the next item of business, I remind Members of the Speaker's ruling on the need for good temper and moderation in debate. Members will be well aware of the seriousness of the issue that we are about to debate and the attention that there will be on it. I will also mention that the debate will be streamed live. Members on all sides of the House will, of course, want to express their views on the issue, but let us ensure that we do it in an appropriate way that does not exacerbate feelings outside the Chamber.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Ms McGahan: I beg to move

That this Assembly condemns the recent racial attacks and firmly opposes racism, discrimination and intolerance of any kind, wherever it occurs; embraces the growing diversity within our society; emphasises that there is no room for racism or stigmatisation; and calls on all political parties to provide leadership on this issue.

I support the motion and the amendment. As hard as it is to believe, it may be fair to say that the events of the past week here in the North have been bittersweet. There is nothing that I can do or that we can do as a society but regret the comments of Pastor McConnell and Peter Robinson for the wounds inflicted on our ethnic minority community. However, it has brought all sides of the community and nationalities together. We saw that last weekend in Belfast, where over 4,000 people attended a protest.

I also welcome and acknowledge the fact that Pastor McConnell visited the families of two Pakistani men who were attacked in their homes in north Belfast last weekend. That is a step in the right direction.

I think that it is sad that our ethnic minority population has never felt more insecure regarding its vulnerability to crime. That is a challenge for policing and for the criminal justice system, and it is a challenge that must

be met without prejudice and with respect for human rights.

Racism is prevalent in our communities, and we need to show political leadership in tackling the problem. According to the PSNI's crime statistics, racist incidents have increased by almost one third in the past year. There were 982 racist incidents in the 2013-14 financial year, which is an increase of 30.9%. The PSNI recognises that there is more work to be done to build confidence in those communities to tackle hate crime.

Sadly, when it comes to addressing hate crime, sound bites will not be enough. There was no justification for Pastor McConnell's comments during his sermon in the first place. We need real solutions to the problem of hate crime. Otherwise, we will leave the problems unchanged or even worse. We need political courage, political strength and the political will to deal with these problems.

No one should think that they are the chosen religion. An important tool, which was included in the Good Friday Agreement and, subsequently, put into legislative form, is a statutory equality duty on all public authorities. It is known as section 75. All public bodies are obliged to promote equality across a range of categories, including religion, politics, race and ethnicity. Everyone living in the North of Ireland has the right to equality before the law and the right to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, social or economic status, marital or family status, residence, language, religion, belief or political or other opinion.

There is an obligation on all in society to respect the rights of others and to uphold just laws. There is an obligation here in government to protect and promote the rights of all and to ensure that all in our society are aware of, and able to assert, their rights. The question is this: are we doing that? Despite legislation outlawing hate crime, which was introduced in 2004 to enable courts to determine additional penalties for crimes aggravated by religious, racial or other hate motives, particular difficulties remain. Clearly, there is still a view within the minority communities that religious hate crimes will not be taken seriously, and so it is that we have the alleged under-reporting or, indeed, non-reporting of such crimes. That seems to have become an established practice. We need to ask how many cases have been prosecuted under the legislation, whether the courts have,

in fact, applied additional penalties to those found guilty of religiously motivated hate crime, and how those numbers compare with the police statistics recording religiously motivated hate crime?

The racial equality strategy has been agreed by Martin McGuinness. It should be agreed, urgently, by the First Minister and go out quickly for public consultation. The strategy is an essential part of the overall equality agenda. It demonstrates the Executive's commitment to eliminate discrimination, promote equal opportunities and develop good relations. The strategy will identify the needs of our ethnic minority population, promote racial equality, tackle racism and increase awareness of the issues in that area. The strategy will foster good relations, thereby promoting greater social cohesion and equality of opportunity for everyone.

Sinn Féin has been at the forefront of pushing for positive change to transform the delivery of equality on the island of Ireland, but our work is far from done. Sinn Féin has long lobbied for a bill of rights for the North of Ireland on the grounds that a comprehensive bill of rights can serve as a guarantor of the vision of parity of esteem and equality of treatment for all contained in the agreement.

The Programme for Government reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and building a united and shared society. The Together: Building a United Community strategy outlines a vision based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation. It provides a framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation.

We all, as a community and as political leaders, need to be extremely careful in our language and discourse. Sometimes, we say things that may seem OK, but, in the eyes of others who have come to this country to settle and contribute to society, our language can be hurtful, negative, unwelcoming and, bluntly, racist in tone.

In conclusion, Pierre Berton said:

"Racism is a refuge for the ignorant. It seeks to divide and to destroy. It is the enemy of freedom, and deserves to be met head-on and stamped out."

By supporting the motion today, the Assembly can give a strong message that prejudice,

discrimination and intolerance must be rejected. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move the following amendment: Insert after "stigmatisation;"

"notes with concern the delay in the delivery of the racial equality strategy; affirms the urgency of addressing racial inequality; calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that the racial equality strategy is robust and is brought forward as a matter of urgency;"

The Alliance Party will, of course, support the motion. I welcome the opportunity that it gives to all MLAs to take a clear, united and unequivocal stand against racism and to consider how we work together to eradicate prejudice from our community. It is right that we condemn racism, stand united against it and show leadership, but it is also vital that we see real action. I ask the Assembly, therefore, to support the Alliance Party amendment, which calls on the DUP/Sinn Féin Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to urgently deliver the long-overdue racial equality strategy, with a clear action plan and an adequate budget.

Some people in our society claim that the issue of racism has been exaggerated or manipulated for political ends. They need to get their head out of the sand and face up to reality. It should be no surprise that a society ripped apart by sectarianism will have to defeat its close friend racism. We, of course, have made serious progress towards peace and prosperity. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister needs to get serious about tackling sectarianism and racism if we are to build a united Northern Ireland. In a political stalemate and with a lack of political leadership, the vacuum is often filled by sinister elements. That is what we have seen to be the case in recent weeks. There has been a 30% increase in racist attacks in the past year, 27% of which have been in north Belfast, 23% in east Belfast and 16% in south Belfast. There was more race hate crime reported in Belfast in 2013 than in the whole of Northern Ireland in 2003.

Unfortunately, I have had first-hand experience of racist attacks on Filipino families serving our health service, where swastikas were painted on their homes. I have seen windows smashed in the homes of African families. Families, including people serving as scientists in our universities, have been put under serious strain. Polish families serving the community and working hard to integrate have been attacked. We have also seen the recent racist attacks

against Pakistani families. We know that paramilitaries, including the UVF, have been involved in the attacks. My colleague Anna Lo has been subjected to vile racist abuse and threat, the veracity of which has been questioned by political parties, including UKIP. She has been called racist by a DUP councillor. Anna and I, as, I am sure, she will agree, do not agree on everything, but we are colleagues in a political party working for a safe and shared society for everyone. I stand firmly with Anna and all victims and survivors of racism in our community. It is wrong, and it has to stop.

It is unfortunate that, in that context, a number of unhelpful high-profile interventions have been made. Christian pastors should absolutely have the religious freedom to preach the gospel of Christ. They are absolutely right to campaign for religious freedom in other parts of the world where it is being so brutally and inhumanely denied as we speak. They should also be free to challenge doctrine in a robust manner, but they should make that challenge in love. They must stand clearly against prejudice and hate. I sincerely respect the service of Pastor James McConnell and his congregation, but the assertion that all members of a group of people are untrustworthy is a prejudicial and dangerous generalisation that he should retract. The language used by the First Minister, Mr Robinson, in an attempt to qualify the comment, whatever the intention, was ill conceived and demeaning. I welcome the private apology that the First Minister is understood to have given on the matter and the public apology that, I understand, was given today by junior Minister Bell for offence caused by the DUP on these matters, but I believe that it is the duty of the First Minister to ensure that all people are safe and welcome in Northern Ireland. A clear, unambiguous public retraction of the comments by Mr Robinson remains urgently required. Indeed, it is a missed opportunity that the First Minister is not here to make a contribution on the issue.

4.15 pm

It is clear that many people in this community, from all backgrounds, stand firmly against racism. That was evidenced by the demonstration attended by people of all backgrounds outside City Hall at the weekend and the planned Unite Against Racism march this weekend, as well as by the many interventions that we have seen from people across our society during the week. That response gives me hope, and I believe that, out of what is a negative situation, we can seize an opportunity to renew and reactivate our commitment to build a united community.

I welcome the action taken by the PSNI to establish a dedicated hate crime unit and helpline, which can be accessed by dialling 101. In May, Operation Reiner saw 20 hate crime-related arrests in Belfast — 11 relating to race — and 15 searches on premises. Six people have been charged with a range of offences as a result; four have been reported for prosecution; and 10 have been bailed for further inquiry. Between 20 and 31 May, the dedicated hate crime helpline received 53 reports of racist hate crime. I believe that the PSNI is taking its responsibility seriously, but we need others to do the same if we are to tackle the root causes of racism and maximise the positive contribution that people of ethnic minority background make to all elements of our society, whether in business, research, health, public services or culture.

Most importantly, we need to see leadership from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the delivery of the devolved racial equality strategy for Northern Ireland, which was scheduled for publication by the end of 2013 in the Together: Building a United Community strategy. As I understand it, the last direct rule racial equality strategy finished in 2010, which begs this question of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: "Why the delay?". The racial equality strategy, if supported by a good and sound assessment of current key inequalities and containing clear actions and timelines, has real potential to deliver improved racial equality in Northern Ireland.

The Equality Commission has made a significant contribution to work on the strategy and has listed key areas that we should see in it. In the area of legislation, it recommends a single equality Bill and a bill of rights or that the Equality Act 2010 be extended to Northern Ireland. On community safety, it recommends that we address the under-reporting of race hate crime; endeavour through early intervention to prevent low-level hate crime escalating; improve our operational response to hate crime; and provide improved support for victims of racist hate crime. We should also publish clear data to allow us to make end-to-end tracking of hate crime cases.

On education, the commission recommends that ethnic minority children see their culture and language reflected in the classroom and school curriculum; that we provide adequate support for newcomer children in our schools; and that we respond to prejudice-based bullying. On employment, we should see initiatives aimed at tackling the exploitation of migrant workers; reducing ethnic minority

disadvantage in employment; raising awareness of the rights of migrant workers; and maximising migrant workers' access to the labour market. On housing, we need a more strategic response to the accommodation needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland. On healthcare, we need to see a coordinated approach to known inequalities among ethnic minorities.

We should also see the OFMDFM emergency fund and minority ethnic development fund made available on a more sustainable and long-term basis to ensure that there are adequate resources at grass-roots level in our community to respond to the issue.

In the upcoming Community Relations Week 2014, which starts on 16 June, the Community Relations Council will urge us to finish the job of the peace process. I hope that the Assembly will today send out a clear message to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that racial equality must be a fundamentally important part of that job.

Mr Moutray: Racism should have no place in our society. I am unequivocal in my condemnation of attacks that have happened in recent days, as are all my colleagues. It is deeply concerning when we look at recent figures released by the PSNI and see that there has been a 30.9% increase in racist incidents in the last 12 months. The high number of race hate crimes is highlighted further when we see that there have been almost 700 racially motivated attacks over the last 12 months. In the Craigavon area in my constituency, 45 racially motivated attacks have occurred in the last year. I am sure that Members will agree that statistics like these are unacceptable.

Those who inflict hate crimes on members of ethnic minority communities should be ashamed of their actions. It is only right that they be subject to the full force of the law and that the punishments are appropriate. I am pleased that, in recent days, the PSNI announced a telephone line for reporting and providing information on race hate crimes, which is some progress in the PSNI's efforts to deal with these issues. It is my hope that people who have been victims of these crimes or, indeed, those who have witnessed them will feel comfortable coming forward to the police and helping them as they carry out their investigations.

We, as a society, must not allow the small section of our community who carry out these hate crimes to tarnish the name of Northern Ireland. The overwhelming majority of our

population is tolerant and respectful of those from other cultures and backgrounds. They recognise that people from ethnic minority backgrounds should be allowed to live peaceably and to make a positive contribution to our society as a whole.

Northern Ireland has been moving forward in recent years, and we want that to continue. According to the Alliance Party amendment, Northern Ireland has been idle in this regard, with claims made regarding a seven-year delay in providing a strategy. That is clearly not the case, because a strategy was in place from 2005 to 2010. Since then, the Department has been working to tackle the problem with the setting up of the racial equality panel. Work by Ministers is ongoing to progress a new strategy that will undoubtedly provide a robust and effective framework to tackle hate crimes.

This Government have been to the fore in combating racism and sectarianism through their Together: Building a United Community strategy. The strategy provides the framework for government action in tackling sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance while seeking to address division, hate and separation in our society. I am aware that consideration is being given to the possibility of incorporating the United Against Hate campaign and building on its achievements to date. In addition, government has been to the fore in investing in communities through the minority ethnic development fund, with £1.1 million having been allocated this financial year on top of the £1.1 million last year from tier 1 alone.

As I draw my remarks to a close, I want to again utterly condemn racist attacks. We in this Assembly have a responsibility, and we are certainly not shying away from it. We remain committed to stamping this out and providing legislation and policies that work towards that end. We cannot allow a very small number of people in Northern Ireland to halt the progress that Northern Ireland has made in recent years and will hopefully continue to make in the years to come. Government alone cannot eradicate the problem of racism. Combating racism is an issue for all sections of society. As we move forward, it is up to society as a whole to promote good race relations and to make it clear that there is no place for race hate crimes in Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: This is a very timely debate given the events of the past week or more: the comments by Pastor McConnell; the unfortunate defence of those comments by the First Minister; the outrageous racist attacks on Anna Lo, our colleague and a Member of the

Assembly; and the egregious attack on two Pakistani residents of Parkmount Street in north Belfast.

Given the fact that we have an opportunity here to put to bed the evil of racist attacks and intolerance in our society, I have to ask the House this: where is the First Minister? Why is the First Minister not here? Why is he not making a statement to the House to clarify his position in relation to Pastor McConnell and in relation to racism? His absence hangs over the debate, and I have to say that it is deeply regrettable that he is not here. There is an empty chair there where the First Minister should be. I believe it is his duty to come to the House and clarify his position. It is the duty of all of us to give leadership in relation to that evil within our society.

Sectarianism and racism are simply two sides of the one coin and the one evil, which is intolerance and bigotry. It is incumbent on all of us, particularly those in high office, to show leadership. If we do not show leadership, then we are letting down the whole community and letting down those from an ethnic background who come to live here as our guests and our citizens and who make a great contribution to our society.

I believe that there is a crisis of confidence among those in our community who come from an ethnic background, and that has shown in the events of the past week. It is clear from the comments, not only by Anna Lo, who has given great articulation to the fears and concerns of the ethnic communities in our society but by the most articulate and dramatic words of one of the victims of the attacks in Parkmount Street — one of the Pakistani gentlemen — who said that the words of the First Minister had set a "fire in the jungle". Those were very poignant remarks, and I believe they highlight the real fear that exists in our community. Given that, those who have been affected in such a tragic and evil manner deserve all of our support.

It is not right for the First Minister to hide away, given the opportunity that the debate has created to clarify his position. It is not right, and he should come to the House even now in order to clarify his remarks. It is a dereliction of duty not to come to the House. We have been given the task of leading this community, and we should do so in a forceful manner. We should directly attack the intolerance, bigotry and racism that have caused so much hurt to people in our society.

Mr Kinahan: I am extremely pleased to speak today to support both the motion and the amendment.

I want to start with a story. I am lucky enough to have travelled a great deal earlier in my life. I met an American who had worked on the Alaskan pipelines for a year. Every year he worked on the Alaskan pipelines, he then travelled around the world. When I asked him where the best place in the world was, he said, "Northern Ireland", not knowing that I was from here. He said, "Those were the friendliest, loveliest people of any country I have been in". That is what we want to get back to. We want to get back to the world realising what a great place Northern Ireland is. Let us get back to what we saw around the Giro d'Italia and the Olympic torch — Northern Ireland all pulling together, all celebrating, all happy. That is what this place should be.

4.30 pm

Is it really that bad? We have just heard from Chris Lyttle how appalling it is for some. We have to take that and change it. I am proud to be on the all-party group on ethnic minority communities, when I can get to it, and to have chaired it. However, I have not been proud of the fact that we cannot achieve half the things we want to achieve because we are not getting it back down from OFMDFM. We need that racial equality strategy today and everything coming back down to us so that we can actually get on with making Northern Ireland a better place. The statistic that shows that four out of 14,000 cases have actually been prosecuted shows how bad we are at protecting those whom we should protect.

Last night, when we went to the Islamic centre, I was appalled to hear that the two people who had been attacked at the weekend were too frightened to go out and get food, and I am really impressed and glad to hear that the pastor has been there today. We have to change this society, and it is up to us, as the politicians, to do so. It is all of us, from the First Minister downwards. It is leadership. That leadership is not just in press releases and statements but in our parties and communities and particularly in challenging those who disagree with us and who have a warped mind and feel that it is all right to attack or intimidate somebody. Let us make sure that we challenge it.

I particularly enjoyed meeting the people last night in the Islamic centre, because they are exactly what I expected to find. They are people who came to Northern Ireland with

fantastic skills. They are heart surgeons and scientific specialists. If you look all the way through Northern Ireland, on the back of the £1.4 billion that is brought in by ethnic communities, you will see the skills that make Northern Ireland the great place that it is. Whether it is the nurses or those in industry, we want to make them welcome. Let us see that they are all very much part of our society.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way, because I may not get the opportunity to speak later. Will he agree with me that, while I agree with him about the skills and expertise we get in through immigration, regardless of why anyone finds themselves in Northern Ireland, no one, in whatever circumstances, should be subject to racist attacks?

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

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, indeed. I full-heartedly agree with you. That should not happen to anyone in any country anywhere but especially not in our country. It should not happen anywhere in the world. Thank you.

Last week, I was pleased to see the British Council here. One of the other great changes we have to get in place is in our education system, and, with the visit of the British Council, we were able to see excellent examples of schools learning about foreign cultures and differences, schools with classroom connections with Uganda and Spain and people teaching how to paint or draw Chinese letters and, equally, how to learn Arabic. There is so much that we all need to learn at school, and it should start right at the beginning and go all the way through. As we heard from someone else, we especially need to learn about each other's cultures. I know one school in my constituency that has 16 ethnic groups, and I know that it makes sure that everyone understands all those communities.

I was sad to hear the comments of the First Minister and really sad to hear his begrudging apology. What we need is a clear apology. When I put out a press release on the back of that last week — I wish that I had not had to do it — within 20 minutes, someone from the Middle East sent me a text to say, "Well done". That is how quickly that little bit of bad language in describing us in Northern Ireland in a way that we do not want to be seen had gone around the world. That is what we have to change, and that is why we need a public and heartfelt apology.

Last week, I was also lucky enough to be at the event with the Turkish ambassador to launch the new consul.

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

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much. I want to make one more comment. The more we push this and publicise it the worse it will get. Let us all work together to calm it all down and never see it happen again.

Mr G Robinson: I will commence my contribution by unequivocally condemning every racist attack as unacceptable and an affront to Northern Ireland society. Despite recent media hype, I believe that firm leadership has been clearly shown in Northern Ireland by the House. I also believe that certain sections of the media, in some cases, could cause division and increased fear by continual coverage of stories that suit their agenda. Have the proposers asked the media what leadership they are giving in these circumstances? When we read our newspapers and hear on our radios and televisions about incidents of race hate, I know that the vast majority of our citizens totally condemn these despicable attacks.

It is a sad fact that Northern Ireland is not the only part of the United Kingdom to suffer from racist crimes, which should be unequivocally condemned. Indeed, the UK is not the only country in the world where these crimes occur. This is by no means a justification for these attacks but simply a factual observation, and they should not happen. Racist attacks are only one part of the overall category of hate crime, and I believe that it is dangerous to make single aspects of hate crime a special case. All hate crime is abhorrent and must be totally condemned. It is up to all of us to ensure that perpetrators are adequately punished for their dastardly crimes. In the past, crimes such as these were treated as sectarian. I should know, because I was on the receiving end of them. I condemn them all, as I deeply understand the untold distress caused to the victims who have been targeted. It is also important to understand that, in some cases, crimes do not attract a strong enough sentence to act as a deterrent.

Let us all join together and encourage anyone who has any evidence of racial abuse or, for that matter, any crime directed towards victims to report that to our Police Service in Northern Ireland. Ironically, Northern Ireland has a reputation for the warmth of the welcome that

people choosing to live here receive no matter what country they come from. I stress again my total opposition to racist or hate crimes and ask the media to examine the extensive coverage that they give to these stories and whether it is contributing to the problem. I urge anyone who knows the perpetrators of such crimes to ensure that they are taken off our streets.

In conclusion, it is worthy of note that, in April, OFMDFM stated in an answer to my colleague Mr David McIlveen:

"The mainstreaming and promotion of racial equality remains a strong commitment of our Department".

Leadership is being given, and all Members here should support that leadership. I also urge support for the "A Sense of Belonging" initiative, which is aimed at uniting communities and increasing tolerance for those of different ethnic backgrounds.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Maya Angelou died last week, and the world mourned the loss of a wonderfully strong feminist African-American writer and poet who lived a very full life. Part of that life included daily political activism against racism in all its forms. She said, amongst other things:

"The plague of racism is insidious, entering into our minds as smoothly and quietly and invisibly as floating airborne microbes enter into our bodies to find lifelong purchase in our bloodstreams."

The past few weeks and, indeed, months have been difficult for many in our communities, those who have come to live in the North to make a better life for themselves and their families. Those people deserve a future in our country in the same way as Irish people who have travelled and worked abroad in every continent also deserved a future. Sinn Féin brings this motion to the Assembly because we understand the importance of sending out a clear, unambiguous, strong message that there is zero tolerance of racism in all its forms in our society. Where it surfaces, it needs to be challenged and action taken, whether it is on social media, on our streets, in the workplace or in our communities.

I join Bronwyn McGahan in supporting all the work that is being done to deal with racial prejudice in our society. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I say to our ethnic minority communities directly that we value you and we want you to

feel safe here. We thank you for all the hard work that you have done in workplaces, in businesses, in communities and in your families. We want to say to you that your children are beautiful, that we want them to get a good education and that they enrich our classrooms. We want you to have access to housing, jobs, welfare and entitlements throughout your life. We also value and celebrate the diversity that you bring to us: your beautiful languages, your music, your dances, your food, your creativity, and your differing religious beliefs, and none. It is that diversity that enriches us. Whether you are Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Christian or atheist, we celebrate your humanity.

This morning, I left my little grandson off at his crèche here in Belfast. He is growing carrots with his granda, and he has watched them grow every single week when he comes to visit us, watching the little green tops coming. He went out and picked them last night. They were very small, because he picked them far too soon. He arrived into his crèche this morning to show a carrot to the rest of the children. He is three. I looked at the lovely faces of the children in that crèche examining that tiny little carrot — African, Asian and European faces looking at it — and I felt very, very sad at some of the public commentary that has been made in the past few weeks. I join Bronwyn in condemning Pastor McConnell and Peter Robinson's comments. I hope that Mr George Robinson did not try to shift the blame on to the media — let us put blame clearly where it belongs.

I also very publicly say to Anna Lo that the Assembly is a far better place because you are here. I know that the vast majority of people on the island of Ireland believe that, too. There are some who are going on the airwaves and, in a very insulting way, are accusing Anna of making things up or exaggerating. That behaviour is indefensible, and I put on record that I have lodged a formal complaint to the Policing Board about a racist attack on Anna Lo at an International Women's Day event way back in March, which was long before any of the more recent statements were made. That attack was by some of the flag protesters from a person who witnessed it.

I welcome Martin McGuinness's leadership on this matter —

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

Ms Ruane: — and I am going to give the last word to Maya Angelou:

“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

Mrs Hale: I welcome the opportunity to have an input into the debate on what is a very serious issue and one that I know that all Members in the House condemn at all levels. From the outset, I make it clear that I and, indeed, my party firmly oppose racism, discrimination and intolerance whenever and wherever it occurs, and I put on record my personal condemnation of the recent racist attacks.

The unprecedented growth of inward migration in recent years presents us with challenges and opportunities. We either show a strong, united voice on the issue or we create a vacuum in which people draw their own conclusions, which can often end in the most damaging consequences. We must ensure that the primary concern of community safety is addressed, but we also need to recognise the complexities of ensuring that, to build a united community on the issue, everyone must feel safe and secure and not feel threatened by intolerance or prejudice.

Collectively, as political representatives, we must show leadership on these issues. The media must also show leadership by ensuring that sensitivities and protections are not sacrificed just for a big story. Community representatives and organisations also have an active role to ensure that they support everyone while helping to lead on integration-based projects and programmes. Most notably, as individuals, we all have an important leadership role to play in ensuring that we do all in our power to break down barriers and challenge actions that lead to racism and intolerance. Fundamentally, we all have important leadership roles to play in showcasing the positives that come from tolerance and diversity.

4.45 pm

My colleague Mr Moutray spoke of the £2.2 million invested through the minority ethnic development fund. In the past number of months, I have met a group called the Horn of Africa, a local charity with the aim of supporting and integrating people from countries such as Somalia who have come to set up home in Northern Ireland. Namely, I met Suleiman Abdulahi, who raised a number of issues with me and suggested solutions to help to meet the

needs of asylum seekers and immigrants coming to Northern Ireland.

The group's projects include a youth football team and a ladies' basketball team, in which young people from south Belfast and the Horn of Africa come together to share and to educate each other through the medium of sport. It also provides English classes and special homework sessions for children, supported by our local teachers who volunteer their time to help. The House needs to do more to showcase and support the excellent work of organisations such as the Horn of Africa in providing the synergy and foresight needed to bring our diverse communities together, and to recognise the work that they do in breaking down cultural and religious barriers.

I hope to host an event later this year to showcase the positive impact that people coming from this region of Africa have in Northern Ireland. I will look to how we can do more to embrace and support the growing diversity in our society, and I hope to see many MLAs at the event. It is my view that we cannot be the champions of tolerance, acceptance and forbearance today and become the aerators of intolerance, narrowness and bigotry tomorrow, whether that applies to Orangemen, ethnic minorities, people attending their place of religious worship or those with a particular disability. We cannot afford to send out mixed messages because we are happy to be tolerant of some but not others.

As I stated at the start, and I reiterate, individually and collectively, we all have a responsibility to challenge intolerant attitudes and behaviours, and we all have a responsibility to show leadership on these destructive issues. We have a responsibility to create a Northern Ireland free from racism or sectarianism.

Mr McKinney: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, although I am saddened that we have to debate the issue at all. I will take a moment to apologise for the departure of my colleague Alban Maginness, who has to attend a meeting on human trafficking.

If there is one thing that Ireland, North and South, knows about intimately, it is emigration. Over 150 years ago, a million fled our shores in the famine. Part of our shared history is finding ourselves as displaced Irish people. As a result, those from both traditions found themselves, not too long ago and on foreign soil, subject to the same discrimination as we speak of today. Even today, many of our people are forced — through economic circumstances — to leave our shores. Family

members are emigrating in their thousands, and we naturally wish them to receive the warmest welcome wherever they are.

It is, therefore, extremely unsettling that the same conditions that many of us fear for our loved ones are being inflicted on others who come here. There was only one place that I wanted to be last week when I heard of the pastor's highly inflammatory comments and the First Minister's distasteful commendation of them, and that was at the Islamic Centre in south Belfast to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who felt victimised. Their welcome to me and SDLP leader, Alasdair McDonnell, was in stark contrast to the comments of the DUP. When we get it wrong, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, we must say that we got it wrong.

We were accepted warmly, with grace and dignity, and we were left in no doubt that those belonging to the Islamic Centre in Belfast were angry and hurt, but, importantly, they were dignified. One was a highly respected health service consultant who had given a lifetime of consultancy to our people here — a life of service that was far from going to the shops. It is not exactly going to the shops, given the investment that the Islamic community has made in ours.

I was interested to see just how subdued our Enterprise Minister was earlier when asked about the impact of the First Minister's comments on her good efforts to bring tourism, investment and overseas sales here. Interestingly, as a result of this furor, the one thing that we are not talking about is the 4% drop by the DUP in the polls. On top of over 900 racist attacks in the past year, we have just heard of the horrific and deplorable attacks on two Pakistani men in north Belfast. It is also worth noting that racist attacks are most definitely under-reported.

I would accept the emotion that the junior Minister demonstrated on the radio this morning if mountains of work had been progressed by the DUP on racial discrimination and attacks. We do not need emotion on our airwaves; we need leadership, vision and ambition for all living and visiting here. However, the stagnation around the racial equality strategy not only highlights one of the fundamental problems of the two-party stranglehold but how a lack of appropriate Executive urgency around fundamental matters can act to the detriment of people here and those who visit.

The last strategy under direct rule had 260 actions. It was reflected at the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First

Minister by members of the Department that many of those actions did not improve the lives of ethnic minorities here. The Committee was united on the need to progress a new strategy. Given recent events, I have no doubt that the strategy is needed now more than ever. The unprecedented rise in racial attacks, the inflammatory comments of Pastor McConnell and the subsequent endorsement by Peter Robinson are clear evidence of that.

The First Minister has had an apology accepted and welcomed by Muslims. He should now apologise to the rest of us. I endorse the comments of my colleague Mr Alban Maginness that he should be here this afternoon to do so.

Mr Nesbitt: I apologise for missing the beginning of the debate; I was called off-campus by an urgent matter.

As Mr Kinahan made clear, last night, some of the Ulster Unionist Party visited the Belfast Islamic Centre as part of an ongoing engagement programme for us with our so-called ethnic minorities. I am not going to pretend to the House that it was anything other than fast-tracked because of the events of recent days. I made that clear, and it was not an issue for our hosts. What was an issue was the building, the Islamic Centre. It has passed its use-by date as a cultural centre and, as a mosque, it was never fit for purpose.

Given that we as Christians take such great pride in our network of chapels, churches and cathedrals that populate — some might even say dominate — our built environment, surely we do not need to be convinced of the importance of having an appropriate place in which to worship our God. Yet between 4,000 and 8,000 Muslims in this country do not have an appropriate place to worship. They do not have that facility.

Inside the centre, we met a group of people whom I can best describe as high achievers: successful businesspeople and they doctors and consultants who are driving forward our health service. They are ratepayers and, let us not deny it, high-end taxpayers, good, corporate citizens of this country who describe themselves as British Muslims or, in one case, as an Irish Muslim — but I assure the Members opposite that I am working on that.

With a variable population of students and the hospitals in south Belfast, that is a key geographic area for the Islamic community. Why would we deny them a single appropriate place in which to worship, where they might

give thanks for successful operations that saved the life of some of our loved ones or maybe even of a Member of this Chamber? All they want is a level playing field in the support and resources given to ethnic minorities by the Assembly and our councils. They just want to receive the same respect that they show to others. Does that not sum up the values that make at least some of us describe ourselves as British, values of tolerance, openness and fairness?

Northern Ireland in particular was known around the world, even though we had our own internal difficulties, as a place that was very welcoming to strangers, as Mr Kinahan pointed out with his anecdote. That some of our citizens seem incapable of accepting others is to their eternal shame, and it is our pressing challenge as politicians.

Never forget that Britain is a melting pot of nationalities. The United Kingdom is basically made up of the English, the Scottish, the Welsh and the Irish. Modern Britain was formed by the descendants of ancient Britons and Celts, who were joined by Romans, Saxons, Danes, Normans, Huguenots and Jews, who came to Britain prior to the 20th century. Since the war, Britain has seen further immigration from former empire and Commonwealth countries, from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent. That has been in addition to the traditional migration from the island of Ireland, which led to the creation of large Irish communities in places such as London, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. That is something that we all celebrated recently with the state visit to Great Britain of President Michael D Higgins. Although uncontrolled immigration can put strains on social cohesion, we have proved in the past that Britain can handle it.

It is part of the human condition to distrust difference and fear the other. I am reminded of President Abraham Lincoln, who once said of a man:

"I don't like that man. I must get to know him better."

It is our challenge as politicians to make it easy for our citizens to get to know better our ethnic minorities, and that begins with a new racial equality strategy and the action plans that will ensure that the strategy makes a difference on the ground.

We support the motion, the amendment and the idea of supporting a new Islamic cultural centre in Belfast.

Mr B McCrea: I was in Belfast for the rally and the flash mob afterwards at Tesco, and I was struck by the sheer diversity of the people who were there. One of the problems was that the size of the crowd exceeded the strength of the PA system, and there was quite a lot of huddling around to see whether we could hear what was going on. It is important to recognise the spontaneity that was involved. People chose to be there because they were outraged — I was going to use the word "disappointed", but "outraged" is perhaps more appropriate — about the shame that has been brought upon our part of the world.

From listening to the debate around the Chamber, you would almost think that there was no problem, because everybody is singing from the same hymn sheet. We are all condemning racist attacks and any form of xenophobia, yet clearly we do have a problem.

A week previous to the rally, I was in a Filipino shop on the Lisburn Road that is a wonderful example of self-help and working together. I was surrounded by approximately 100 — perhaps 150 by the time that the evening had finished — happy, friendly folk who just wanted to get on with their lives and be part of our society. There was a discussion about what it was to be Northern Irish. My view was that it was not about birth, culture or any of those things but that it was about wanting to be Northern Irish. It is a self-declaration, where someone says, "I believe in being Northern Irish". They were quite taken by that.

I move on to some of the issues raised in the Chamber that we have not managed to deal with, in particular a racial equality strategy. It is worth pointing out — I know that other Members have mentioned this — that the last one that we had covered the period 2005 to 2010. For four years, we have failed to update our racial equality strategy. That is something that we need to look at, and not just for it to be done with a tick-box mentality or a section 75 approach; rather, we need something that will make a difference. We are looking for something other than fine words.

I note also the PSNI's most recent crime statistics, which show an increase in racist incidents of almost 31% and an increase in homophobic incidents of 14%. There is something going wrong in our society that we have to deal with.

So, when it comes to where politics itself is actually making a difference, one cannot help but look at the election results across Europe, where there has been a dramatic swing to the

right. A lot of people are talking about being anti-Europe, anti-immigration and anti-freedom of movement, yet those are some of the most basic tenets of our democracy.

5.00 pm

Look then at the response that has come from our political leaders and the furore of the past few days about what Mr Robinson did or did not say about what the pastor said. What you are really looking for is an unequivocal stance on this, not dancing on the head of a pin or saying, "If you really understand what I am saying, you will understand that I am saying the right thing", but some clear leadership that we can all believe in and say, "This is what our country stands for". An unfortunate message has gone out throughout the rest of the world. That message is that Muslims and ethnic minorities are not welcome here. That is not a good message to put out. It does not do us justice. It is not the Northern Ireland that I know and believe in. Collectively, we have to do something about that. If we do not do something about it, the racists and xenophobes will take comfort from the language that has been put out. I do not think that that is something we want.

The Northern Ireland identity must be flexible and broad enough to encompass, acknowledge and celebrate the different communities that have joined us from across the European Union and the wider world, people who are proud to call Northern Ireland home. We should welcome them all, because they strengthen our society and make our communities better.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank my colleagues and fellow Assembly Members for their contribution to the debate. I want to take the opportunity, at the outset, to totally condemn the appalling attacks that we have seen take place over recent weeks and months. I want to send our support to our colleague Anna Lo from the Alliance Party, who herself has been a victim of racist abuse and threats. We are very proud of the way that you have handled that, Anna. I am pleased to be able to respond positively to the original motion and the amendment. It has been good to hear so many Members speak out about their sense of outrage at attacks, without equivocation or any attempt at justification, and about some of the inflammatory comments that have been voiced in our community over recent weeks.

On the racial equality strategy, it is clear that we need to act and take a united stand against the

attacks and in how we deal with them. All of us, particularly those in leadership roles, whether they are political leaders, community leaders, church leaders or any other type of leader, need to take a united stand and show our support for our ethnic minority communities, many of whom are vulnerable at the moment. People mentioned the rise in racist attacks over the past year. We should be very mindful that there are real people behind those statistics, real people who have families and who, every day, have to leave their home. I have spoken to many of them over the past months, including a young woman with three young children who is now living in a hostel far away from the schools that her children go to. There is a human cost to this type of abuse and those attacks. We also need to ensure that support is given to the PSNI to make sure that those responsible are brought before the courts. We all need to do more in supporting victims of racist violence and in reducing the number of racial attacks.

I turn then to the amendment proposed by Alliance Party Members, which calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister:

"to ensure that the racial equality strategy is robust and is brought forward as a matter of urgency".

I am pleased to be able to say today that the deputy First Minister has already agreed and signed off on a draft strategy to go out to consultation. We are asking that that be put out as soon as possible, preferably over the next few days. The strategy's provisional title is "A Sense of Belonging" because we want everyone, especially people from minority ethnic backgrounds, to have that sense of belonging to this place. We want that sense of belonging to be acknowledged and valued by people from all backgrounds.

Someone mentioned earlier that many Irish people down throughout the centuries have emigrated to other countries. We would be outraged to see people from our families and communities being treated in the way that these people are being treated in our country today.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Ms J McCann: Yes.

Mr Allister: Speaking of outrage and hate crimes, does the Minister have any reflection on the hate crime towards foreigner Thomas Niedermayer in his kidnapping or the hate crime of the murder of Jeffrey Agate in Londonderry?

What about her own hate crime of shooting a police officer? Does that rank as a hate crime?

Ms J McCann: I expect nothing more from you than to try to degenerate this very important debate into what you have just said. I am not even going to comment on it at this stage.

The consultation document was drawn up jointly by OFMDFM and its racial equality panel, which includes the main service delivery Departments, the Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission, the Community Relations Council and the minority ethnic representatives. We will use the same partnership process when it comes to drafting the strategy itself and the ensuing programme of work. The consultation will last for the normal period, and officials will work hard over the next few months to ensure that the views and opinions of everyone who has an interest are taken on board. As well as staging open consultation events, we intend to commission a few minority ethnic representative organisations to undertake their own consultations in their respective language communities, and they will then make those results available to officials.

With the events of recent weeks and months, the focus has been on bringing forward the new strategy. We are pleased, as I said, to be taking that first step with the launch of the consultation document. However, we should make no mistake about this: the consultation is only the start, not the finish. Making a reality of the vision we have proposed in the consultation document will require sustained effort by all sections of society over many years. We have heard the voices that have said to us that we must take action now. Because of that, we are also finalising details of a package of measures that we hope to bring forward in the next week or so to tackle the spike in attacks, particularly in and around Belfast. A bid has been submitted in the June 2014 monitoring round to tackle these issues that will be over and above the £1.1 million per annum that we are already distributing through the minority ethnic development fund.

I will conclude by saying that this strategy and the package of measures will not solve the issues of racism and sectarianism in our society, both of which breed on intolerance, bigotry and a lack of respect for anyone who is different, whether they are of a different colour, race, religion, culture, gender or sexual orientation. We need to change people's attitudes in our society, because we must be sure that we do not inflame the situation by insulting or degenerating a whole community with careless words. Everybody in the

community has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and we have to send a very clear, united message from this Chamber that hatred, bitterness and intolerance will not be accepted by any of us. It is very clear from the debate so far that we are all going to send that clear message, and I am very glad to hear that.

Ms Lo: I want to thank all the Members who supported our amendment, and I welcome the Minister's announcement that the consultation document will be published shortly. I would like to let those who do not believe that I have received racist comments know that last night, yet again, I was visited by a police officer, who told me that there was another racist slur against me on social media. Luckily, this time, it was easily traceable, and a man was arrested yesterday afternoon.

I would like to say to Members that I am probably the only politician in the House to have been involved in the drafting of the first racial equality strategy before it was published in 2005. Right enough, it was a strategy for five years. However, in 2007, it was effectively shelved at the same time as the shared future document. It was seen as a sister document of 'A Shared Future'. Ethnic minorities, who had great hope about a new strategy that might improve their lives, saw only an action plan for one year. It is correct to say that from 2007 until now, seven years on, we have not seen the work of a racial equality strategy.

I remember that, at that time, in 2007, I tried to explain this to ethnic minority people. I said that it was fair enough because the Assembly was now in action and it wanted to put a stamp on its own document and have ownership of a revised document. However, a delay of seven years is just unacceptable. Clearly, in those seven years, there has been lack of emphasis and focus on revising the document. How on earth was the Department, with so many staff, unable to revise that document? There is a document already; we are talking about simply updating it to call it a Northern Ireland Assembly document. It has taken seven years. I certainly question the emphasis in the Executive, particularly in OFMDFM, on tackling racism.

Clearly, when there is no document, there is a vacuum, as my colleague said. There is a vacuum in the lack of leadership and direction from OFMDFM to provide actions and resources to tackle racism. When there is no action, when there is inertia, there is a vacuum in which racism can flourish and re-emerge, as we have seen in the past six or seven months.

Muhammad Khattak was right. He talked to me yesterday. He was really upset. He was right to say when he was interviewed that the pastor and Mr Robinson's remarks had:

"lit the fire in the forest and it is not going to stop".

We need to stop it. We must stop it. We must stop the tide of racism in Northern Ireland. We need political leadership from the House. All of us need to unite and stand together. Local councils also need to do so because the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 places a duty on them to promote good relations. All of us need to stand together to fight racism; otherwise, ethnic minorities will continue to feel unsafe in their homes and on our streets.

The racial equality strategy must be properly resourced. Work is needed on the ground in communities where racist incidents are rife. I am sick and tired of condemning racism in Northern Ireland. Every time a journalist phones me and I condemn it, I see no action from anywhere. It is time that we had the proper resources to ensure that the work is done, particularly in the areas where the attacks happen.

5.15 pm

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion in the names of my party colleagues, and I support and endorse their comments earlier in the debate. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I very much welcome the amendment tabled by the Alliance Party. So, we call on all Members to support the amended motion.

First, I welcome the assurance from Jennifer McCann that the Department will publish a racial equality strategy fairly soon. Of course, it is really important that we have such a strategy, which seeks to identify the problem and all the issues; to educate people on the issues of diversity, respect and equality; and, of course, to attach the relevant resources to the solutions that we have identified as needing to be brought into being. However, I do not accept the notion that we need a racial equality strategy before we can do anything else. I just do not accept that we need such a strategy to do that.

In my view, nobody in the Chamber needs a racial equality strategy, although I think that it is important that we have such a strategy, and I welcome the announcement that we will have one fairly soon. In fact, I would go as far as to

say that there is an opportunity arising next week with refugee week and community relations week, in that perhaps the strategy could be launched at one of those very significant events. That is just an idea. So, I very much want to see a racial equality strategy promoted very quickly and given the attendant resources following the consultation.

Pleasingly, every Member here this afternoon supported the amendment and the motion. Every Member in the House and all the parties rejected racism, embraced the need to work with and support all our communities, ethnic or otherwise, and condemned all attacks on people from communities that are perhaps different from ours. I think that it is very important to recognise that.

We all know that, in all our communities and constituencies, there are many brilliant examples of schools, community organisations, ethnic minority representatives and many others taking the lead without a racial equality strategy to give them guidance. So I simply make the point that, although we need a strategy, we also need to understand that it is about having good manners and respect, that there is legislation in place and that there is a way of doing our business. So I do not accept that Members in the Chamber and in this Building who have been vested with political leadership can be paralysed without having such a strategy at their disposal.

I shamelessly refer to a project in my constituency — I know that all Members can refer to others — that is about creating a cohesive community. The project is organised jointly by the South Belfast Roundtable on Racism and LORAG, the Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group, which is a local community organisation on the Ormeau Road funded by OFMDFM. It is a brilliant project that, like many others, struggles for funding. We need to redress that, because the people at the coalface are tackling problems and are making sure that, when new communities come into often hard-pressed communities, that is managed in a way that respects the culture and rights of the existing communities and the new communities coming in. I think that those examples are tremendous; they are beacons. I have no doubt that many Members in the Chamber are involved in such projects. So, again, I stress the point that — I hear this far too often — nobody in the Chamber needs to have a racial equality strategy to know how to behave themselves.

I do not believe that we can in any way justify, under the guise of free speech, the type of

language that we have heard in recent weeks. I do not think that freedom of speech affords pastors or politicians the right to utter the type of disgraceful, insulting, offensive and racist remarks that we have heard. I think that those who refuse to withdraw and take themselves back from that type of remark or commentary continue to further seriously and dramatically diminish themselves in the eyes of the vast majority of people in our community. I call on all those people, whether pastors or politicians, to consider the remarks that they have made in recent times and to withdraw them in whichever way they think is best. Those who continue to refuse to see the writing on the wall need to understand that they have been and will continue to be diminished in the eyes of the vast majority of the people we collectively represent, unless they redress that glaring problem, which they have created and which they and only they, personally and individually, can correct.

I simply say to all Members of the House that I am delighted that every Member from each of the parties has been forthright in their rejection of racism, their condemnation of all attacks and their commitment to work with all the communities in our society. I also say that, yes, we do need a strategy. I want to see a racial equality strategy published very soon, and I want to see the necessary funding to deliver that strategy and its wishes. I want to see respect given to people, and, on the basis of that respect, I want to see solidarity and support given to all the communities that we represent. The legislation that we have in place is woefully inadequate or is not being enforced.

It would be very foolish for us to ignore the reality. It is worth my while reminding the House that the motion was tabled long before the events of the past week. It was not intended as a response to Pastor McConnell or Peter Robinson's remarks or to the fallout from any of that. It was tabled well in advance of the past week or two, because we know that we have a problem. Why would we not have a racism problem when we have had a sectarianism problem for, as far as I can remember, all my life and, I presume, throughout the lives of every Member? We have had sectarianism, so why would we not have racism? They are both a scourge and are the two sides of the one coin. It is not that long ago that we heard remarks against the Catholic faith from pulpits and all the rest of it. I do not care whether it is against the Catholic faith, Protestant faith or any other faith: there should be no insulting remarks against any faith under the guise of freedom of speech. I am approached on a day-to-day basis by people

who say to me, "I have not heard such and such commenting about this". I am talking also about mainstream Churches. I want to hear from the pulpits, and I want to hear from every politician about their rejection of racism, their tolerance of all religious faiths and their refusal to challenge or to bad-mouth, as we say locally, people of other faiths under the guise of some theological or doctrinal difference. I do not accept that any of that is valid. Certainly, religions will have theological and doctrinal differences. That is all very well, and I totally and utterly respect that. I do not respect those who use that as a guise to mask their bigotry or small-mindedness.

All of us in this society need to step up to the mark. We have legislation, but, as far as I can see, it is not being enforced. As a former member of the Policing Board, I know, as other Members can confirm, that we have a situation here where a lot of the attacks, whether they are sectarian, homophobic or racist, are not reported in the numbers that they are happening. We all know that. Maybe part of the reason is because people are still afraid that, if they report something, they will highlight the problem. In the past, they have often been advised, "Don't report it. Keep your head down. It will go away". We know that it does not go away. Intolerance has to be driven out. We can no longer say that we will have zero tolerance of this type of bigotry; we have to do something about it. I am very clear in my mind that, sometimes, we cannot change people's mindset, but we can change their behaviour. So, legislation has to be enforced. The police have to do their job, the PPS has to do its job and the courts have to do their job.

So, I call for a racial equality strategy and a reaffirmation from all the political parties, particularly those in leadership positions. We need to make it very clear that we all not only reject racism but are seen to be rejecting it. We should not all simply condemn attacks but show solidarity with the victims of attacks. We should visit their homes, share with them, see them and be seen shoulder to shoulder with them. I suggest that, if a racist attack happens in any constituency tomorrow night, an MLA from each party should join those victims. That might be a little act of solidarity, but it would show that we are all singing from the one hymn sheet, to use that analogy.

There is a responsibility on all of us to show political responsibility, and there is a responsibility on all others in civic leadership to show that leadership in a way that is inclusive and respectful. So, I call for religious tolerance that is based on respect for other faiths.

Finally, I thank all the Members for the manner in which the debate has been conducted this afternoon. It has not been so much a debate as an affirmation from all of us that we are against racism and want to do something about it. So, I commend all the Members for the mature way in which we have managed to deal with this. I again call for, as I said, a strategy with the necessary funding to support it. We want to make sure that we all demonstrate in practical ways our support for and solidarity with people who are victims of attacks such as those that we referred to and that, if the legislation that is in place is inadequate, we improve it as a matter of urgency —

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

Mr Maskey: — and make sure that we enforce it.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly condemns the recent racial attacks and firmly opposes racism, discrimination and intolerance of any kind, wherever it occurs; embraces the growing diversity within our society; emphasises that there is no room for racism or stigmatisation; notes with concern the delay in the delivery of the racial equality strategy; affirms the urgency of addressing racial inequality; calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ensure that the racial equality strategy is robust and is brought forward as a matter of urgency; and calls on all political parties to provide leadership on this issue.

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

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Invest NI: Business Park and Job Creation in Strabane

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have seven minutes.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am very grateful to have the chance to debate the low level of economic activity — in other words, jobs — and the lack of employment or future prosperity for everyone living in the Strabane district.

This Adjournment debate came about because the 40-acre Invest NI business park in Strabane remains empty. The debate may give us, as an Assembly and as local representatives, the impetus to do something about that. I am delighted to see the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment present this evening. Hopefully, together, we can improve employment opportunities in the Strabane district and give people the chance to stay in their locality and contribute to the local economy and community.

Since 2006, Sinn Féin has spearheaded a campaign to redress the shortage of available industrial land in Strabane. The development of the 40-acre business park was the outcome, with 19 acres of serviced sites for inward investment and business expansion projects. The park opened over a year ago, and we have yet to see any benefit as it remains empty. In recent years, economic investment, inward and indigenous, has been lost to the district because of the lack of industrial land. I have been engaged in a long-term lobbying campaign, alongside Pat Doherty MP and other Sinn Féin MLAs and councillors in the area, with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to rectify this structural problem.

Throughout the years, we have met Invest NI, DETI, the local chamber of commerce and others several times in a bid to progress the business park. At this stage, the people of the district feel deflated by the lack of development and investment on the site. The chief executive of Invest NI, Mr Alastair Hamilton, has assured

us on several occasions that Invest NI was proactively marketing the park to foreign and indigenous investors as an investment location and that the body was, at that stage, dealing with expressions of interest from the agrifood, manufacturing and IT sectors.

We have also been assured by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment that there was formal interest in the new land from several businesses and that they would continue to work closely with them to develop those growth projects further. However, I feel that the Executive as a whole need to place and sell Strabane as a priority on the basis of its need for employment. In the West Tyrone constituency, Strabane represents over 50% of the unemployment figure. The business park needs to secure large employers to alleviate the pain and improve the social and economic issues that Strabane suffers today, has suffered for many decades, but will not suffer in future.

5.30 pm

Just last week, Pat Doherty MP and I met Mr Hamilton again. He informed us that the seven businesses that expressed an interest in the park were still interested. He has confirmed that this will be a slow process. However, he is hopeful that it will all come to fruition very shortly.

Strabane, like other places across Ireland, has been badly affected by unemployment and by the high levels of emigration of young people to countries such as Australia, America and Canada. The next few months will see many people graduate from Irish universities. It is a sad prospect that many of those highly skilled and educated young people will have no option but to go abroad to look for work.

Strabane has suffered economically over the past few years with the closure of Linton and Robinson, Adria, Barratts shoes, Co-operative Travel and various small local businesses and, most recently, the announcement of job losses at the Quantum clothing group. Closures such as those result in unemployment figures unfortunately rising and people having to leave their home town to go elsewhere for work.

Through a recent research request to the RalSe team here at the Assembly, I discovered that, since 2007, it has been estimated that, throughout County Tyrone, almost 10,500 people have emigrated, 2,000 of whom were from the Strabane district alone.

There is a serious lack of investment in Strabane; it has the reputation of being an

unemployment black spot, and there are high levels of child poverty. Those issues are all the more obvious when you look at the local levels of debt. Debt figures show that almost 900 local people have dealt with, or are dealing with, a combined arrears total of almost £7 million.

We are positioned on the north-west corridor and the gateway to Donegal. Strabane is very well placed with its neighbours in Donegal, and there is an opportunity that needs to be developed further. The A5 is a strategic must for the region and a massive influencer on the decision of an investor to the region. That is highlighted as an essential criterion of Invest NI.

All over the North of Ireland, cities and towns such as Strabane and Castlederg are crying out for investment. I hope that we will soon see the benefit of the business park in Strabane being put in place in the very near future. I look forward to visiting the first firm that sets up base there, and I hope that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment can provide us with an update on what efforts have been made to stimulate inward investment and on what is being done to maximise the investment potential of the new business park in Strabane.

Given its yearly placing in the top three unemployment spots in the North, resources surely need to be targeted now. We are possibly at the start of a new economic upturn, and Strabane does not want to get left behind this time. I trust that the Minister will work alongside Invest NI to ensure that this significant investment in the economic infrastructure of Strabane district is delivered in the shortest possible time frame. Sinn Féin will continue to keep the issue on the agenda, as this site is vital in securing inward investment, business expansion and, most crucially, the creation of new jobs.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Adjournment debate, and I thank Michaela Boyle for bringing it to the Assembly. I also thank the Minister for being present.

Strabane is an area that has suffered from high unemployment for decades, and anything that can help to improve employment opportunities for the area needs to be addressed. The business park will be welcomed, but only if it can be used to attract investment to the area. I know that some companies have expressed an interest, but, until the people of Strabane see jobs in the 40-acre park, they will not feel that they have been listened to.

I have spoken to many of the local skills providers. They are concerned that they are providing young people with skills, but that the young people have no opportunity for full-time employment, as a result of so little new investment in jobs in the area, particularly through foreign direct investment (FDI) projects. A number of weeks ago, the South West College, which has a catchment area including Strabane district, was, following an inspection by the inspectorate, awarded a grade 1 and assessed as being one of the top three further education establishments in the UK. The area is also serviced by North West Regional College, which has a campus in the town of Strabane.

We have the facilities locally to skill potential employees, but Strabane needs inward investment to address the historical unemployment issue. People need job opportunities.

Despite a very small drop in the unemployment figures in recent months, Strabane remains an unemployment black spot, with approximately 7.4% claiming benefits. That is the second highest figure in Northern Ireland after Derry city. The biggest problem in the area is youth unemployment. The youth of the area have two choices: to emigrate in search of work or to become unemployed permanently. Youth unemployment in the area needs to be addressed. Strabane has a talented young workforce that needs work to change the spiral of high historical youth unemployment in the area. Strabane has a high percentage of young graduates who cannot find a job locally. That is the most depressing thing. Parents will say that they encourage their young son or daughter to stay on in education and get a post-secondary school qualification, such as a HND or a degree, but they then find themselves totally at a loss, because, despite all the effort, they end up with no job.

Manufacturing jobs in the past have dropped dramatically at times owing to the closure of employers such as Herdman in Sion Mills and Adria and, more recently, the Quantum Clothing company in Strabane. I pay tribute to the current employers who have invested heavily in the area: organisations such as O'Neills sportswear, which employs over 400 people; Frylite, which employs over 120 people; McColgan's foods; and Allstate insurance, which is a US company with over 500 employees. It was helped by Invest Northern Ireland, and the Minister has been supportive of it. I also pay tribute to the retail sector, in which over 25% of those in the area are employed. However, only 5% of employment is in public

administration. That shows the government neglect of Strabane since 1921. It is a border town that has suffered disproportionately because of partition.

The refusal of the Agriculture Minister to consider seriously Strabane for the DARD Civil Service jobs was a missed opportunity. It would have shown the Strabane people that they were valued, and the extra income to the area that could have been earned would have had a major impact in the Strabane and surrounding areas. That is the grossest government disadvantaging decision taken in recent times. Over £750,000 has already been spent on the site. It appears that it is only the start of a DARD relocation to Ballykelly.

Some of the existing premises in Strabane are ready for occupancy. I appeal to the Minister to give serious consideration to supporting purpose-built office accommodation that could be used to make Strabane even more attractive to a potential inward investor. The closure of the railways in 1964 greatly decimated Strabane. It made it more peripheral than it should have been. The A5 road project has the best potential to make Strabane an attractive location. It is a fundamental peace dividend project that we want to see realised. I hope that the House and the Executive do not resile from the commitment that they made to it. I, along with other Members for West Tyrone, have continually lobbied on the issue. I put on record the importance of the road for safety reasons and as an economic driver for the north-west.

Strabane is a border town that has suffered government neglect for a long time. It has been famous for the wrong reasons, such as being the economic black spot of Europe. I hope that the Executive and the Assembly can do something positive and invest in the young people of Strabane.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank my colleague Michaela Boyle for bringing this important Adjournment debate to the House today. I agree with all the sentiments that have been expressed. I cannot stress how important it is for us to increase job opportunities in Strabane to prevent the brain drain and to prevent our young people being forced into emigration in search of jobs in other parts of the world.

Unfortunately, Strabane has traditionally been referred to as an economic black spot. I looked at figures provided by NISRA about what that actually means. I looked at them on a ward-by-ward basis, and NISRA estimates that 63.2% of children in the east ward are living in poverty.

In Ballycolman, it is 48.7%. Those are startling statistics, given the fact that the average in the North is 22.2%. They are incredible. It is the same in the Derg area, where 44% of children live in poverty. In the east ward of Strabane, 72.6 % of people are on low income or benefits, and, in Ballycolman, it is almost 60%. We need to address those startling statistics. Living in poverty means that those children will go on to have fewer opportunities and life chances than their peers. That is unfair and underlines the importance of us delivering and investing for the people of that area.

We have been doing our part, as was rightly referred to earlier. Infrastructure investment is crucial, and the A5 scheme is important to all of us. When we met business leaders in the north-west recently, we were told that that was perhaps the biggest, inhibiting factor to investment in Strabane, Derry and the wider north-west of Ireland. The economic assessment when that project was being worked up reckoned that it could be worth as much as £1 billion to the local economy through investment, job creation and its construction. That is notwithstanding the fact that it will make our roads safer.

I also welcome the fact that our Minister is following one of our priorities in trying to decentralise jobs into the west and other parts of the North. To that end, I commend the fact that Minister Michelle O'Neill has announced her intention to create a DARD Direct office in Strabane. I understand that work will begin on that this year and that it should be operational by 2016. The DARD Direct office there will bring together veterinary services and administrative staff and will be a welcome boost to the Strabane area.

There is a dispersed rural hinterland in and around the town of Strabane. Take, for example, the Sperrins, which have been endorsed by 'National Geographic'. DETI recently announced its intention to create 10,000 jobs in the tourism sector by 2020. I sincerely hope that many of those jobs will be created in the West Tyrone constituency and, indeed, in Strabane and the wider area.

I also note that the agrifood sector has expressed an interest in the business park. That is also welcome because of the dispersed rural hinterland. I welcome the fact that there has been progress on the agrifood loans scheme, but there is a lot of work to be done in the Executive, particularly on pillar 2 of the rural development programme. The EU contribution to the rural development programme is substantially depleted thanks to the Tories'

negotiating skills with the EU. The Executive need to work on that if we are to realise the Going for Growth strategy's goal to create jobs in the area.

I also welcome the fact that the rural development programme that we are currently in has created 500 jobs and has the potential to create upwards of 900 jobs, many of which are in the Strabane area and in the West Tyrone constituency. These are critical for the area because of the large rural hinterland there and in how that will support the town itself.

In conclusion, I congratulate my colleague Michaela Boyle for bringing this important subject to the House today to put a focus on Strabane and the economic needs of the area.

Mr Elliott: I am not from west Tyrone or Strabane, but I live close enough to the area to at least be able to make a few comments. Having visited Strabane on several occasions and played football there in my early career as a footballer — maybe not very well — I have at least had the opportunity to get to know a lot of people from the town. Indeed, I am still good friends with many of those people.

We have heard from colleagues here today about the depressing situation in the Strabane area and of how the high unemployment figures make it a difficult place to live and work or at least to even to find work in. Many will point the finger and ask who is to blame. I am not pointing the finger at any of these people, but I am sure that some will say that it is DETI's fault for not putting more jobs there, central government's fault for not spreading the weight of government jobs out there or the local council's fault for not doing enough to develop jobs. Some may blame the terrorist campaign of years gone by and the bombing and murdering of people in the area. I almost heard a latent blame being attached to the Irish Government from colleagues who said that the A5 road was not going ahead, so maybe the Irish Government are also to blame for not putting that funding into it.

5.45 pm

Irrespective of all that, look at the business park, which the debate is broadly about. I understand that a number of businesses have shown interest in developing in the business park. Maybe the Minister can give us some information on how much of an uptake there has been in the last couple of years from the businesses that have shown an interest. As regards those that have not followed up their

interest, is there any reason why? Is there any opportunity to assist them to bring their business and development there?

You cannot just say to the Department, "Let us create business opportunities there"; it has to be a partnership. I am sure that the Department will want to help those people, but initiatives also have to come from those in the wider business community who want to go to Strabane and take up the opportunities in the business park. It is about giving the best opportunities that we can, wherever that comes from — the Department, the council, central government or the wider business community — to go there. There may be opportunities for central government to look at expanding the decentralisation of government jobs. I am not saying a whole Department, but there may be an opportunity to bring an agency of a Department to Strabane. That would help the local community in general and give a degree of confidence to businesses that may show an interest in going to Strabane.

Again, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this. Hopefully, in the not too distant future, Strabane's workforce can be improved and the unemployment reduced.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on what is obviously a very important issue for the west Tyrone area. As a representative of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I am fully aware of the economic challenges facing the most peripheral parts of Northern Ireland. It was as a direct response to those challenges that Invest NI procured the 43 acres at Melmount Road in February 2011, which we have heard about today, and subsequently developed the business park in Strabane. It was designed to address the shortage of available industrial land and support economic development by enhancing the economic infrastructure in the Strabane council area. As you know, Invest becomes involved in an area only if the private sector is unwilling or unable to do so. That was our assessment in relation to Strabane and why Invest Northern Ireland became involved in the Strabane business park. We continue to proactively market the site to foreign and indigenous investors as an investment location.

Mr Elliott made reference to it maybe being the Department's fault that we do not have more jobs in Strabane. Jobs are created by businesses. We can assist those businesses, and we try to provide them with the infrastructure to come. However, at the end of the day, it is about whether businesses decide

to locate or expand in Strabane. That is the key element and the answer to all this. If we work in partnership with the council and elected representatives, we can give out a strong message about the positives of investing in Strabane and locating your business in the Strabane area.

At the moment, there are a number of formal interests and we are still working with those interests to try to develop them further. I am sure you will appreciate that it can take a long time to progress some of those interests and convert actual sales into investment. Issues such as providing and securing the necessary funding or achieving all relevant statutory approvals are outside Invest NI's control. However, they are all important in determining whether an investor will be able to implement their project in a particular area.

Taking all these factors into account, I am confident that Strabane business park will prove to be an attractive investment location and will promote economic development in the Strabane area.

Turning to the wider issue of economic development in Strabane and across the West Tyrone constituency, between 2008-09 and 2012-13, Invest NI made 860 offers of support to businesses in West Tyrone. That support amounts to £15 million and will lead to associated total investment in the constituency of £84 million. In Strabane specifically, Invest NI made 284 offers of support to businesses, amounting to £5.3 million. That will lead to associated total investment of just under £30 million in the area. Invest NI's most recent figures for 2013-14 are being validated, and I hope that they are going to be released very soon.

The support of Invest NI has led to the promotion of over 1,400 new jobs across the constituency, including those from the Regional Start initiative, and 481 new jobs promoted in the Strabane area. Many people living in the region have benefited, directly or indirectly, from the new employment opportunities that are being created by Invest NI. One such company has been O'Neills Irish International, which is creating 61 new jobs in the area over the next couple of years. The chief executive visited that firm a number of months ago.

It is clear that we are far from complacent about seeking to work with businesses in the area or, indeed, those outside our city centres in general, and we are engaging regionally to help businesses in more remote locations to grow and develop. Of course, our help and support

extends beyond job creation. It has many programmes and interventions aimed at improving the overall competitiveness of the economy. For example, over the past five years in West Tyrone, more than 160 offers of support to help companies engage in research and development or invest in improving the skills of their workforce have been put in place.

As with most regions, Strabane and the wider West Tyrone constituency have not been immune to the impact of economic downturn. Indeed, Members here today would say that that area has been hit far worse than other areas. A number of businesses have had either to reduce the size of their workforce or take the unavoidable decision to close completely. Through initiatives such as the jobs fund, Invest NI has been attempting to be proactive and address situations like that. We have sought to provide fast-track support to help companies across Northern Ireland to deliver new jobs on the ground as quickly as possible.

In Strabane, the jobs fund has promoted 91 jobs, with 72 jobs actually created. There is always a debate in the Chamber about "promoted" versus "created" so it is good to give the number of jobs created. In the West Tyrone constituency on a wider basis, the jobs fund has promoted 200 jobs, with 165 created as of December last year. We do not have more up-to-date figures. Under the jobs fund, 30 young people not in education, employment or training have also been given assistance to start their own businesses. In Strabane, nearly 350 new locally owned businesses have been set up and 11 young people not in education, employment or training have been given support to start their own businesses.

Of course, we also work with local councils, and we have been working with Strabane council on a range of new initiatives under the local economic development measure to improve the capability of local businesses in the areas of sales growth, financial management and procurement.

We have worked in a collaborative way with the council, and I look forward to continuing to do that with the new Strabane and Londonderry council. We will continue to engage with the council and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to progress important issues like the Strabane business park and how we can bring business to the area. Actually, a meeting is being arranged with the Strabane chamber of commerce, and Invest will present at the next council development committee on 23 June. So, Invest will be going up to Strabane District Council on that date.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for giving way. Minister, it is fair to say that Omagh Enterprise Company and Strabane Enterprise Agency have been extremely successful over the past 10 or 12 years. In the future, with economic development being even more rigorously pursued by the new district councils, does the Minister or the Department intend to provide more resources to those local enterprise companies to help them to drive local, small and medium-sized businesses, particularly young start-ups?

Mrs Foster: I am very glad that you mentioned Omagh Enterprise Company even though this is a discussion about Strabane. I have been working very closely with Omagh Enterprise Company and Nick O'Shiel, in particular, on the Fermanagh and Omagh Smart region project, through which Omagh and Fermanagh are working together, particularly on the data analysis of what is happening in the Fermanagh and Omagh area and how we can bring more jobs to that area. That is a very good example of how a locally inspired enterprise centre can work with another enterprise centre in Fermanagh to try to do something about the peripheral nature of where we are in the west of the Province. The Smart region has been given pilot funding by Invest NI to progress that initiative, and it is the first time that such an initiative has come forward. We will continue to work with Nick and his team in Omagh Enterprise Company.

It is only through proactive working, like the Member has pointed out, that we can successfully rebuild our local economy, particularly the economies outside of Belfast and Londonderry, and seek to ensure that all areas of Northern Ireland benefit from economic growth. Clearly, we are actively engaged with businesses of all sizes across the region to do whatever we can to assist with their growth and development. We will continue to do so in Strabane and West Tyrone in particular. Thank you.

Adjourned at 5.57 pm.



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