

Official Report (Hansard)

Monday 16 June 2014
Volume 96, No 3

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Assembly Business | 1 |
| Executive Committee Business | |
| Justice Bill: First Stage | 1 |
| Budget (No. 2) Bill 2014: Consideration Stage..... | 1 |
| Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 | 2 |
| Committee Business | |
| Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage | 3 |
| Gerry Kelly MLA: Sanction of Exclusion | 4 |
| Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014 | 23 |
| Oral Answers to Questions | |
| Regional Development | 26 |
| Enterprise, Trade and Investment | 33 |
| Committee Business | |
| Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014 (<i>Continued</i>) | 43 |
| Private Members' Business | |
| North Coast Transport Infrastructure..... | 52 |

Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the Editor.

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

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

Assembly Members

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

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 June 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 31 May, an interview with the deputy First Minister was broadcast by RTÉ, during which he said that he was in prison at the time of the murder and secret burial of Patrick Duffy. In fact, it transpires that he was not in prison during this period, and he now claims that this was a lapse of memory. I find it hard to believe, as I am sure the House does, that someone would forget where they were at the time of a murder, especially when they were accused of being involved in it.

Mr Speaker, if RTÉ was misled, and it appears that it was, can you review Hansard and establish whether the House was misled by the deputy First Minister?

Mr Speaker: I hear what Lord Morrow has said. Lord Morrow, there is no doubt that you now have that on the record. Certainly, let me review Hansard, and I will come back either to the Member directly or to the House.

Executive Committee Business

Justice Bill: First Stage

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to introduce the Justice Bill [NIA Bill 37/11-15], which is a Bill to provide for a single jurisdiction for County Courts and Magistrates' Courts; to amend the law on committal for trial; to provide for prosecutorial fines; to make provision in relation to victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings and investigations; to amend the law on criminal records and live links; to provide for violent offences prevention orders; to make other amendments relating to the administration of civil and criminal justice; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Budget (No. 2) Bill 2014: Consideration Stage

Moved. — [Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the seven clauses for the Question on stand part, followed by the three schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 3 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget (No. 2) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

The regulations further amend the principal regulations, which set out the arrangements for automatic enrolment, to ensure that they give effect to the original policy intention.

As I have said before to the House, I am conscious when dealing with pensions that it is easy to get lost in the maze of technical provisions and pensions jargon. However, the rule we are considering is somewhat technical. Whilst I will try to keep my comments at a fairly high level, some jargon is inevitable, but I will do my best to keep that to a minimum.

First, to be used as a qualifying scheme for automatic enrolment, in addition to satisfying the quality requirements for defined benefits schemes, a career average pension scheme is required to revalue accrued benefits by at least a minimum level while the member is in employment. This is so that the value of the benefits is given a degree of protection against the effect of inflation. Final salary schemes do not need that revaluation in service because, historically, salaries have tended to at least keep pace with, if not outstrip, inflation.

The regulations provide for schemes that revalue by a change in average earnings or potentially by reference to another measure not to be excluded from being a qualifying scheme, so long as the scheme's funding and statement of funding principles assume that revaluation will be at or above the minimum in the long term. That is consistent with schemes that are allowed to revalue by reference to a discretionary power, where funding assumptions can be considered under the principal regulations. It also allows schemes maximum flexibility over the period of revaluation they use, so long as it can be assumed from the scheme's funding that the minimum level will be provided.

In addition, the regulations provide for new public service career average schemes that revalue by reference to the annual order under section 9 of the Public Service Pensions Act

(Northern Ireland) 2014. If they revalue at the rate specified in the order, they will not be prevented from being a qualifying scheme. Explicit reference is made in this way as such schemes are not able to consider funding assumptions in the same way as funded private sector schemes, which are required to have a statement of funding principles or an equivalent.

The regulations also restore the policy intention to allow hybrid schemes that certify money purchase benefits under alternative requirements set out in the principal regulations to phase in contributions under the transitional provisions for money purchase schemes.

In summary, the regulations ensure that employers using good career average pension schemes are able to do so without any unnecessary impediments and that all employers using hybrid pension schemes under automatic enrolment are treated alike in phasing in minimum contributions.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Committee first considered the original SL1 pertaining to this legislation at its meeting on 6 March 2014 and was content for the rule to be made. The Committee subsequently considered the rule on 3 April and agreed that it should be confirmed by the Assembly.

The Department advised the Committee that the rule allows greater flexibility for certain pension schemes to meet minimum revaluation requirements while ensuring that the benefits of those types of schemes remain protected. The rule also restores a positive policy intention to allow all schemes to phase in contributions under the transitional provisions for money purchase schemes.

The outcome of the rule is therefore a positive one, and the Committee recommends that it be confirmed by the Assembly.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased that there is a consensus across the Assembly for the regulations. Again, I thank the Social Development Committee and its Chair for the positive way in which they have dealt with them. As I said in the opening comments, this is simply to ensure that good quality career average schemes are not prevented from being used as qualifying schemes for automatic enrolment.

I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 be approved.

Committee Business

Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 27 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 35/11-15].

On Tuesday 27 May 2014, the Assembly referred the Local Government Bill to the Committee for the Environment for scrutiny. Sorry, my notes are wrong: it referred the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill to the Committee for the Environment for scrutiny.

The Bill will amend provisions in the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Road Traffic (New Drivers)(Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and the Road Traffic Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. Those amendments will make major changes to the processes for new and learner drivers, lower the limits for drink-driving and make the wearing of protective headgear mandatory for riders and drivers of quadricycles.

The Committee agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals, and, in addition to signposting notices in the local press, stakeholders have been contacted directly. The Environment Committee firmly believes that it is essential that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on this Bill.

This is an important Bill that will save lives and make our roads safer for everyone in Northern Ireland. It is clear, however, following Second Stage, that the process will not be easy, as many issues were raised and need to be given due consideration by the Committee.

The Committee's public call for evidence does not close until 21 August 2014, and we anticipate a high volume of submissions. After considering those submissions, the Committee plans to invite respondents to take part in a stakeholder event so that members have a wider opportunity to explore the views expressed. The Committee also wishes to bring its concerns to the Department for its response.

The Committee believes that it is essential that it is afforded the time to fully exercise its scrutiny powers on this highly significant legislation. I ask, therefore, that the House supports this motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill to 27 March 2015, and I can assure Members that, following discussions with the Department, this extended date will not delay the progress of the legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 27 March 2015, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill [NIA Bill 35/11-15].

12.15 pm

Gerry Kelly MLA: Sanction of Exclusion

Mr 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 the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. Mr Kelly will have 10 minutes to make his contribution. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. I inform Members that a valid petition of concern was presented today in relation to the motion — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Allister: Shame.

Mr Speaker: Order. The vote, therefore, will be on a cross-community basis and postponed until tomorrow, when it will be taken as the first item of business.

Before we begin the debate, I remind the House that the motion relates only to the Committee's report and recommendations following complaints about an incident that took place in the Carrick Hill area of north Belfast on 21 June 2013. I would like Members to be very clear about the rules of the debate from the outset so that, if Members stray into another area, for whatever reason, they are well warned. I will not allow reference to any other incidents, convictions or allegations — *[Interruption.]* Order. Members must keep their remarks to matters dealt with in the report and sanctions recommended by the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Members who disregard the ruling will be asked to resume their seats and we will move on.

I remind Members to be mindful of the dignity of the Chamber and to treat each other with courtesy and respect. I remind Members of the authority of the Chair. Members have been well warned. Sometimes, Members feel that they can rise to their feet and weave in and out of a particular debate. When the Chair rises in his place to calm the Member down or warn the Member to be careful in where he is going, the Member looks at you, as much as to say that they did not know that they could not do that. All sides of the House are well warned in this debate.

Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges): I beg to move

That this Assembly, in consideration of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges [NIA183/11-15], imposes upon Mr Gerry Kelly MLA the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of five days beginning on the Monday after the resolution.

I move the motion on behalf of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. In doing so, I ask the Assembly to agree to impose upon Mr Kelly the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of five days.

However, given that a valid petition of concern was lodged this morning, I suggest that that is incredibly unlikely.

All Members should have already received a copy of the Committee's report on the four complaints about the conduct of Mr Kelly on the evening of 21 June 2013 in the Carrick Hill area of north Belfast. The Tour of the North parade took place that evening. Mr Kelly had been in attendance but departed when it appeared that the area was calm. However, tensions in the Carrick Hill area were subsequently raised, and Mr Kelly was asked to return. Upon returning, Mr Kelly learned that a young man from the area had been arrested. Mr Kelly approached a police Land Rover and spoke to one of the officers in the vehicle in relation to that youth. It was what subsequently happened that formed the basis for the allegations in the four complaints.

Our Commissioner for Standards investigated the complaints and, having watched a number of videos of the incident, sought further information from the four complainants; obtained information from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Police Ombudsman and the Official Report; and interviewed Mr Kelly under oath. He made certain findings and established a number of facts.

First, the commissioner was satisfied that, at the relevant time in this case, Mr Kelly was acting, in part at least, in his capacity as a Member of this House. Mr Kelly accepted that. That is important because it meant that Mr Kelly was required to act in accordance with the requirements of the Assembly's code of conduct. The commissioner then went on to establish that Mr Kelly made his way to the location, having been advised of the situation that was developing, and became aware that a youth had been arrested. Mr Kelly approached the first in a line of police Land Rovers and spoke with the passenger. As a result of that exchange, he believed that the vehicle would move forward a short distance and then pull in to facilitate further discussion.

Mr Kelly asked the small crowd that had assembled to clear the way so that the vehicle could move forward, and the crowd complied with his request. The first vehicle did move forward, but did not stop; the second and third Land Rovers in the line of vehicles followed the first vehicle. The fourth vehicle in the line moved forward slowly with its blue lights and headlights flashing. Mr Kelly walked directly in front of the moving vehicle and shouted at the driver to pull in. The vehicle continued to move forward very slowly. The siren was sounded once, and Mr Kelly took hold of the grille on the bonnet of the vehicle and was carried forward slowly for a short distance before the vehicle stopped.

The commissioner also pointed out that, whilst Mr Kelly was being carried on the bonnet of the vehicle, and for a short time after it happened, a number of the crowd struck the vehicle. Following this, Mr Kelly challenged the senior officer at the scene. Mr Kelly claimed, and the officer accepted, that he was trying to defuse the situation. Mr Kelly then asked the crowd to stand back from the vehicle to allow it to move away, and the crowd complied with this request.

The driver of the vehicle and Mr Kelly later accepted informed warnings for their part in the confrontation. Mr Kelly accepted his warning for impeding the police. It is important to note that impeding a constable in the execution of his duty is a criminal offence, contrary to section 66 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. Mr Kelly signed the certificate of informed warning immediately below text, which read:

"I admit the offence outlined and understand the meaning of an informed warning".

This is an important point. In accepting his informed warning, Mr Kelly admitted the offence of impeding the police. Although Mr Kelly has described his acceptance of this warning as a technical admission, made only after he had taken legal advice, the acceptance of it was a clear admission of guilt of criminal conduct. The public duty principle of the code of conduct provides that Members have a duty to uphold the law. It follows that, in committing the offence of impeding a constable in the execution of his duty, Mr Kelly failed to uphold the law as required by the Members' code of conduct.

The principle of leadership in the code of conduct states that Members should promote and support the other principles:

"by leadership and example in order to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of the people of Northern Ireland, and to ensure the integrity of the Assembly and its Members in conducting business."

The Committee acknowledges that Mr Kelly did seek to demonstrate positive leadership on the evening in question. His intention had been to defuse a tense situation, and he used his influence positively to direct the crowd and facilitate the passage of the police. However, despite this, Mr Kelly failed to demonstrate leadership when he obstructed the police vehicle. His actions set a poor example and resulted in a number of the crowd striking the police vehicle.

The Committee believes that the unlawful behaviour of a Member is a serious matter and that Mr Kelly should, therefore, apologise in the Assembly for his conduct. Notwithstanding any such apology the Committee believes that, in this particular case, it would be fully justifiable to impose a sanction upon Mr Kelly. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Assembly imposes upon Mr Kelly the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of five days.

In coming to the conclusion that this sanction would be appropriate, the Committee has taken into consideration the following factors identified by the commissioner. First, that Mr Kelly was an experienced leader; secondly, that he attended the scene with good intentions to try to defuse a tense situation; thirdly, that the poor example he gave by breaking the criminal law resulted in others striking a police vehicle; fourthly, that his criminal conduct was undertaken on the spur of the moment without due regard to the consequences; fifthly, that the illegal conduct received widespread media coverage at the time; sixthly, that before and after that conduct Mr Kelly used his influence to calm the situation; and, finally, that, as a result of his conduct, Mr Kelly received an informed warning.

Members of the Assembly are influential leaders to whom the public often look to provide an example. The Committee, therefore, recognises that Members can play a constructive and welcome role in lowering community tensions. The Committee accepts that Mr Kelly had intended to make a positive contribution on the evening of 21 June 2013 and that some of his actions assisted in defusing a tense situation. It is, however, most regrettable that Mr Kelly undermined his positive actions when he obstructed the police.

While Mr Kelly acted on the spur of the moment, his conduct was, nevertheless, unlawful. The Assembly's code of conduct requires that Members uphold the law through their actions, and any failure to do so should be dealt with seriously by the Assembly.

I will now make a few personal comments before opening up the wider debate.

I am surprised by the actions, particularly of the SDLP this morning, in signing a petition of concern, not least because of a number of factors. First, nobody on the Committee, including Sinn Féin members, argued that this was not a breach of the code of conduct. Therefore, it follows that there should be some degree of sanction. By its actions this morning, the SDLP has decided that no sanction should follow Mr Kelly's actions. The SDLP had the opportunity to put down an amendment to the motion on the Floor of the House. It could have argued that perhaps a lesser sanction is appropriate in this case, but the SDLP chose not to do so. The only conclusion that one can reach is that that party has decided that Mr Kelly's illegal actions should not be punished by the House. I find that disappointing and surprising.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. When his Committee debated that particular incident, what actions did the SDLP take when it came to the vote?

Mr Ross: From recollection, I do not think that the SDLP representative remained at the Committee for the discussion with the Commissioner for Standards. The SDLP member did not take the opportunity to ask the commissioner any questions on the report and did not vote in any way after that discussion.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will give way to Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: Picking up on what the Member is telling the House, is it then the case that the SDLP representative on the Committee absented himself, took no opportunity to oppose or question what was being discussed, took no opportunity to vote against or even to abstain and, in fact, acted as spinelessly on the Committee as that party is acting today in supporting this petition of concern?

Mr Ross: Mr Allister's observations are correct. The Member could have chosen to ask the commissioner questions if his party was concerned about the report and could have

stayed in the Committee to discuss with other Committee members the sort of sanction that would be appropriate to bring to the Floor of the House. The Member chose not to do either of those things.

I am also disappointed that one of the signatories to the petition of concern is a member of the Policing Board because I believe that the issue we are talking about today is one of the most serious breaches of the code of conduct that we have had, given that a Member of the House has broken the criminal law. I am surprised that a member of the Policing Board does not believe that that would merit a sanction from the House.

Mr McGlone: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will the Member clarify whether he is speaking as Chair of the Committee or in a personal capacity? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member made it clear that he was speaking as the Chairperson to start with, but indicated that he wanted to make a few personal comments, which he is now doing.

Mr Ross: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am glad that everybody else in the Assembly was listening to my comments.

I look forward to listening to the contributions from other Members, particularly those from the SDLP, who have taken the decision to support a petition of concern. I am disappointed. It is regrettable, particularly given that they left it until the last minute before making any utterance of their view on the issue.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom labhairt in aghaidh an rúin seo. I rise to speak against the motion. I just want to pick up a couple of points from the point of view of the Committee. At the very outset of the debate, I heard people shouting, "Shame" when the petition of concern was mentioned. It is not that long since a petition of concern was brought forward here in respect of another Member who had come to the Committee — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: The main issue for me is how we actually go ahead with the Committee on Standards and Privileges and how it conducts business in future. As in the case of the previous Member Mr Wells, it seems to me that

the Committee is getting to the point where it will be heavily politicised in terms of vote management and what it brings to the Chamber, as opposed to undertaking the role for which it and that of the commissioner were designed.

The Chair mentioned the actual debate that took place. On a number of occasions, I sought clarity from the commissioner about a few issues relating to the technical admission and technical breach. It is not as though we ran away from it in the Committee.

12.30 pm

I want to pick up on a few points in the report itself. I refer to one person who wrote to the commissioner to complain about the matter. On pages 57 and 59 of the report, the person states that Mr Kelly had been involved in other incidents of that type way back in the 1970s and 1980s. Mr Kelly could not have been involved in those incidents, because he was not out and about to be involved in them. Clearly, you are looking at the level —

Mr Allister: Maybe it is a memory lapse.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: There goes the heckler again. The heckler will no doubt have his say in due course.

The people who wrote to complain about the case refer to matters that clearly Mr Kelly could not have been involved in at that time.

I also want —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Yes.

Mr Clarke: The Member makes a point about someone's recollection of Mr Kelly's involvement in events. Is the Member then disputing what we saw broadcast on television, which was Mr Kelly standing in front of and obstructing the police in the line of duty?

Mr Boylan: I will say this in response to the Member: when Mr Kelly got up that morning, he did not decide, all blasé, to go out on to the street with the intention of affronting anybody. He was there in a leadership role, trying —

Mr Clarke: Obstruct the law.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: — to resolve issues and calm a situation down.

Mr Clarke: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: It is funny that the Member should say that, because I can quote a number of incidents that have come to the Committee. Some of those are not admissible, but maybe after we get through this process on the code of conduct —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am listening to all Members very carefully. Let us not stray into other incidents or other areas. It is vital that we deal, as far as is possible, with the motion before us. I am trying to help the Member.

Mr Boylan: I accept your point, Mr Speaker. The only point that I was trying to make is that we are going through a process at the minute, and, as part of today's debate, we have to learn to take the process forward. I was only trying to make the point that Members are quick to get up to ask questions about this matter, but there are a number of other similar issues.

Mr Clarke: It does not matter what —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: I just want to —

Mr Speaker: Order. Members who want to contribute to the debate can do so, but let us not have a debate across the Chamber. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you.

The reason that I brought up the issue of one of the complainants is that it was the same person who notified the commissioner of the section 66 ruling, which was raised in this matter.

I want to make another point. We are all saying that Mr Kelly did this and Mr Kelly did that. If you look at the report on what happened on the day, you will see that there were three informed warnings given — three. Those were given to Mr Kelly, a PSNI officer and a young man. Mr Kelly set about doing his duty to try to find out exactly why the young man was arrested. He was there with his local community trying to assist. Not one person throughout the whole

process, even in Committee, said anything. Unfortunately, I am up to speak first, but I would like to hear some other Members talk about the actual conduct of the PSNI officer, because —

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: Yes.

Mr Ross: It may be useful to remind —

Mr Speaker: Order. The motion has absolutely nothing to do with a police officer. Let us not stray into areas that are not in the Committee report. Let us be very careful here. I am trying to manage a very difficult debate. I will allow the Member to continue.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. I was also hoping to help the House by reminding it that only one of the three individuals who received an informed warning is a Member of the House, so the House has the remit to propose a sanction against only one of those individuals.

Mr Boylan: Mr Speaker, I am trying to put into context what happened on the day and to bring it back to my colleague who was acting in a leadership role. That is what this is about, and it is actually in the report, but I take your guidance.

Like I say, some Committee members never said anything when this came up. With that mind, I do not intend to support the motion.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: No. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr A Maginness: I oppose the motion.

A Member: Shame.

Mr A Maginness: Just hear me out before you —

Mr Speaker: Order. I have already warned the Member. The Member has the Floor. Allow him to make his contribution.

Mr A Maginness: I invite Members to listen to what I say before arriving at a premature judgement in relation to what I am going to say. I recall the events of 21 June 2013. I was there. I was there when this particular incident took place. It was in the aftermath of a very heightened situation arising out of the Tour of

the North in north Belfast in the Carrick Hill area. It was a very tense situation and people were getting very aggrieved about what was happening in the Carrick Hill area.

There was an attempt by me, by Carál Ní Chuilín, by members of the concerned residents committee of Carrick Hill, who are a very good, outstanding body of people, and by Gerry Kelly to try to defuse what was becoming an extremely difficult situation. That situation was inflamed — I have to say "inflamed" — by the premature arrest of a young man. That young man was taken away in a police vehicle, and the problem arose out of his arrest at that point in time. Yes, he may well have — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maginness: Yes, he may well have needed to be arrested but not at that particular point in time when there were many people about and there was an extremely difficult situation.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I will not give way. Just hear me out and listen to me, please. I believe that Gerry Kelly's intervention was well intentioned and was an attempt to defuse the situation, which the Committee has accepted. So, we get to the nub of the situation, which is that Gerry Kelly accepted an informed warning. That technically means — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maginness: That technically means that he breached the code, but what are the consequences that flow from that? We have to be mindful in this House that any sanction imposed on a Member of this House should be proportionate. Given the circumstances in which Mr Kelly made his intervention in order to try to defuse the situation, does that not mean that that technical breach of the law that took place should, in fact, be looked at in a different light and that the penalty being imposed —

Mr Craig: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Just give me a moment. The penalty being imposed by the Standards and Privileges Committee of this House is, in my view, disproportionate to whatever breach took place. I further add this: Ms Lo proposed at the Committee that an opportunity be given to Mr

Kelly to apologise. The Committee rejected that opportunity. So, Mr Kelly did not have an opportunity to apologise to the House or to the Committee for what happened. I believe that that was a poor decision by the Committee —

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: — and what the Committee wanted to do in circumstances was to impose an excessive and disproportionate penalty on Mr Kelly.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. It is a very simple point. If that is the view of the SDLP, why did the SDLP not bring an amendment to the motion this morning as opposed to blocking it altogether?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute on to his time.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you very much. The point that has to be made is — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maginness: The point has to be made in terms of this particular motion and report coming to the Committee. It is not possible to do that. You have to accept the package. You cannot amend the report. This is a Committee report. It comes to the House. The House has to make a decision.

The House is, in a way, a court of appeal, and, therefore, all Members have to listen to the report as delivered by your good self.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I am sorry; I really have to finish off the points that I am making.

Mr Ross: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Ross: Mr Speaker, will you clarify for the House whether it was possible for a Member to table an amendment today that would have changed the sanction? Mr Maginness is claiming that that was not possible.

Mr Speaker: Order. I will clarify the situation: any party could have brought an amendment to the motion — not to the report but to the motion. *[Interruption.]* Order. I hope that that

clarifies the situation. *[Interruption.]* Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr A Maginness: I accept the advice from the Speaker on that. The report coming to the House clearly states that there was a breach, and it highlights and underlines that the penalty for that should be five days' suspension. My party and I believe that that is excessive.

You criticise the SDLP for signing a petition of concern. A petition of concern was signed by you, the DUP, in relation to Jim Wells. *[Interruption.]* You did.

Mr Speaker: Order. Address your remarks through the Chair. Order.

Mr A Maginness: So you cannot criticise the SDLP for signing a petition of concern on this. I say to you — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Will the Member bring his remarks to a close? *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr A Maginness: My final point is this: any —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr A Maginness: Any sanction should be proportionate. The sanction recommended by the Committee is not proportionate.

Mrs Overend: From the outset, I would like to express my exasperation with the SDLP, and Pat Ramsey, Colum Eastwood and Dolores Kelly in particular, for the disregard for law and order that they have shown today. I am not sure whether they somehow believe that Gerry Kelly is innocent or have publicly buckled under political pressure from Sinn Féin. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs Overend: Sadly, it leaves me once again questioning whether the values of the SDLP are the same now as when the party first entered the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: Order. This debate is not about the values of any political party. It is clearly about the report. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us not get into the values of parties in the House.

Mrs Overend: It brings me no pleasure that a Member of the Assembly has breached the code of conduct and broken the law in the way described by the Chairman of the Standards and Privileges Committee. It brings me no pleasure that video footage of an Assembly

Member, showing him taking hold off the grille of the bonnet of a PSNI Land Rover and being carried on that bonnet for some time in an attempt to stop the police officers while a number of people in the crowd violently struck the sides of the vehicle, was transmitted via the airwaves to news channels worldwide. It brings me no pleasure, just embarrassment, that such actions could be taken by a Member of the Assembly.

What Mr Kelly was thinking when engaging in such thuggish behaviour is beyond me. He should be ashamed of himself. It is 2014, and there are ways and means of engaging with police officers. Gerry Kelly, in obstructing a PSNI Land Rover, impeded the police and broke the law, specifically, section 66 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. His actions had the potential to escalate the situation and further provoke the crowd, which was clearly demonstrated when the police Land Rover, which he impeded, was then attacked by those present.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Overend: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: You say that his actions would have provoked the crowd or escalated the situation. In fact, the crowd was not provoked; the crowd calmed down. In other words, the opposite happened.

Mrs Overend: The report, as I read it, said that his actions meant that others hit the side of the Land Rover.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for giving way. I know that there must be embarrassment about the issue amongst those in the SDLP. Will the Member not agree with me that, first, whether or not the crowd was provoked, the act was illegal, and, secondly, the aftermath showed that the crowd attacked the Land Rover as a result of the actions of Gerry Kelly?

12.45 pm

Mr I McCrea: It is true. That is what the reports says.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has an added minute.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Member for his intervention. No matter what was happening that night, I do not think that there is any excuse for being on the bonnet of a PSNI Land Rover.

There are ways and means of dealing with the PSNI. You certainly would not catch me on the bonnet of a Land Rover.

The subsequent decision to take legal action against the Chief Constable was, similarly, seriously misguided. It again demonstrated contempt for the rule of law, but that is hardly surprising. It was rightfully withdrawn. Gerry Kelly and Sinn Féin are not above the rule of law. They cannot pick and choose when to obey it.

For once, the Commissioner for Standards was unequivocal in a ruling. He found that Mr Kelly had breached the code of conduct. When the Standards and Privileges Committee met to discuss his report, I proposed that Mr Kelly should apologise to the Assembly and that a motion be put forward to exclude him from proceedings for five days. I am pleased that the Committee agreed that proposal.

When each of us was elected to the House, we signed up to a code of conduct, which states:

"Members have a duty to uphold the law and to act on all occasions in accordance with the public trust placed in them."

Mr Kelly has clearly failed in that regard. Members also have a duty to show leadership; again, Mr Kelly has clearly been found to be in breach of that duty.

I also question, as others have, what respect Gerry Kelly showed for the police and the rule of law in his actions, and how those actions could be seen to be promoting good relations.

In his accepting an informed warning, in January of this year, I welcome the fact that Mr Kelly admitted his guilt. However he chooses to term it, it does not change the fact that he broke the law, and, by breaking the law, he failed in his duty as a Member to uphold the law.

Today's motion is not about point scoring but about holding Members to the standards that they should adhere to when they are elected to the House. It is about protecting the integrity of our devolved institutions. It is a shame that this is far from the only incident that Gerry Kelly should apologise to the House for; it is a shame that this is far from the most serious incident that Gerry Kelly should apologise for. Unfortunately, however, the Commissioner for Standards has been found wanting on many other instances, in my opinion.

If Gerry Kelly and his party are serious about reconciliation, I urge them to apologise for their

part in the 30-year terror campaign that cost this country countless lives. Only last week, Gerry Kelly's refusal to appear before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee showed disdain for those victims who questioned —

Mr Speaker: Order. I have warned Members many times. We are straying into an area that has nothing to do with the report. I beg the Member to come back to the report and the specifics within it.

Mrs Overend: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I reiterate my disappointment that a petition of concern has been used by Sinn Féin and supported by the SDLP Members. The Sinn Féin Member across the way complained of the DUP's misuse of the petition of concern, but two wrongs do not make a right. What a terrible place Northern Ireland would be if all MLAs were to set their standard —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mrs Overend: — by the actions of Gerry Kelly MLA. I support the motion.

Ms Lo: As Mr Maginness alluded to, during the debate in the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I proposed that the Committee should establish if the Member would apologise to the Assembly for breaching the code of conduct and, if so, that the Committee should report that it considered the matter to be resolved. If not —

Mrs Overend: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: Yes.

Mrs Overend: Does the Member accept that the report asks for Gerry Kelly to make an apology to the House, that today's motion is on his being withdrawn from the proceedings of this place and that he should still make an apology?

Ms Lo: I thank the Member for her intervention, but I ask her to listen to the rest of my speech. I said that he should come, first, to the Assembly to apologise, but if he would not, that the Committee should consider the issue of seeking to impose a sanction. There was certainly a precedent in using that approach in relation to the complaint against Mr Wells, last year, regarding his negative comments towards a DCAL special adviser.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I may not get an opportunity to speak later.

Does she agree that the conduct in the House today contradicts the conduct in Committee, where the discussion of these matters was often very civil, and that the DUP and Sinn Féin, in bringing petitions of concern when their members are sanctioned, disrespect the Committee, including their members on it?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Ms Lo: Thank you. I absolutely agree with that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Lo: However, my proposal was not agreed to. The proposed exclusion we are discussing today was backed by unionist MLAs on the Committee, but it was opposed by Sinn Féin. I abstained from the vote.

The Alliance Party firmly believes that elected representatives should lead by example in terms of their actions and behaviours. That is essential to encourage high standards of behaviour in others and to help to build public trust and confidence in the integrity of the public office or institution. The fact that Mr Kelly accepted the reprimand is an acknowledgement that he broke the law. The Alliance Party supports sanctions, but I agree with Mr Maginness that the proposed sanction is excessive.

Whilst we are discussing the issue — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: No. I am sorry.

Whilst we are discussing the issue of the conduct of MLAs, I feel it is necessary to put on record my grave disappointment at the level of DUP hypocrisy today. When Ruth Patterson, a councillor —

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, we are straying away from the report. Let us deal with what is in the report; nothing more and nothing less.

Ms Lo: Mr Speaker, it is about consistency in relation to today's debate. When Ruth Patterson, a DUP councillor, was charged — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, the Member will know that this will be a very difficult debate. Help me to manage this debate. I say that to all Members. The Member is straying into a different issue and a different incident. We really must come back to the report. I am really trying to help the Member.

Ms Lo: Mr Speaker, I believe that this is relevant to us debating this issue. At that time, her party was very quick to support her. Similarly, it is beyond my comprehension — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Lo: — that Mr Wells and Mr Givan, also from the DUP —

Mr Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I almost know what the point of order might be.

Mr Wilson: It is a genuine point of order. This is the third time that the Member has ignored your ruling as to whether what she is saying is relevant to the debate. Are you going to put her out for five days, or are you going to impose some other sanction on her so that she comes back into line?

Mr Speaker: Order. This goes for all Members: the Chair will decide what is appropriate and what is not in any debate. Let us please move on. That goes for all Members from all sides of the House.

Ms Lo: Mr Speaker, thank you for your guidance.

It is beyond my comprehension that Mr Wells and Mr Givan, also from the DUP, were allowed to interrogate a sex-worker representative during a Justice Committee — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I really must warn the Member now — *[Interruption.]* Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. This goes for all sides of the House. A number of Members from all sides of the House will make their contribution later, so this ruling goes for all sides. We have some Members who think that rules are for them and them alone. They are for all Members. This is a final warning to the Member: she needs to get back to the report.

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Member named me and Jim Wells about an incident to do with the Justice Committee.

The Member is fully aware that the Commissioner for Standards investigated and indeed exonerated Mr Wells and me, but she abused her position to pursue us on that Committee. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Even points of order and interventions should be on the motion before the House. I ask the Member to continue.

Ms Lo: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I certainly respect your authority on the matter.

Now is a sensitive time, as we try to heal from our past and come to terms with a changing and more diverse society. Tensions are undeniably heightened. Now is the time for strong leadership, not for pettiness. Now is the time for uncompromising respect, not just for the rule of law, but for each other.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I respect the efforts that you are making to try to get order in the House for this debate. I obviously oppose the motion.

When you look at and listen to the demeanour and attitudes of the Members opposite, you see that this is a farce, this is a charade, a pantomime. The laughs, the faces, the guffaws and the interventions show that, not only do the Members know that it is a farce, but they are demonstrating that it is. I am tempted to say that, rather than Mr Kelly offering any notion of apology, he is a bit confused, as he is more used to the back of a Land Rover than the front of one and much more experienced in that regard.

On the seriousness of this business, the way in which the matter has been taken to the House by the Committee is nothing short of a disgrace. If you look at the facts found during the inquiry, Mr Kelly has been, in my view, almost entirely exonerated. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: In his earlier contribution, Mr Maginness made very clear the scenario on the day in question and the environment in which he, Carál Ní Chuilín, Gerry Kelly and many others including the residents' association and the local clergy were in. Those people were working very hard and in a very determined way to maintain order in that area against a very negative backdrop.

We know that, unfortunately and tragically, so to speak, that particular area of Belfast has now become one of the more dangerous flashpoints and has seen a lot of public disorder. A lot of people have ended up in court, a lot of people have ended up being charged, convicted and fined and have had other, serious custodial sentences implemented. If I recall correctly, none of the Members opposite, many of whom have been involved in those activities, have ever seen the inside of a court, and I have to say that there remains a big question mark over the consistency.

It is all very well for Members opposite doing what they are doing here, which is trying to rabble-rouse or to showboat — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: I think that I touched a raw nerve there, Mr Speaker. No, I will not give way, because the Member will have ample opportunity to speak.

The fact of the matter is that the environment that Mr Alban Maginness referred to earlier on was created, for the most part, by Members opposite. Some of the Members opposite who were involved in rabble-rousing, who are trying to do the same thing here today, who brought people out on to the streets, who brought people out into protest scenarios and activities and parades —

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I say to the Member that, as far as possible, he should come back to the report. Let us not discuss any other issue that may have happened now or may do in the future. Let us get back and deal with the recommendations in the report that are before us this afternoon.

Mr Maskey: Thank you for your direction, a Cheann Comhairle. I respect that entirely.

I just wanted to make the point that the environment in which Mr Kelly found himself on that particular occasion was a very negative and polluted one because of the political environment on the ground at the time and that has already been testified to.

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: No, I am sorry. I have already refused to give way, so I want to be impartial in that.

For me, when you read the report, the facts found and established were that, very shortly after the vehicle stopped, Mr Kelly engaged in a robust way with a senior police officer present.

During that exchange, Mr Kelly asserted that his actions had been an attempt to calm things down, and the officer accepted that as being correct.

1.00 pm

So, at no time did Mr Kelly decide to go out that day — I think Cathal Boylan made this point — and create trouble. In fact, his only and exclusive intention on that day, as it was before and has been since that day, was to maintain calm to the best of his ability. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Maskey: Most objective observers, including the police officers involved, have recognised that the activities of Mr Kelly brought calm to the situation, rather than inflaming the situation and making it worse than it had been. I make the point that Mr Kelly has consistently continued to maintain calm in that area against a very difficult background, with Members on the opposite side of the House — I make the point again — continuing to cause problems in that area, which people, including Mr Maginness, Carál Ní Chuilín, Gerry Kelly and many others, have to try to pick up the pieces from.

As far as I am concerned, the Committee has taken a partisan and unfair decision. It is not acceptable to us as a party, which is why we wanted to trigger the petition of concern and we are pleased to have got support for that. Mr Kelly was at all times trying to maintain calm. The Committee has abused its position in trying to impose an arbitrary five-day sanction on the Member.

Mr I McCrea: I think it is about time we got back to what we are here to debate. There are some facts that some Members are overlooking. The fact is that we are here today to debate a Committee on Standards and Privileges decision following a report and investigation by the commissioner in respect of the actions of Mr Kelly. That is something that no one in the House can try to change, as it is a fact. It is also a fact that Gerry Kelly, following the event where he took a spin on the front of a Land Rover, accepted an informed warning on 21 June. That is another fact. It is also a fact that, in speaking to the commissioner, he accepted that the informed warning was an

admission of breaking the law. That is another fact.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr I McCrea: I will.

Lord Morrow: Does the Member agree with me that a powerful message is being sent out here today by both Sinn Féin and the SDLP that criminality is OK on occasions?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr I McCrea: Thank you, and I thank my colleague for raising that point. I think that does unfortunately set a precedent for Members who break the law while serving in their duty as an MLA. That is a debate we are having in another part, but we will not stray into that. In essence, that is one of the issues that we have difficulties with. I have to say that I am disappointed in the members of the SDLP who have signed the petition of concern because that is exactly what they are accepting. They are saying, "It is OK to break the law; we'll cover you. If it's Sinn Féin, we'll cover you. We'll sign the petition of concern and give you the cover so that no sanctions will be held on you."

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I take on board what he has just said, but can we really be surprised? The SDLP has aligned itself with Sinn Féin in refusing to have the National Crime Agency fully extended to Northern Ireland to deal with crime and criminality.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, let us not go down a road that we are not debating this afternoon. Let us get back to the motion.

Mr I McCrea: I would certainly agree, but I will try to stay in the sense of the debate. It certainly will not be lost on anyone who is watching or listening to this debate, or, indeed, reading it in the press tomorrow, that the SDLP is supporting those who break the law. I think that is a shameful position.

Cathal Boylan tried to use the excuse that what we did previously in respect of petitions of concern on other Members is the reason why they did it in this case.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr I McCrea: I have given way, and I want to just make a couple of other points. I will come back to you.

Mr Boylan is correct. He did raise the issue that that this was a technical breach with the commissioner. However, the commissioner, given the discussions he had with Mr Kelly, accepted that there was an admission that an informed warning was a breach of the law. I cannot see how we can look at it in any other way in today's debate. The facts are that Mr Kelly broke the law and we are here today based on a decision of the Committee to sanction a Member. If the Assembly cannot see its way to sanctioning a Member who has admitted breaking the law, I am not sure of the point in having the Committee in the first place. I will give way to Mr Clarke.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way; I think he went on to qualify his point. The admission of guilt is key. Whilst Sinn Féin Members tried to draw parallels with others who have been before the Committee, the fact is that, in this case, an illegal act was admitted by the Member whose party is trying to block the sanction.

Mr I McCrea: That is the entirety of what we are here to debate today. I have said it in Committee before and I will say it again: if something is right, I will vote yes, and I will vote no if it is not. As the Chair said, not one Committee member denied that there was a breach of the code of conduct. So, we have to accept —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr I McCrea: With respect, I heard enough from you earlier. I do not think that you made anything other than a pathetic attempt to try to encourage this side of the House to understand your point.

It is an absolute disgrace that the House will not sanction a Member for breaking the law. I think that we are sending out a very serious negative message to Northern Ireland. People have made their decisions already on the good and bad of the House, but I think that they will be disgusted today.

Mr Craig: I am one of those who put in an official complaint in the first place. Unfortunately, my party colleague has got it right: this is a day that will go down in infamy because this is a day when it has been made clear to the Assembly that any Member can

breach the law without consequence. That is very telling.

Have a look at the history of all this: Gerry Kelly MLA, Policing Board member and former Minister of the Crown, broke the law while acting, as it was proved, as a Member of the House. That behaviour is the zenith of hypocrisy. As an MLA, you sit here and allegedly write the law in the first place. You also sit as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and allegedly scrutinise those who implement the laws that are passed in the House. You are Sinn Féin's representative for policing and justice, telling others to obey the law, yet, by your actions, you have breached that law. If you ever had any credibility as a representative of the House, it is now down the drain. Your disregard for the law in this situation encouraged others and will encourage others, unfortunately, to impede the police and break the law. That, in itself, is deeply regrettable.

There were other —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: I will.

Mr Clarke: Given that you and the Member we are discussing today are members of the Policing Board, is it not also regrettable that, if someone follows the line of actions that Mr Kelly has followed, they may see the rigours of the law falling hard on them, yet Mr Kelly seems to have gotten off with the light-glove touch with the sanction and the informed warning?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Craig: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I accept that intervention. What is happening in the House today contrasts very poorly with a young loyalist who stood on top of a Land Rover and ended up getting a three-month sentence from the court. What is going on here today with the pan-nationalist front is an absolute disgrace, and it is sending out the wrong message.

I ask a very serious question, because Mr Kelly was not the only public representative at the scene on the day. Mr Alban Maginness tried to explain away the actions of Mr Kelly to the House. I will ask him this very simple question: Alban, why did you not jump on the bonnet of that same Land Rover and try to impede its progress? Is the simple truth that you knew from day one that that was illegal?

Mr Speaker: Let us have remarks through the Chair.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: The Member will give way.

Mr A Maginness: Let me explain the circumstances. Mr Kelly was at the side of the vehicle. He then approached the front of the vehicle when it was starting to move off. In those circumstances, as the vehicle was building up speed, he had to hold on to the grille; otherwise, he would have been crushed and seriously injured. There is absolutely no doubt about that in my mind. That is an entirely different circumstance from mine, in which I was standing at the side of the vehicle and attempting, with others, to communicate with the police officers inside. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Craig: Again, I have heard nothing that tells me why Mr Maginness did not impede the movement of the vehicle. I think that that is because it is very simple. With your legal background, you knew that it was illegal to do so.

The other question that arises is this: was the individual who was arrested actually in that vehicle? We all know from the facts that have since come out that the answer to that is no, so why was that vehicle being impeded in the first place?

The commissioner decided, and the Committee agreed, that there was significant evidence to say that Mr Kelly broke the leadership principle of the House. When Members try to make the argument that there is no real evidence, that the report does not really tell you what happened and that there was not really a breach of the code, it reminds me of Sinn Féin's attempts to rewrite the history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Now it is trying to rewrite this report, and I am not going into any other outside issue. It is trying to rewrite the report. It cannot be done. It is there in black and white. It is very clear. The commissioner was very clear that this was a clear breach of the code of conduct for Members. When others are using their petition of concern to bring down the report and stop the sanctions in it, they are sending out a message to the public that it is OK for a Member to break the law and breach the codes of the House, because no sanctions will be applied. What a message. Is it any wonder that we have issues and problems on our streets in this country?

Mr McCartney: Ba mhaith liom labhairt in éadan an rúin seo. I will be speaking against the motion.

Two things strike me about most of the contributions made to date, particularly those from the unionist Benches. It is striking how many Members who have contributed have not, in my opinion, read the report but are coming at the issue from a purely political and partisan view. Their mind is made up, and they are coming in to turn what Alex Maskey has already described as a farce into a farce in reality.

The second thing that strikes me is that none of them is taking any account of people who were there on the day. Alban Maginness, when he spoke, gave an account. If people read the report, they will see that the report states very clearly that Gerry Kelly did exercise leadership at Carrick Hill on the day in question. It states:

"I do not doubt that Mr Kelly's intention when attending at Carrick Hill was to diffuse [sic] a tense situation and to calm things down."

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes, I will.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member acknowledge that Douglas Bain, in his report, goes on to state:

"Overall his actions reflect that intention but his obstruction of the police had the opposite effect albeit only for a short period."?

His actions had the opposite effect, and the situation could have deteriorated significantly and endangered the lives of police officers.

1.15 pm

Mr McCartney: And then, let the Member say, "But it didn't". It did not deteriorate. As a matter of fact, Alban Maginness — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have debate through the Chair. Order.

Mr McCartney: Through the Chair, as Alban Maginness, who was on the ground, pointed out, it did not deteriorate, and it did not deteriorate, in my opinion, because of the type of leadership that Gerry Kelly has shown. I listened to —

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: No, I gave way once, and my time is short enough. I listened on a number of occasions to television interviews, and I heard members at Committees that I attended saying that the police have phoned them to come to the site of illegal roadblocks, and they said that they have stood on the road to try to defuse the situation. In anybody's book, that is breaking the law, but for a lot of people, perhaps at the right time, it is the right thing to do. I think that the people who have come in here today have totally and absolutely ignored that.

A number of months ago, in relation to the debate around Jim Wells, I said that we were turning the Committee into a farce. There was a petition of concern, Jim Wells was deemed guilty of being intimidating and using abusive language, and the DUP put in a petition of concern. I will ask the Ulster Unionists what way they voted on that day. In many ways, we have the outworking of that today, which is that we are not coming to these Committees with the proper intention. People are coming with a made-up position, and they are trying to maximise political gain, because nobody who spoke today, including the Chair, through you, a Cheann Comhairle, has explained why they wanted it to be five days. No explanation has been given to the rest of us as to how the Committee decided that it would be five days. I will give way to the Chair, if the Chair wants to give us an explanation as to why your Committee decided that it would be five days.

Mr Ross: It is very simple. The Committee came to the decision that five days would be a proportionate response to the breach of the code of conduct in the same way that it comes to determinations on every issue that comes before it, which is that it gives a proportionate response, including, I should add, when members of his own party are judged to have been involved in bad behaviour and complaints have been received and the Committee decides that it was not a breach of the code of conduct. That is how we do all business in the Committee.

Mr McCartney: I do not see why, in the case of Jim Wells, you voted against a particular sanction, but in this case —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: — you decided that you were going to give five days. I think that you have to try to provide an explanation. In my opinion, the explanation is very, very simple: it is political partisanship. The DUP saw an

opportunity to get at Gerry Kelly because of the leadership that he was showing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: I have heard people come to the House and defend people for doing a jig outside a Catholic church, and the DUP Benches were not only silent, but, that day, they were rabble-rousing and cheerleaders.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, let us not stray outside the motion before us this afternoon. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us get back to the motion.

Mr McCartney: Therefore, our use of the petition of concern is to ensure that we will not allow people to be partisan in their approach. When the report set the context very clearly, and when you listen to people like Alban Maginness, who was there on the ground, you get some sense of the environment in which this took place, and it is for that reason that we put in the petition of concern.

A Cheann Comhairle, today is my first opportunity to offer my apologies — not for any actions of Gerry Kelly — for not being in my place when the Minister for Employment and Learning was answering questions.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do not envy you today. This is one of those debates where the Back-Benchers seem to be lined out to try to continue whatever debates were going on outside the House over the last number of months. We have to recognise the context of all this. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Eastwood: We have to recognise the context of this, Mr Speaker, if they would maybe give me a chance to speak. We are facing into another very long and hot summer. In the constituency — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Eastwood: The constituency where this event took place will be at the forefront of all that, and it is incumbent on all of us — every single one of us — to try to ensure that tensions are calmed and that the heat is taken out of this summer.

Just for the record, because I know that there will be a number of hecklers, I am the SDLP member on the Committee for Standards and

Privileges. I left the meeting, but not because I was "spineless", as Mr Allister said. If I were spineless, I would not be standing here talking right now. People know that I have no problem taking difficult positions. I had to leave the meeting. There was a very good reason for that, and it was unavoidable.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: No, I will not.

I also have no problem giving way in most debates, but I think that we have a duty to try to keep this as calm as possible. I know — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Eastwood: I know that it is your day out or whatever, you are allowed off the leash, and it is "Let the DUP Back-Benchers get their heckles up" day. That is fine, but our bigger responsibility is to what is going on outside the House. We have to do our best to ensure that we can calm tensions, particularly in the constituency that we are speaking about, because lives are at stake, and we have had far too much of this stuff in the last couple of years. The world looks at the North of Ireland in a very different way than it did a couple of years ago, when it thought that we had moved on. We have, at times, really been a bit of an embarrassment. We, as leaders in here, need to do everything that we can to calm those types of situations.

Mr Maginness is a political opponent of Mr Kelly. They look for the same votes in that constituency. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Eastwood: They will fight each other in an election in two years' time. I do not see what benefit Mr Maginness would get from coming here to support Mr Kelly if he did not think that it was the right thing to do. I know Mr Maginness very well. He is a very honourable person. He has come and given us — none of us was there — his account of the situation. I have been in situations like that before, and it is not easy. People are there trying their best to calm the situation. Mr Kelly, and it has been recognised, came to that situation to try to prevent a riot. Sometimes, that is a difficult role, but people need to understand that people do that work every single day — people on the opposite side of the House, on this side of the House and even people whom I am a political opponent of. Sometimes, you have to be big enough to

recognise when people are doing that kind of work.

Our difficulty with the motion is the proportionality element. When Mr Wells was found to be in breach of the code — it is important to put it on the record because I spoke in that debate as well — he was offered the opportunity to apologise. He did not take up that opportunity. Why was the same opportunity not afforded to Mr Kelly? That is our difficulty. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Eastwood: That is our difficulty. *[Interruption.]* I know that you all want to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have warned the Member on at least four occasions. You might smile about it — *[Interruption.]* Order. You might smile about it, but a good politician, a professional politician, sometimes has to listen to a contribution that is different from theirs. That is the style of a good, professional politician. Order. I know that the Member may not have much respect for the Chair. That is up to him and his conscience, but I warn him to allow the Member to continue.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. There are certain people in the House who never want to listen to an opposing opinion, and I do not think that that does this place any service at all. It would be far better if we could have this debate in the way that most debates are had in the Standards and Privileges Committee, which is normally a very good Committee in terms of people working together.

Let me just end by saying this: we have a responsibility, and I have said it already, to know what is going on outside the Chamber and on streets not that far from here. We have a responsibility to try to calm tensions, to ease tensions and to ensure that we can have as peaceful a summer as possible. If we do not take those responsibilities seriously, God help us all. We need to start taking them seriously, and maybe people will put their name on the list and get up and speak rather than speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am pleased to be here. I feel like thanking the DUP for the numbers in which they have turned out to hear the debate. They do not normally come out in such numbers.

Although this is about a single incident, I think that it is worth putting a bit of context on this, so I hope that the Speaker will give me a small amount of latitude. On the day, there were a number of parades going up past St Patrick's chapel on Carrick Hill. They had passed up and down a number of times. There were multiple breaches. The PSNI did not act. That is not a criticism of the PSNI. We have discussed this many times with them and their argument, which to a great extent I accept, is that the situation could get worse if they moved straight in on a parade where there are multiple breaches, and then we are in a very difficult situation, but with the caveat that action is taken later.

When the parades had passed, I had an appointment in Ardoyne at a sporting event. I discussed with a few people there that it looked as if the parades had passed reasonably peacefully, and I went on up to the event. Then, of course, I got a call saying that things had gone "belly up", I think was the term, and I came back down. When I arrived, things had started to calm down again. There had obviously been an incident on the far side of Carrick Hill, in North Street around the supporters who were going in that direction. There was a huge line of police and Land Rovers at that end of Carrick Hill and, indeed, at the other end of the street at upper Library Street. I would say that there were between 30 and 40 Land Rovers, but things had started to calm down, and we had our discussions.

I would like to thank my colleague Alban Maginness, who was there. It is important to say this: Alban Maginness was there on the ground — nobody else from here. In fact, the four complaints that were put in were done off the TV. I found it a bit extraordinary, or at least interesting, that none of the MLAs from North Belfast put in a complaint. I can tell you that none of the residents put in a complaint. The two others, outside of the political reps, who put in complaints live nowhere near north Belfast.

However, I was told that there had been an arrest. I found it extraordinary, since things were calming back down, that that was the thing to do. I know now that the police officer in charge — who was not on the ground, by the way — gave an order for five jeeps to come in and arrest this young man, completely contradicting the attitude towards the multiple breaches that were occurring and the violence at the other end on North Street.

I do not know — I did not know at the time, at least — anything about the arrest. I had no opinion on the arrest. I went over simply

because a mother came to me in a distressed state and wanted to know what was happening to her child, as she saw it — a teenager.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: No, I will not.

Mr Clarke: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr G Kelly: I went over and spoke to the passenger of the Land Rover in which, I believed, the young man was. In fairness to the passenger, a police officer, he spoke to me very politely. He said, "I did not realise the mother was there. Look, I will just pull over there." A small crowd had gathered around the jeep. I accepted his word. It turned out that he was telling lies, but he was very plausible at the time. I accepted his word and said to the ones around the Land Rover, "Look, move away. We are going to get this sorted out."

All I was interested in was giving this mother some notion of where her son was being taken and the charges. The jeep drove off after that. Was I annoyed? Yes, I was annoyed. I am an elected representative. I was there trying to calm the situation. I had been given an assurance by a police officer, and he had broken that assurance and then a number of Land Rovers after that.

I hear all the notions from over there, and I will not go through them all, but I noticed that Sandra Overend, who, I believe, was on her way out of the country at an airport and was ordered back to make sure that she put the case for sanction at this Committee, said that I had taken hold of the grille. Jonathan Craig talked about jumping on the jeep, and a number of other people used that phrase. That is not what happened. I tried to stop another Land Rover to get attention, and believe me it was the only way to get attention at the time. The jeep moved forward, and I grabbed onto the grille, because if I had not, I would have been under the jeep.

It is as straightforward and simple as that. You saw the videos, so look at them again. If I had not done that, I would have been under the jeep. I grabbed onto the Land Rover and it drove off. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr G Kelly: That is the incident. Those are the facts of the matter.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: No, I will not, especially not to you.

Mr Allister: A compliment.

Mr G Kelly: I always like to give you compliments, Jim.

So, a judgement was made on that day that I think was wrong.

1.30 pm

When I arrived, and it is worth saying this again, Alban Maginness, people from a number of the residents' groups and Carál Ní Chuilín had calmed the situation right down. The action that triggered all of this was the police action. *[Interruption.]* Aye. The police on the ground — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, you have given the Member some latitude, but we are now discussing the attitudes and the actions of the police. This sounds like the new book by Gerry Kelly and that this is the first chapter of his biography. Maybe we could get down to what we are supposed to be speaking about: the report by the Committee.

Mr Speaker: Order, order. The sanction is against the Member who is now speaking. The Member has every right to set the background to the event. *[Interruption.]* Order. That is exactly what he is doing. I assure the Member that, should Mr Kelly stray from what we are debating this afternoon, I will pull him up on it like I have pulled other Members up. Let us be careful. Allow the Member to make his contribution and set the scene. Order.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

The reason that is relevant is that three informed warnings were given out: I accepted one and the police officer who was driving the jeep accepted one, as did the young boy who was arrested. That showed that the police were trying to deal with this in a proportionate way, unlike the DUP and the Ulster Unionist members of the Standards and Privileges Committee.

Did I break the law technically? Yes, I did. That is why I accepted the informed warning. Let me say this to all Members, especially those who are sitting across the way, to deal with these difficult situations you need the flexibility

to make decisions on the spot that you, as an elected rep, think will help situation. That is exactly what I was doing —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: No, I will not give way.

That is exactly what I was doing on the day. I have listened to your heckling all day: I wish you would shut up for a minute. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. I remind Members to be careful of the language that they use in the Chamber. Be very careful.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: No. Well — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr G Kelly: As I — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Clarke: — *[Inaudible.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to make a contribution. I warn the other Member that I will sanction him should he continue on the road he is going down, because he does not have respect for either the Office of the Speaker or myself in the Chair. That is quite obvious, and it is something that he is going to have to live with and deal with.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat.

In the report, the commissioner talks about the intent on the day. I offer this to anyone who has been in the same situation: they might have made a different decision from the one that I made on that day, but they would have made it because they were there, I hope, trying to calm the situation, as I was.

The situation could have been sorted out in a two-minute conversation if the Land Rover containing the police officer who said he would stop had stopped. The anger was building around the mother of the young fella who was there. Unfortunately, that is not what happened. It is accepted that before and after the incident I was trying to calm the situation, which is what all MLAs should be at.

This is political parties taking their stances. We will make decisions in all sorts of situations. Sometimes they will be right, and sometimes they will be wrong. I will maintain the flexibility in any given situation to make what I think is the

proper decision for the people who elect me. Someone said earlier — I think it was Jonathan Craig — that I have lost credibility. We will leave that up to the electorate and see what they say.

Members across the way were involved during the flag protests and the protests around the primary school. If this is the yardstick, they have broken the law so many times that I would not be able to count them.

The difference is that action was decided in this instance, and no action was decided in the other instances. If they are honest with themselves, they will know that that is the case. There is a whiff of political hypocrisy coming from the unionist Benches.

Let me say this, to be very clear: I accepted the informed warning. I know that I technically broke the law. I took legal advice on it and took that step.

Mr Allister: Will you apologise?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr G Kelly: I maintain that any other MLA — I know it to be true, whether they accept it or not — would, given not necessarily the same but similar circumstances, make their own decision on the day, and nothing that I or anybody else says in this room will make a tot of difference.

Mr Ross: I thank everyone who has participated in the debate today. Before I address some of the specific points, it is important to put some general comments on record. Mr Boylan talked about the politicised nature of the Committee, and Mr McCartney made comments about the partisan approach. We on the Standards and Privileges Committee deal with some difficult and sensitive matters. Mr Agnew made the comment that the tenor of today's debate was in contrast to how the Committee generally approached things. That is right. It is important, therefore, to put it on record that, in the vast majority of complaints, whether they be against Members from Sinn Féin, the Democratic Unionist Party or any other party, the Committee will come to conclusions in a unanimous way. Indeed, during this mandate, since I have chaired the Committee, there have been only five Divisions from 39 complaints. So, in the vast majority of cases, no matter who the person complained of is, the Committee will come to its conclusions in a unanimous way. However, as I said, some complaints are particularly difficult to deal with, and I think that this has been one of them. We

must, as a Committee, address each case in an objective and unbiased manner, relying on the facts identified by the commissioner and testing those against the provisions in the code of conduct. Disagreement is not typical, and it is therefore disappointing when it occurs.

Let us remind ourselves of the purpose of today's debate. The Assembly is not being asked to decide whether Mr Kelly has breached the code of conduct; the Committee has already decided that he has. Whilst some members abstained when the Question was put, no member of the Committee opposed the motion. What we are doing today is debating what sanction should be imposed in the light of the breach of the code that has occurred. The Committee believes that exclusion from proceedings for five days is the most appropriate and proportionate sanction. In coming to that conclusion we have taken a number of factors into consideration. We accept that Mr Kelly attended the scene with good intentions, something that I said in my opening speech and repeat now. He did try to defuse a tense situation, and, before and after his criminal conduct, Mr Kelly did use his influence to calm the situation. We also accept that he acted on the spur of the moment without due regard to the consequences. However, none of that excuses the unlawful obstruction of the police.

Mr Kelly is an experienced leader, yet on that evening he set a very poor example. He broke the law, and that resulted in others striking a police vehicle. The unlawful behaviour of a Member is a serious matter, and, for that reason, the Committee said that Mr Kelly should apologise to the Assembly — it is a shame that he has not done so. Leaving to one side the issue of an apology, the Committee believes that a sanction should be imposed. I should point out that the sanction of exclusion from proceedings is a serious one, as Members have said during the debate. Proceedings of the Assembly are all the matters that are governed by Standing Orders. If the motion had been agreed, Mr Kelly would have been excluded from, for example, speaking in or voting on proceedings in plenary, participating in Committee meetings or even tabling motions or amendments in the Business Office. We do not bring the motion forward lightly. The fact that we do indicates how seriously we take the matter.

Mr McNarry: I thank the Chairman for giving way. Will he perhaps tell us where his Committee now rests with the issue? As someone who was probably in a similar position to Mr Kelly, although I am not going to admit it

in this court, I wonder whether the action of Mr Kelly, which we have been debating all morning, is a precedent for the many young people with convictions, who are probably in jail thinking that they did far less and noting that their sanction was criminality. Is it the ability of the Committee to bring forward at a later stage, in the Chairman's view, whether or not it is a precedent, in that all MLAs can resort to the same action as Mr Kelly and expect nothing to happen to them? That is exactly what will happen today.

Mr Ross: I will address the issue as quickly as I can. There is a danger that the public perception will be that this creates a precedent. We will look at similar circumstances when deciding on sanctions or actions that the Committee will take. Criminal behaviour, as the Member will know, is a matter for the courts and for the PPS and they decide whether to take forward prosecutions on that basis; I will make no more comment on that. However, in terms of how we cope with the behaviour of Members of the House, it does, perhaps, set a dangerous precedent.

I want to respond to some of the comments that were made, because I have only five minutes left. Mr Boylan, Mr McCartney and a number of other Members raised the issue of Mr Wells. I appreciate that we are here to debate the code, but given that it has been raised by so many Members, it is appropriate that we make some comment on it. The issue concerning Mr Wells is not comparable with this one. All cases have to be judged on their merits, but the circumstances, by any measure, are very different. In Mr Wells's case, we were not talking about a breach of criminal law. Of course, during the Committee's deliberations on the incident involving Mr Wells, there was no agreement on whether he had actually breached the code of conduct in the first instance. Therefore, it followed that there would not be agreement on the sanction proposed by some members of the Committee at that stage. So we are not comparing like with like.

Mr Boylan also talked about the political nature of the complaint that was made. Again, I cannot speak for the motivation of people who make complaints to the Commissioner for Standards, not least members of the public. However, it is a red herring, of course, because the complaint that was lodged was upheld. Indeed, the complaint that was made and upheld was not opposed by the Sinn Féin members of the Standards and Privileges Committee, because it was acknowledged by Mr Kelly himself that he broke the law in his

actions and, therefore, failed to uphold the law, which is a key part of the code of conduct. It was not in question at all.

It also has to be said that, in terms of the political nature of this complaint, there have been other instances where complaints have come to the Committee on Standards and Privileges, even about the Member whom we are discussing today. Even though the Committee was criticised for not taking action against the Member on that occasion, it came to the balanced view that freedom of speech in that incident should be upheld, and it found that the Member had not breached the code of conduct. It is not a political matter, because, if there were a political motivation on the part of members of the Committee, we would find that, every time a complaint was made against one side or one community or the other, the Member concerned would be found to be in breach of the code of conduct. That does not happen. In the vast majority of cases we find agreement, and in most cases we find that Members have not breached the code of conduct, irrespective of whether the complaints are politically motivated or not. It is very important to put that on the record.

If there is any political posturing, perhaps that accusation could be levelled at other parties for the actions they have taken today. Mr Alban Maginness spoke about an extremely difficult situation, and, again, nobody disputed that fact. Indeed, in the Committee's report, we acknowledged how difficult the circumstances were at that time and the fact that, in his actions, Mr Kelly was well intentioned and tried to calm the situation, but it does not change the fact that Mr Kelly, as a Member of the House, broke the law and that, therefore, a sanction should follow.

Mr Maginness and others talked about how sanctions should be proportionate. I absolutely agree with that, but it was the SDLP who previously argued that Mr Wells should be suspended for seven days for failing to make an apology to the House. I am not sure that too many members of the public or others watching this debate would compare a failure to make an apology with someone who broke the law. Indeed, we are dealing with a circumstance today where a lesser sanction is being put forward.

I will make the point that I made to Mr Maginness again now, because I thought that a man of his standing would know the procedures of the House. Had he or his party felt so strongly about it, they could have brought an amendment to the House and had it debated,

but he chose not to do so. Indeed, in proportionality terms — we have commissioned research from the Assembly's research —

1.45 pm

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will not give way because I have very little time left.

If we look at other Members, in the House of Commons or Scottish Parliament, who have been suspended for a period, we can judge it against that. If anyone has been suspended for a period of five or seven days, it has been due to a serious breach of the code of conduct. I do not think that anybody could argue that this was not a serious breach of the code of conduct.

I have very little time left, so I will hover over some of the other comments. Mrs Overend talked about how there was no pleasure in tabling the motion. She is right: we do not want to see this kind of behaviour from Assembly Members. She mentioned the fact that some of Mr Kelly's behaviour led to others attacking the police vehicle. That is acknowledged on page 12 of our report. She is right to mention that.

Ms Lo talked about proportionality. I think that I have addressed that. Of course, Ms Lo's colleague, who used to sit on the Committee, wanted to suspend Mr Wells for an indefinite period until an apology came.

Mr McCarthy: It was not going to happen, and you knew it.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Ross: I am not sure that that party is always on the right line with regard to proportionality.

Mr Maskey talked about it being a farce. I do not think that members of the public would think that it was a farce that the House would debate sanctioning a Member who has broken the law. It is disappointing that he said that. Other Members have gone on similar lines. It is disappointing that there is no agreement on the issue and that a petition of concern has been lodged. It is important that, when a Member of the House breaks the law, we are seen to sanction that Member. That is what the public would expect.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the debate. The vote will be taken as the first item of business tomorrow morning.

Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014

Mr Speaker: Order. The next item of business is a motion from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014. 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. All other Members will have five minutes.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that 16-22 June 2014 marks Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014; further notes the respective themes of shared future and building a united community; and expresses its support for Refugee Week and Community Relations Week, particularly in relation to their shared aim of facilitating positive encounters between diverse cultures in order to encourage greater understanding, overcome hostility and build a shared society.

I am pleased to bring the Committee motion to the House, move it and commend it to Members. Not only does it give the Assembly the opportunity to recognise the real issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland and give support to some of the most vulnerable people in our society, it provides us with an opportunity to recognise the work being done by many community and voluntary organisations across Northern Ireland, with the aim of encouraging better understanding between our various communities.

The theme for Community Relations Week 2014 is "Building a United Community", while Refugee Week focuses on "Different Pasts, Shared Future". Indeed, it is fitting that Community Relations Week and Refugee Week coincide in 2014, providing us with a timely reminder that, when we speak of uniting communities, we must look beyond the two traditional communities in our society.

Before moving on, I would like to pay thanks, on behalf of the Committee, to the organisations that have helped to raise the issues and challenges facing asylum seekers and refugees here. They include the Law Centre, the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) and Red Cross Northern Ireland. May I also record thanks to

the Assembly's Research and Information Service for the very useful briefing papers that Committee members received at our last meeting on Wednesday?

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, at the end of 2012, there were 15.4 million refugees worldwide or eight and a half times the population of Northern Ireland. Of those 15.4 million, 46% — nearly half — were under 18 years of age. During that year alone, an average of 23,000 persons per day were forced to leave their home and seek protection from conflict and persecution. Mr Speaker, I think you will agree that these are awesome statistics that only highlight the vulnerability of refugees and the need to support them as they flee persecution.

Indeed, we have to look no further than the current events in northern Iraq to appreciate the ongoing nature of that fundamental problem.

Closer to home, the figures are much smaller but no less significant. In fact, a key issue with them is the lack of disaggregated data for Northern Ireland, which makes it difficult not only to assess accurately the number of refugees here but to target resources and services specifically to where they are most needed.

The most recent statistics indicate that, in 2012, there were 240 applications for asylum in Northern Ireland. That was less than 1% of the total UK applications, which stood at 28,000. Of the 240 applications, 80 were successful.

Members, as you aware, asylum and immigration are excepted matters. However, the issue is very much on our doorstep. The Home Office operates an immigration office in Belfast and an immigration removal centre in Larne, which has been operational since 2011 and while the issue of asylum is dealt with by the UK Government, our devolved Departments have responsibility for providing services such as healthcare and education.

Indeed, the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has always taken seriously its responsibility to deal with those issues. In the previous mandate, following representations from the public, the Committee visited the Dungavel House immigration removal centre in Scotland. The Committee also visited the UK Border Agency office at Drumkeen House in Belfast and was taken through the process of how an asylum seeker can seek refugee status.

Stakeholders report that those seeking asylum face complications with the process for claiming asylum; access to healthcare for unsuccessful applicants for asylum; and the treatment and safety of child asylum seekers. Once an asylum application has been successful, there can also be problems with the integration of refugees into society here.

That brings me on to the long-awaited racial equality strategy. It is now nearly two weeks since junior Minister McCann advised the House that the consultation on the draft document would be published in the "next few days". On 8 May, the Committee wrote to the Department requesting an update on the racial equality strategy and to enquire whether the Department was considering a refugee integration strategy. The Department responded on 28 May to advise that officials were finalising the racial equality strategy for submission to Ministers and that the issue of whether a refugee integration strategy is required is to be addressed in the consultation document itself.

Clearly, the issues facing asylum seekers and refugees — some of the most vulnerable people to arrive on our shores — cannot and should not be ignored.

Refugee Week is a time not only to highlight issues and challenges but to celebrate the contribution of refugees throughout Northern Ireland and, indeed, the whole of the United Kingdom. That can be done through a programme of arts, cultural and educational events. I commend the Different Pasts, Shared Future programme to the House and encourage as many Members as possible to attend events celebrating the skills and abilities of people who have chosen to come to Northern Ireland to make their life better and to make our lives more diverse and enriched.

Let me also say a few words about Community Relations Week, which, for the first time, includes events across all 26 of the outgoing council areas.

In the foreword to the 2014 Community Relations Week booklet, the chief executive of the Community Relations Council (CRC) writes:

"Building a united community is as urgent now as it was when the peace agreement was signed in 1998. We have plenty of examples of our capacity to slip back into animosity and old ways of thinking. There is no room for complacency."

That echoes the words of the Department, which stated in 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC):

"we recognise that there is no room for complacency, and we must all face up to the difficult issues that stand in the way of further progress."

The Committee agrees that building community relations and uniting communities is a priority for the Executive, for the House and for wider civic society to create the ability to celebrate diversity and promote good relations.

The Committee is committed to monitoring and scrutinising developments in and the progress of Together: Building a United Community. Only last week, members of the Committee were briefed on the outcome of the consultation on the draft good relations indicators, which are to be used to monitor progress on the T:BUC strategy. I hope that the Department will take on board not only the views expressed by Members during the meeting but those of stakeholders when the indicators are finalised over the coming weeks.

Some of the challenges faced in building a united community are more long term. That is reflected in Together: Building a United Community, particularly in regard to the target to remove all interface barriers. The Committee recognises the need for engagement with local communities and young people in tackling some of those deep-seated issues. In January, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into united communities, and members will again consider that in more detail before the summer recess.

Community Relations Week is promoted and driven by the Community Relations Council, and the Committee is aware of proposals to bring together the work of the CRC and the Equality Commission through the creation of a new equality and good relations commission. I understand that progress on developing the consultation for the proposed legislation is well under way, and the Committee looks forward to its future scrutiny role in that regard. I trust that initiatives such as Community Relations Week will not be lost through the creation of the new structures.

Community Relations Week is about highlighting the great work that goes on all year round in uniting communities, often quietly, in the background, without fanfare or fuss. Mr Speaker, I was delighted to hear that you were presented with an award recognising civic leadership in the area of good relations at the

launch of Community Relations Week last Tuesday. We all have our part to play. Indeed, I, along with the Deputy Chair and other colleagues from this House, will be playing our part at the World United football tournament to be held near this House later this week. You nod in amazement, Mr Speaker. It is a comeback after some 35 years.

I commend the motion to the House and trust that the activities promoted through Community Relations Week and Refugee Week will meet their aim of facilitating encounters between diverse cultures in order to encourage understanding, overcome hostility and build a truly shared future.

Mr Moutray: I rise as a member of the OFMDFM Committee to support the motion before us today. It is very apt, given that today sees the start of both these weeks of awareness raising around the work that has been done to date and the much work that still remains to ensure a truly shared society.

The need to continue to work towards positive relations with our neighbours cannot be underestimated. As someone who represents a constituency that has suffered at the hands of division and strife, I remain committed to working positively to try to foster better and closer relations between people no matter what their race, religion, creed or skin colour.

I commend the outgoing 26 councils, which are embracing Community Relations Week. I have looked across the areas to see a range of events of all types and initiatives that will challenge people's perceptions and endeavour to create and build upon positive relations. Community Relations Week will undoubtedly bring about a focus and a concerted effort, particularly when relationships are so difficult as at present.

I know that the Community Relations Council has been to the fore this week, and I hope that the events will go some way to meeting its objective of promoting a peaceful and fair society based on reconciliation and mutual trust. Refugee Week, however, is a wider based UK programme of arts, cultural and educational events and activities that mark the contribution of refugees to the UK and promote better understanding of why people seek sanctuary.

This week provides a platform for images of refugees to be promoted in order to further work towards a better shared future. There remains a lot of hostility and negativity around the

asylum issue. Perhaps this week of awareness raising will aid to stem that negativity.

When we look at the report, we see that applications for asylum seekers remain relatively low in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom, with it being less than 1% of the UK total. Our Executive Departments have a responsibility to refugees on issues such as health, education and social security. I know that those issues are not taken lightly. Undoubtedly, the House knows that there is a need for creating an understanding of different cultures. There needs to be greater respect and consideration given to such. I believe that these awareness-raising weeks provide a specific time for events and information sharing that will help to foster and create greater consideration for others by all of our constituents and help to build a united and shared future.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2:00 pm, I suggest that Members take their ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, and the next Member to speak will be Bronwyn McGahan.

The debate stood suspended.

2.00 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Traffic-calming Measures

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many locations in the eastern division have been assessed for traffic-calming measures by Roads Service since May 2011. (AQO 6338/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): From 1 May 2011 to 31 March this year, 216 locations in the eastern divisional area were assessed for the provision of traffic-calming measures. In the same period, my Department invested approximately £3 million in traffic-calming measures throughout Northern Ireland, including approximately £1 million in the eastern division.

This is, perhaps, an opportune time to advise Members that the operational boundaries of Transport NI changed on 1 April 2014 to reflect the new council boundaries, which are due to take effect in April 2015: for example, Belfast, Castlereagh and Lisburn council areas remain in the eastern division operational area, whereas Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey borough council areas are now part of the northern division operational area. North Down Borough Council area is now included in the new southern division operational area.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. In the areas that have been assessed, what percentage of schemes were progressed? What is the Minister doing to allocate additional resources to the clearly overstretched traffic-calming programme? I am sure that we have all had a similar response, which is that whilst a traffic-calming scheme would be beneficial, other schemes in the area are deemed to be of greater priority.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for her supplementary, and I agree that we are very much oversubscribed in terms of traffic-calming requests. Those requests are very fairly and expertly assessed by my officials, and we will continue to do that. On additional funding, my Department has submitted bids totalling £5.2 million for local transport and safety measures,

which include traffic calming, as part of the June 2014 monitoring round. Obviously, we hope that that bid will be met.

Mr Kinahan: I, too, was going to ask a question on the funding, but it seems that we have a difference of opinion on whether traffic calming works. Many people are against it. There are studies of it, and I wonder whether the Minister can clarify what is thought of traffic calming, starting with road bumps, as a preferred way forward.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. Indeed there are differing opinions on the impact of traffic-calming measures. However, I can confirm that they are still very much sought after by local communities concerned about dangers in particular housing areas. All that has to be borne in mind. That is why careful consideration is given to all applications and every assessment made.

Mr Wilson: Can the Minister confirm that his Department has no plans to implement the mad policy of traffic calming in town centres by imposing blanket 20 miles an hour speed restrictions, as have been requested by some members of the Green Party and other fringe parties?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He seems to be intent on pursuing his issues with the leader of the Green Party, even though, I understand, he is a former pupil of his. The issue of the implementation of 20 miles per hour schemes is being carefully looked at. We are bringing forward pilot schemes to better inform our view on that. I think that that is a sensible approach, and preferable to an approach of implementing widespread changes that people and communities are, perhaps, not prepared for.

Bangor Sewerage Infrastructure Improvement Scheme

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the timescale for the Bangor sewerage infrastructure improvement scheme. (AQO 6339/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The £10 million capital investment in the sewerage infrastructure in Bangor is split into six phases. Phases one and two, located at Luke's Point and Bangor marina, are presently under construction and expected to be completed towards the end of June 2014. Phase three, which includes a major

wastewater pumping station replacement planned within the grounds of Castle Park and an additional pumping station planned for within the grounds of Clandeboy Primary School, is targeted to start in autumn 2014 for 12-month duration. That timescale is subject to obtaining necessary statutory approvals, including archaeological requirements within Castle Park and the grounds of Bangor Abbey. Phases 4 to 6 of the investment, which are smaller in scale, are located in the areas of Brompton, Strickland's, Carnalea and Bangor west and are programmed for completion within Northern Ireland Water's (NIW) PC15 capital works programme covering the period 2015 to 2021.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his full response. What measures have been put in place to control disruption during this period, particularly when other works are ongoing at this time?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and, indeed, for his interest in the issue as a local Member for North Down. The Member will appreciate and, I think, support the belief that the scheme will improve and provide important infrastructure for homes and businesses in the area. Of course, as is the case with any major scheme, there will be some disruption. However, the majority of the planned work throughout the town will not take place on the public road; therefore, disruption to traffic will be limited and kept to a minimum. NIW has been asked to take steps to mitigate any disruption. It is liaising with statutory agencies, including DSD and DRD, and North Down Borough Council, the chamber of commerce and traders, to ensure that good communication and healthy cooperation is the order of the day.

Mr Dunne: Following on from my colleague's question, can the Minister give us an assurance that DRD will work with other contractors on the sewerage scheme, as it progresses, primarily contractors engaged through DSD carrying out the public realm work? Will they do all that they can to minimise disruption during this busy summer period when we have so many tourists coming to an attractive place like Bangor in north Down?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am aware of public comment in an article in a local newspaper claiming that NIW was delaying the public realm works. Due to the necessity of routing the major pipework along Abbey Street in Bangor, to avoid risk of damaging elements of Malachy's Wall — part of the larger medieval

Bangor Abbey site and, itself, a site of international Christian heritage significance — the council and the DSD public realm contractor have reprogrammed a section of work along Abbey Street to allow NIW to lay its sewers before the public realm work proceeds in that short section.

It is a reprogramme of the public work in a very short section of the overall scope, and it will not delay the overall programme. My answer indicates the level of cooperation between Departments and agencies.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for agreeing to take a question from the leader of a fringe party. I am delighted that I was elected and that I have the opportunity to ask one. How are residents who may be affected by the works being informed of the likely disruption?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. Of course, he has nothing to be modest about. He should not seek to hide his light under a bushel, and nor does he. *[Laughter.]* It is important that we liaise with all those impacted. NI Water liaises with the council, other public representatives and agencies, and, not least, the chamber of commerce and residents to keep them informed of progress and likely scenarios that may impact on their ability to move freely. All that is taken on board, and that will continue to be the case.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call you, Mr McKinney, I draw your attention to the fact that this is a constituency-specific question, if that makes any difference to what you intended to say.

Mr McKinney: I will give it a try, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Clearly, improvement schemes like that in Bangor are welcome, but what steps is the Minister taking to avoid future heavy fines as a result of our sewerage system falling beneath European standards?

Mr Kennedy: That is quite a timely question in relation to this particular project. We want to ensure that we comply with European regulations for our drinking water in that area and that we do not incur infractions. NI Water plays its part in helping to meet the more stringent standards laid out in the revised European bathing water directive. Those standards are in place, and we have to be aware of them. The scheme will reduce maintenance costs, improve the appearance of the existing infrastructure in Bangor and reduce

the risk of out-of-sewer flooding during periods of heavy rainfall.

Car Parks: Council Control

3. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his proposals for the transfer of car parks to local councils. (AQO 6340/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The decision to transfer off-street parking functions from central government to the new councils has been agreed by the Executive as part of local government reform. In order to implement that part of the Executive's proposals under the review of public administration, my Department proposes to issue an Off-street Parking (Functions of District Councils) Bill for consultation soon. It is scheduled to be introduced to the Assembly in September. The Bill would transfer to district councils the powers my Department has in relation to the provision, operation and management of off-street parking places under the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The Bill would also create certain decriminalised powers of enforcement to enable councils to issue penalty-charge notices where parking contraventions occur in those car parks. Those powers would broadly reflect those available to my Department under the Traffic Management (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. The Bill would come into effect on 1 April 2015.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. I welcome his announcement regarding the future of car parks in towns. What level of income do the new super-councils hope to earn from having the responsibility for such car parks? Will the new super-councils be in charge of arrangements and local car parking charges for such?

2.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. It is envisaged that over 300 free and charge car parks with an estimated value of some £46 million will transfer to the new councils. To be clear, that is what they are worth, not what they earn. Work is ongoing to determine the final list of car parks that will transfer. Those pay car parks generate in the region of £8 million a year.

Mr Spratt: The Minister will be aware that the Committee has been discussing the Department's proposals and has been concerned about the transfer of these assets without any apparent safeguards being set in

the legislation. That could allow some very lucrative sites in city centres etc to be sold off at a loss to the public purse. The figure that the Committee was originally given was £300 million, but today the Minister mentioned a figure of £46 million. What is the true figure and what safeguards can be put in so that public assets are protected under the legislation?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He raised this with me in a recent brief meeting. We need to be aware that councils have long sought powers in some DRD matters. The transfer of car parks has been at the lower end of that expectation, but, nevertheless, it is my intention to transfer it. The legislation is due to come through the House.

I understand the point that the Member makes. He will be aware that car parking spaces in towns and cities in Northern Ireland are sometimes at a premium because of the need for their provision as a public service. I would be concerned if councils went down the road of selling sites that would impact on car parking arrangements for the wider public. That is bound to be a consideration that would weigh heavily on them before they would undertake such a course of action. It is a matter that will come before the House and whether or not mechanisms should be put in place will be decided and deliberated on at that stage.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. People are employed by DRD in connection with car parking, such as car park attendants, for example. Can the Minister tell us what will happen when that responsibility shifts to councils?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The Bill will provide councils with the powers to employ their own traffic attendants. Some local government representatives have inquired about the possibility of my Department's traffic attendants continuing to provide an enforcement service for the new councils. That arrangement has been recommended to councils by the RPA transfer of functions working group and could be put in place, but, as yet, there are no firm indications as to how many, if any, of the new councils will wish to proceed on that basis.

Grass: Cutting Responsibility

4. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development who is responsible for cutting the grass, in public areas, within private housing developments. (AQO 6341/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The majority of grass areas in private housing developments are not adopted or maintained by my Department and, consequently, responsibility for grass cutting lies with either the developer or the appointed managing agent. My Department is responsible for cutting grass on areas of the public road network. In those instances, grass cutting is carried out only for road safety purposes or to prevent the overgrowth of roads and footways. My Department does not cut grass for appearance or amenity purposes. If the member has concerns regarding a specific area he should contact officials in my Department, who will be in a position to clarify responsibilities in relation to grass cutting.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his response. He will know that there are many private developments that are adopted but, unfortunately, in some instances the developer is no longer there or has gone bust. In circumstances like that, does the Minister agree — he has mentioned the sort of contracts that are available — that the best way forward is to set up some type of maintenance contracts with residents for green areas? Would his Department be willing to be involved in that process?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am somewhat loath to go down a route that would even potentially involve expenditure on that. It is very much the case that private developments and private developers are and should be responsible for a proper maintenance regime for housing areas that they have created and have accrued some considerable financial benefit from the sale of. The onus is on my Department to ensure that developers live up to their responsibilities. To that extent, I am happy to assist with that.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I declare an interest as someone who lives in an area with about eight feet of uncut grass in front of his house. It is not my garden; it is the common area, of course. I would cut my grass. In terms of a private development where the owner is now in administration or liquidation, can the Minister provide any advice as to how householders can try to get that grass cut by whoever has the responsibility in that case, which is becoming more frequent in developments?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question, and I encourage him to continue to cut grass, particularly in public amenity areas. He will find it very therapeutic.

[Laughter.] I cut grass in the front section of my own home and, technically, it belongs to the Department for Regional Development. I see it as public service. World Cup commitments aside, I hope to do some grass cutting tonight.

Back to the basis of your question. Obviously there is, or should be, legal recourse for those who find themselves in an unfortunate position where developers no longer exist and are not in place any more to provide the services that they are legally entitled to provide to householders. It is a difficult one. It is akin to the issues where developments remain unfinished as a consequence of financial impact to developers. One finds that providing water services or completing the developments becomes a real challenge. Whilst I have sympathy for those who find themselves in that situation, I think legal advice is probably the best way forward.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer and his continuing interest in the subject. I know that the World Cup is on, but I suggest that it is not just the grass. It is the footpaths, the street lighting, the roads and the sewerage that have left thousands of people in an awful dilemma following the collapse of the building industry some years ago. Can the Minister tell the House if we are any closer to legislation that would protect those people who are the unfortunate victims of what happened and who may well not be watching the World Cup?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to Mr Dallat for his supplementary question. Maybe he is not a football fan, but I thought that the World Cup has been very good so far.

To be serious, I understand the importance of the issue, particularly to householders who find themselves living in unfinished estates and where the prospect of pursuing legal issues is not perhaps attractive or financially beneficial. I continue to have ongoing discussions with the various parties involved, including officials from my Department, the Law Society and the construction industry to see how those legacy issues, if you like, can be addressed. It is not easy and it is a challenge, not least with the potential bill and cost that would be involved in upgrading and putting right estates and housing developments all over Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: On grassy areas, developers sometimes develop extensive flower beds and fronts that require considerable ongoing maintenance. Is the Minister aware of any proposals to ensure that all potential new homeowners are aware of any ongoing costs that would be associated with such

maintenance? Is he aware of any proposal from the Department of Finance or the Office of Law Reform to give greater clarity on this issue and ensure that there will be better management of such proposals with lower administrative costs to homeowners?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for the point that he raises. It is a point that is worthy of consideration by the agencies he mentioned, not least those with legal responsibilities, as they advise their clients and potential homeowners. Basically, that is where the responsibility should remain. I do not envisage my Department being in a financial position, on a widespread basis, to undertake the work that has been promised by house sellers, private developers or, indeed, their legal representatives.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Gregory Campbell. I remind you that Mr Wilson is behind you.

Schools: 20 mph Limit

5. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, as part of the new schools safety policy, he will introduce a 20mph speed limit in areas adjacent to rural schools. (AQO 6342/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The new road safety at schools policy, which will be authorised this summer, will provide for the installation of part-time 20 mph speed limits at schools in all areas. The schools will be prioritised according to the level of perceived risk, with those located on roads where the national speed limit applies attracting a higher priority. The implementation of schemes will commence in this financial year, with the number completed dependent upon the availability of funding.

Mr Campbell: My being in the Chamber one hour and 20 minutes after leaving Royal Portrush Golf Club proves that I went more than 20 mph, but I did not exceed the speed limit.

I thank the Minister for his response, but I indicate to him that there are a number of small rural schools that are adjacent to quite significant roadways, where speeding occurs from time to time. They should be at the very top of the Minister's priority list for any reduction in speed limits such as this.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I will not question him more closely on the speed he drives at on

the very good network that we, in DRD, have provided.

As I indicated, all schools will be considered in line with the school assessment sheet, regardless of the measures already in place. Obviously, some schools have had safety engineering measures installed within the past five years, and considerable investment has been provided there. Therefore, perhaps available resources would be better targeted at other schools where there are currently no measures or where older measures have been installed.

We will carefully consider all those as we move forward.

2.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions, and we now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Belfast Rapid Transit System

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Regional Development what other Belfast rapid transit (BRT) system work is going on in his Department to make sure that the service will be fully embraced and successful when it becomes operational in 2017, given the road and pavements works that are to start in the Ballyhackamore area in the next couple of weeks. (AQT 1261/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her topical question on Belfast rapid transit. It has the potential to transform public transport in Belfast, initially in east and west Belfast, and then, hopefully, be extended across all areas of Belfast.

The Member will know that we have started work on the new park-and-ride facility at Dundonald, and we continue to carry forward work in that general area. Work is due to start next week on the section of the Belfast rapid transit route on the Upper Newtownards Road between Sandown Road and Knock Road. The work will include minor carriageway widening to facilitate the future introduction of bus lanes in both directions for BRT. The resurfacing of almost 1 kilometre of carriageway and adjoining footways will also be undertaken, along with works to improve pedestrian crossing facilities. The scheme is programmed to ensure that as much of the work as possible in Ballyhackamore is undertaken over the summer months, when traffic levels are lower and schools are on holiday. I hope that that is a

flavour and indication of the approach that we are adopting to the work of BRT and, indeed, in Ballyhackamore.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he agree that the key to BRT being successful is getting more traffic off the road and that one way to do that is to offer free public transport to all schoolchildren? Further to the motion that I brought to the House in 2013, has any progress been made on the feasibility study into making that a reality?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. I well remember the debate that we had in the House. Even free public transport does not come without cost. We have to be realistic about that, and I know that the Member will want me to be realistic. We would have to give very serious consideration to an extension of that because of the pressures that we currently have.

I have to say that there are substantial issues before the Executive that are not resolved. I can think of at least three issues. In education, there is the whole debate around the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), and there are the issues with welfare reform and CAP reform. All of those have the potential to impact on future budgetary settlements and the financial position of not just the Departments involved but other Departments, including mine. Therefore, I am cautious about adding to the size of the financial requirements that I need to run my Department effectively and efficiently.

Protocols

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development what protocols are in place to allow local management to discuss various problems with elected officials. (AQT 1262/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his topical question. I consider myself to be a Minister with an open-door policy. I think that the Member and other Members know that. I also encourage that in the work of my officials as they liaise with public bodies or, indeed, public representatives. There is huge benefit to be gained in greater coordination and cooperation between Departments and government agencies with not only the public at large but public representatives.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that response. The south-eastern area headquarters has been moved to Craigavon, which you touched upon.

Is that really helping the dialogue with local people?

Mr Kennedy: The Member will know and appreciate that there were issues around RPA that the Ulster Unionist Party, to which both of us belong, did not agree with, and that included the number of new councils. We favoured making them coterminous with parliamentary and Assembly boundaries. However, that argument did not carry the day, and now we are in a situation where, in some cases, it is hard to see how local government means local government because of the distances that have to be travelled by elected members and because of some of the services. So, as we approach the full implementation of RPA, which is due next April 2015, I, like him, will be very interested to see how that impacts and truly relates to people on the ground.

Traffic Chaos: Strabane

3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with Roads Service in Strabane to try to resolve the ongoing traffic chaos caused by the closure of the A5 Victoria Road and the one-way system in Bridge Street. (AQT 1263/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. Indeed, she has raised the matter with me directly in the House. She knows that environmental improvement schemes, wherever they are, can bring a certain degree of traffic disruption and inconvenience. Every effort is made to ease the situation and, hopefully, that includes restoring two-way traffic flows at Bridge Street, Strabane as quickly as possible.

To safely carry out the reconstruction of the footways on Bridge Street and provide proper temporary provision for pedestrians and safe working space for the works, it is necessary to fence off part of the carriageway. The options for traffic management in that scenario were carefully considered at the planning stage. The introduction of the temporary one-way system to Bridge Street was considered to be the option that would bring the least amount of disruption and that, in turn, meant that, for most of the time, a single lane would be available for traffic.

At the planning stage, my officials in Transport NI examined the possibility of utilising traffic lights or a stop/go arrangement. However, such arrangements would have led to greater disruption due to tailbacks on both approaches on Bridge Street and into adjoining junctions.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for that. Given the demographic of Strabane and the ongoing roadworks on the A5 Victoria Road between Ballymagorry and Strabane, does the Minister agree that it was a lack of joined-up thinking by Roads Service to start the roadworks on the A5 Ballymagorry to Strabane when the roadworks were still continuing on Bridge Street? I say that given the demographic of Strabane.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question, but the answer is no, I do not agree with that. Careful consideration has been given. The point that I have made is that sometimes you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs. The work to the bridge was particularly necessary. Two-way traffic flow was reintroduced for one day on Saturday 7 June, and it was introduced on 14 June to ease the situation for the Summer Jamm festival held in the town centre. The contractor has sought to ease congestion wherever possible, but, when work is necessary, I am afraid that some levels of inconvenience are unavoidable. I hope that the Member accepts that. I am sure that the public, in overall terms, will accept the benefits that we are trying to make to the road network in Strabane town centre and the approaches to it.

Transport Infrastructure: Portrush

4. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether, given the very best of news received today, which is that Royal Portrush is to be placed on the rota to host golf's Open Championship, possibly by 2019, with the potential to host further tournaments, he will give a commitment to consider, given that he has time before 2019, investing an even greater amount in the A26, the railway lines from Belfast to Portrush and from Larne to Portrush, and, indeed, the stations on those lines, to make sure that the infrastructure is in place for the Open. (AQT 1264/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. It is indeed tremendous news. I am sure that the whole House rejoices in the fact that it is now indicated that the Open will be held at Royal Portrush, hopefully, in 2019. Of course, we had the huge success of the Irish Open in 2012, and it is worth remembering that we are due to have a return visit of the Irish Open to Portrush before 2019 and to Royal County Down in the south Down area in 2015.

It is very important to improve the overall infrastructure and transport infrastructure. I am very happy and proud to say, as an Ulster

Unionist Minister, that we brought forward a scheme that will upgrade the A26 Frosses Road. With moneys and the good intent that Mr Frew has indicated will come from his party around the Executive table, I think that I can look forward with confidence to getting more money to perhaps improve further that network of roads.

Of course, the Member will know that the Coleraine-Londonderry line was saved and, effectively, rescued by this Minister and this political party. So we are very conscious of our role and its importance, and we look forward with confidence that we will be supported around the Executive table as we bid for further funds to improve the road network.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for his commitment to lobby the Executive for additional funding for my North Antrim constituency and neighbouring constituencies. Politicking aside, Minister, can you also assure the House that any advancement in the area around Portrush will be compatible with the North West 200?

Mr Kennedy: Thank you, Mr Frew, for your supplementary. Again, the record shows that I, as Minister, have given considerable support to the North West 200. I have even had the experience — I am not sure whether he has — of having ridden the course. So I say, as a rider — [*Laughter.*] — that I am always aware of the North West 200 and its importance, not only to the regional economy of the north-west but to Northern Ireland generally, and I continue to be optimistic, as we go forward, in supporting events such as the North West 200, the Ulster Grand Prix and other road racing events.

Water Treatment: Electricity Costs

5. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his view of the costs, in economic terms, of the use of electricity in the treatment of water. (AQT 1265/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for the question. Electricity costs Northern Ireland Water (NIW) some £34 million a year. This figure, I think, will only increase in future years unless we actively explore ways to reduce the quantity of water entering the system and sources of renewable energy. We cannot simply treat larger and larger quantities of waste water; we will have to be cleverer in our approach.

2.45 pm

Mr Copeland: Would the Minister agree that the promotion of sustainable drainage solutions could be an excellent means of reducing not only energy costs but flood risk?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his interesting supplementary question. It is because of his representation of East Belfast, and having had to deal with historic flooding issues, that it is relevant. I certainly agree that we need to promote sustainable drainage solutions not only in new developments but, wherever possible, in retrofitting existing areas to make better use of these practical solutions. During my recent cycling study visit to Copenhagen, I met a Danish water provider and visited some of its forward-thinking SuDS projects. In some cases, those projects have not only reduced the burden on water treatment but have, as he indicated, reduced flood risk, so we have much to learn and to apply ourselves to.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment gave notice to the Business Committee last week that it might not be possible for her to return from official business outside Belfast in time for questions. Of course, the very good news about the Open will allow Members to understand why that situation has arisen. The Minister of Finance and Personnel will, therefore, respond to questions on her behalf today. Thank you very much, Minister.

Air Passenger Duty: Thomas Cook

1. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with Thomas Cook with regards to the reported charging of air passenger duty on flights on which the tax was abolished. (AQO 6353/11-15)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Department's trading standards service has not received any complaints to date about this issue. However, it is investigating to ensure that Thomas Cook's current advertising and information provided to consumers is not misleading in respect of air passenger duty.

The Consumer Council has been in direct contact with Thomas Cook since this matter came to light. The company confirmed that it investigated this problem and identified 32

passengers who were affected. Thomas Cook has confirmed that all affected passengers have been refunded. The council is encouraging passengers who might have been affected and not refunded to contact the airline. If they are not content with the response from the airline, they should contact the Consumer Council, which can investigate the complaint.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Since the abolition of air passenger duty, we have seen no additional destinations. Indeed, we heard recently of the suspension of the only direct flight from the North to the United States. I wonder whether the removal of air passenger duty has not been as successful as was first anticipated.

Mr Hamilton: I think that it was successful, primarily in achieving its number one target in devolving long-haul air passenger duty powers to the Assembly. Subsequently, the Assembly reduced air passenger duty for long-haul flights to zero. It was successful in its primary purpose, which was to save the Newark to Belfast route. I share the Member's disappointment and the Minister's disappointment that that service is going to move from being a 12-month to a 10-month service, which will affect from mid-January to mid-March of next year. That is disappointing, although, if there is a silver lining to the news, I hope that it makes the route more profitable and, therefore, sustainable. I welcome the fact that United Airlines has confirmed that the route is secure, albeit that it will be reduced to 10 months.

There is an interesting point of discussion flowing from this that will feed into the ongoing work that my Department and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's Department are doing in respect of an air connectivity study, which will, among many things, look at the impact that air passenger duty has on attracting and keeping routes. It is interesting to note that whilst we have zero pounds of air passenger duty for long-haul flights like the Newark flight, it has not been enough to keep it in place for 12 months. Interestingly, one of the four routes that have been affected — it is not that Belfast was singled out by United Airlines — is the Dublin route, where they also have a zero level of air passenger duty or its equivalent.

It is not as simple as Members who claim that, if you eliminate air passenger duty on all flights, you will see lots more routes opening up into and out of Northern Ireland have said.

Mr Dunne: What work has DETI done to encourage direct flights to Turkey, which would bring opportunities for tourism and business in Northern Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: I know that the Enterprise Minister has been working assiduously to lobby a great number of airlines, not just about long-haul routes to places like Turkey, which the Member mentioned, but about routes that are shorter and closer to home. As I said in the House last week during the Budget debate on the issue of air passenger duty, which Mr Sheehan raised, it is vital that, as well as looking at long-haul routes — I welcome the fact that the aforementioned Thomas Cook has announced in the last week direct routes out of Belfast to Orlando and Las Vegas for the summer — we have better connectivity through hub airports such as Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Paris and Berlin.

Istanbul airport is a little further away, but it is a critical route and would give us penetration into that part of the Middle East, elsewhere in the Middle East and, importantly, into emerging markets in the Far East. The Minister has been working closely with our international airport to attract a direct service to Istanbul. That is an issue that the Minister welcomed the opportunity to discuss with the Turkish ambassador on his recent visit to Northern Ireland. However, work that is ongoing on that route is, as you would imagine, commercially sensitive and of a confidential nature. Should such a service be introduced to Northern Ireland, the Minister's officials in Tourism Ireland would work with key stakeholders to highlight and promote the route in key markets overseas.

Dr McDonnell: The Minister mentioned shorter-haul routes. Can he enlighten us on any recent discussions the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has had with the Treasury or others about reducing air passenger duty on short-haul flights, including those that connect to other routes?

Mr Hamilton: The Member is right to focus on Westminster. They are responsible for bringing in air passenger duty. If there is a problem with it, which I believe there is, particularly for peripheral regions like Northern Ireland, the responsibility for solving that lies in Westminster. I have spoken in the House about my concerns, in my role as Finance Minister, about us trying to solve the problem, and I am not entirely sure it would solve the problem, at a cost of between £60 million and

£90 million to our block grant. That is a heavy price for us to pay to mop up somebody else's mess. We avail ourselves of any opportunity that arises to make that point to colleagues and Ministers in Westminster.

I also very much welcome the fact that the Chancellor, in his recent Budget statement of 19 March, announced that he was extending the scope of the regional air connectivity fund to include start-up aid for new routes from regional airports, including Belfast, and is increasing the funding to £20 million per annum. It is important that the work that our officials in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment already do with their counterparts in the Department for Transport across the water is carried forward so that we can see whether we can avail ourselves of the opportunities to bring in new and additional routes, particularly the short-haul routes that I mentioned before and to which the Member alluded. There are measures other than the lowering of air passenger duty that can be introduced to attract those routes to Northern Ireland.

Mr Cree: I, also, was surprised at the Thomas Cook situation. Minister, you have touched on the matter and the wider field. We all aspire to having other long-haul destinations, but bearing in mind the experience of this one, is the Minister satisfied that we have sufficient critical mass to support further routes?

Mr Hamilton: There is no doubt that Northern Ireland is a small place; we frequently mention that fact in the House. The increasing inward investment that we are attracting to Northern Ireland helps to make routes like the New York route more sustainable, due to the business traffic that is going back and forward. I know that, for many of those businesses, that is an incredibly important factor in their investment. However, the Member is right: it is probably a little more challenging for us in Northern Ireland than, for example, our counterparts in the Irish Republic, with Dublin Airport's ability to attract routes because of its bigger population and slightly different economy. It is critical that Tourism Ireland, which has responsibility for marketing Northern Ireland outside the island of Ireland, up its game so that we attract more visitors from beyond Ireland and the British Isles. That in itself justifies not just the New York flight but some of the other flights into western Europe, southern Europe and beyond.

Electricity: Local Generation

2. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contingencies are in place to deal with the reduction in local power station electricity generation required by the EU emissions trading system. (AQO 6354/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: The EU emissions trading system is not expected to result in power generation reductions in Northern Ireland. The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister's officials have been working with the Utility Regulator and the electrical System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) to ensure that there is sufficient generation capacity after 2015, when there will be impacts from the EU industrial emissions directive. SONI recently took forward a competition for additional generation, which is to be available from 2016. The competition result is expected in early autumn 2014, thus allowing sufficient time for the additional capacity to be provided. Mutual Energy is continuing to work towards providing interim and permanent repairs to restore the Moyle interconnector to full transfer capacity.

Mr Allister: I note that, whereas Mr Gregory Campbell was able to make it back from Portrush and the welcome announcement about the Open, the ETI Minister — the Minister for photo opportunities — was not. Therefore, I ask the stand-in Minister whether the Department has really got a grip on how serious the situation could be, with Ballylumford B to be decommissioned, Kilroot to lose 50% of its production and the Moyle interconnector being temperamental, at best. Is the Department really saying, with absolute confidence, that, come 2016, we will have sufficient indigenous generation? Is there not a danger that, with Republic of Ireland companies now controlling the distribution of electricity in Northern Ireland, if hard choices have to be made about shedding the load, Ballymun is likely to do much better than Ballymoney?

Mr Hamilton: I am glad to see that the Member has met the good news about the Open with his traditional grumpiness. If being the economy Minister requires the Minister to be photogenic, I am glad that the Member himself is not the Minister for the economy.

To be fair, he raises a serious issue. The EU industrial emissions directive, which he did not raise in his original question, will have an impact, and he mentioned Ballylumford B power station. I state categorically that the Department, as well as SONI and EirGrid in the South, are aware of the issue that the Member

has raised. There is an understanding that generation surplus in Northern Ireland will drop from 600 megawatts to 200 megawatts in 2016. Even though it will do that, I understand that the adequacy standard will still be met. That is why, in agreement with the Utility Regulator, SONI has, as I mentioned in answer to the original question, sought interest from the market for the provision of 220 megawatts to 300 megawatts of additional generation adequacy. That would increase our generation margin to around 450 megawatts from 2016. With the restoration of the Moyle interconnector to full capacity, that would bring the margin to around 650 megawatts, which is higher than it currently is. As for the doomsday scenario outlined by the Member, the Department knows about and understands the issue and is active in working with partners, such as SONI and our power generators, to address it as quickly as possible.

3.00 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for, at least, a good part of his answer anyway. I will not ask about the photogenic nature of power stations. What assessment has the Department made of the impact of the EU emissions trading system on the price of electricity for domestic and business consumers alike?

Mr Hamilton: As I mentioned in response to Mr Allister's question about this, the Department is very aware of that and is working with SONI, EirGrid and our partners in the Irish Republic to ensure that any reduction in generation adequacy as a result of the EU industrial emissions directive is addressed in advance. It is important that, because it will have an impact in 2016, now in 2014 we are addressing that.

I am not aware of what analysis has been done of the directive itself and what it means for electricity prices, although I am aware, as most Members are, of the concerns that many industries in Northern Ireland have about electricity prices. The Member will be well aware of the restrictions on the Minister and her Department's budget and on her ability to directly intervene on electricity prices. Of course, any intervention, small as it may be, that the Minister may be able to make will have an impact on other customers as well. There is always a fine balance to be struck in respect of electricity prices and the assistance that this Department can offer.

Mr Frew: I very much welcome the presence of the Minister in Portrush and the fact that she is, indeed, delivering for Northern Ireland while some can only grump and gripe from the sidelines about it. With regard to the generation margin for Northern Ireland for 2015, how essential is it that there is full restoration of the Moyle interconnector and that we get, as soon as possible, the proposed North/South interconnector?

Mr Hamilton: As I outlined in response to Mr Allister, in a situation where the EU directive will reduce our generation adequacy to about 200 MW of additional adequacy, whilst that is still within tolerable levels, it is important that the required repairs to the Moyle interconnector are brought forward as quickly as possible. That will get us back into a much more comfortable position.

The Member is also right to raise the issue of the North/South interconnector. I understand that Northern Ireland Electricity resubmitted its planning application and environmental statement for the Northern Ireland part of the electricity link to the Department of the Environment in June last year. The next stage is the resumption of the public inquiry. It is incredibly important that that moves forward, because it is a key part of our long-term security of supply to have that modern North/South interconnector in place.

The ETI Minister has discussed the issue, particularly the recent disappointing decision by the Irish planning board that will mean that this project will not come under the transitional provisions of article 19 of the EU 10E infrastructure regulation. This has been discussed actively by our Minister with the EirGrid chair and chief executive, and her officials have met representatives of the Irish planning board. It is premature to conclude that there will be any further delay in the delivery of the project, as EirGrid has undertaken substantial work to support its proposed planning application. DETI will closely monitor further developments in relation to the EirGrid planning application as part of considerations on how best to deliver long-term security of supply for our electricity.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister who sponsors the Utility Regulator, he will be aware of the proposal to cancel the generating agreement units. Given that Manufacturing NI and the Consumer Council have said that this will have a serious impact on the costs borne by consumers, what is the Minister's opinion of the proposal, and does he see it as a sweetener to

incentivise existing generator companies to upgrade their generation equipment in a way that gets them and the Executive around any state aid implications?

Mr Hamilton: I am not aware of the particular issue that the Member has raised. He said that my Department — the Department of Finance and Personnel — is a sponsor of the Utility Regulator, but it is not. It appoints the chairman and the board of the Utility Regulator, but it does not have the same sort of role as the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has in that regard. I am sure that her officials will have heard what the Member asked and will correspond with him accordingly.

As I mentioned in response to Mr McGlone's question, there is concern about electricity prices generally. That is something that would, understandably, concern us if it were to have an impact on business investment in Northern Ireland. However, it is interesting to note that no evidence of that is being shown. Whilst the manufacturing sector is rightly concerned about electricity prices here, there is no clear evidence that those prices act as a disincentive or barrier to investment in Northern Ireland.

When Invest Northern Ireland provided evidence to the Enterprise Committee as part of its review of electricity prices, which I understand happened recently, it specifically indicated that, while it is alert to electricity prices being a potential issue, it has not lost any projects as a result of energy pricing. That does not mean that we are not concerned about it or that we should take our eye off it. It is interesting to note that it is not having a discernable impact on our economic strategy, particularly our inward investment strategy.

Derry: Investment Imbalance

3. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department's efforts to meet the Executive's stated ambition of tackling regional imbalance have addressed the historical neglect of the Derry City Council area with regard to investment. (AQO 6355/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI is committed to regional development across Northern Ireland, including the Derry City Council and surrounding areas. The ETI Minister was pleased to announce on 17 April 2014 Convergys's decision to undertake a £10.1 million investment in Londonderry promoting 333 jobs, which Invest NI has supported with £1.4 million of funding. In December 2013, the ETI Minister also

announced an £8.8 million investment by Fujitsu, which will create 177 new jobs in the area, also supported by Invest NI.

The most recent figures available from Invest NI, from 2008 to 2013, show that its assistance of £37 million has contributed to £161 million of investment in the Derry City Council area with the potential to create almost 2,000 new jobs. It is interesting to note that over that period the assistance per head of adult population in the Derry City Council area was £377 compared to a Northern Ireland average of £362 for the same period. Invest NI is currently working to finalise the 2013-14 figures for jobs promoted and created at subregional level, including in the Derry City Council area. It intends to publish that information when the figures have been fully validated.

Invest NI has a regional office in Londonderry. Businesses in the Derry City Council area have the opportunity to access the same levels of financial assistance and advice as those in other parts of Northern Ireland. Invest NI continues to work closely with Derry City Council and other stakeholders to develop a sales proposition to show the strengths and opportunities in the city and surrounding area that will ultimately attract potential inward investors to visit, locate there and grow.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that very detailed answer. Given the very welcome work in the region, supported by INI, to develop that sales proposition and the integrated economic action plan, is there any intention, as a result of that proposal, to actually support or lobby for the north-west to become an economic zone, given the regional imbalances?

Mr Hamilton: When the Member says "economic zone", I interpret that as "enterprise zone". The first pilot in Northern Ireland was recently announced for the north-west in the Chancellor's Budget statement. I think that Coleraine is still part of the north-west. Mr Campbell to my right is nodding vigorously that it is.

Sometimes, when Members raise the issue of whether this area or that can be designated as an enterprise zone — the economy Minister and I have been lobbied by quite a few Members of the House and indeed by some councils — there is a misunderstanding of what the current iteration of an enterprise zone looks like. Many of the policy levers contained in enterprise zones that the Treasury is permitting are already within our purview as an Assembly. They include rates — we have a pretty

attractive regime of rates relief — access to high-speed broadband and the ability to designate for particular planning purposes. They are all within the remit of the Assembly and Executive already.

The one thing that is missing from the current proposition for enterprise zones is enhanced capital allowances. That is why Coleraine was picked as the pilot zone, because it is absolutely perfect for that. The university site was absolutely ideal for the 5NINEs data centre project, because it was already on track. At that time, there was a time limit to get the projects on the ground and implemented before 2017. That has now been extended to, I understand, 2020. There are potentially opportunities for other enterprise zones, but enhanced capital allowances are attractive only to businesses that are investing in capital-intensive industries, and some of the jobs that I highlighted that have gone to the Foyle constituency are not capital-intensive jobs. That does not mean that there may not be opportunities for an enterprise zone in that area or, indeed, elsewhere, but more work is required to flesh out exactly where the best place is.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Paul Girvan. Sorry, excuse me. Pat Ramsey is a constituency representative, so I will call him first.

Mr P Ramsey: The announcement and the efforts made by Minister Foster in the north-west are most welcome, but she should be mindful of the fact that Derry and Strabane still unfortunately have the highest levels of unemployment and youth unemployment and the highest levels of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland. Does the Minister not believe that there should be a more targeted inward investment effort in disadvantaged areas that have been hot spots for generations?

Mr Hamilton: Hopefully, what I outlined and, indeed, some of the other things that I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been involved in, whether it be an enterprise zone coming to Coleraine and the benefits that that will bring to that part of Northern Ireland and, indeed, to the whole region, or whether it be the concentration on getting high-tech, well-paid jobs in Convergys or Fujitsu, highlight that it is not a matter of the Executive or the Minister forgetting about the north-west.

I had the privilege of meeting the global president of Fujitsu in London towards the tail

end of last year. He was incredibly complimentary about the standard of the workforce right across Northern Ireland and said that he wanted to bring the additional investment that he and I spoke about that day to Londonderry. He was complimentary about the workforce that is already there and saw it as a great opportunity for his business. I think that people in Londonderry should be proud of the fact that companies such as Fujitsu, which have billions and billions and billions of pounds in their portfolios, and which could invest that money anywhere in the world, are choosing to invest in Londonderry and to avail themselves of the excellent skills and wonderful infrastructure there.

Nobody could, in all honesty, stand up and criticise the Minister, her Department or Invest Northern Ireland for their efforts in the north-west, whether those be for local business start-ups, of which 165 were approved in the Foyle constituency between 2012 and 2013; through the jobs funds, which promoted 567 new jobs in the Foyle constituency between 2011 and 2013; or through the loan fund, which has seen nine companies offered support of £2.695 million. Efforts are being made, and work is happening to attract businesses and to start or grow existing businesses in the north-west.

The Member talked about youth unemployment and a range of other issues. He will, of course, be mindful of the fact that the Minister for Employment and Learning has a responsibility for all that. He would, I am sure, be better taking up some of the issues with him.

Mr Girvan: I appreciate that a lot of the work done by Invest NI and the Minister is about encouraging and promoting existing home-grown industry and business. I know that we have had some very good results in south Antrim. However, Northern Ireland is a very small area, and I appreciate that people have to travel quite a distance to work. In two hours, you can go from one end of the country to the other. How many jobs have been created in the south Antrim area?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: This was a constituency-specific question, so it is entirely up to the Minister to decide whether he wishes to answer the question asked.

Mr Hamilton: I am trying to find the information. In the past 10 years, Invest NI assistance and investment in south Antrim has resulted in 2,057 offers. There have been 175 offers of inward investment in the South Antrim area. That has created 693 new jobs and secured

130. That accounts for about £18-63 million worth of assistance. South Antrim is an area that I am reasonably familiar with, Mr Deputy Speaker, as of course you are, and it is home to many good companies, such as the likes of Radox and others who are good, indigenous Northern Ireland grown companies that are exporting far and wide and bringing much pride to the Northern Ireland economy.

3.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We are all in awe of your quick-footedness, Minister. I call Tom Elliott with the same health warning.

Mr Elliott: I know that time is running out. DETI is obviously responsible for tourism. How much money has been provided to the Walled City project in Londonderry and to the tourism project of Destination Fermanagh?

Mr Hamilton: This is incredibly tangential from the question about the north-west. The Member's heart obviously lies inside the walls of Derry asking a question like that. There has been sizeable investment. A lot of it has been around the UK City of Culture to develop our cultural infrastructure in Londonderry. There has been investment in a number of assets, including £1.4 million in the Walled City lighting strategy, and investment, as the Member will be aware, in the likes of the Apprentice Boys' memorial hall, First Derry Presbyterian Church, the Playhouse Theatre and other assets in the north-west.

I do not have the Fermanagh figures to hand, which I humbly apologise to the House for. The Member will be aware of not just the benefit that the successful hosting of the G8 summit a year ago this week brought to Fermanagh but, building on the Irish Open success in Portrush a number of years ago, the Open, the Irish Open — I said "the Open"; now, that would be news — has been secured for Fermanagh. The Irish Open has been secured for Fermanagh in, I think, 2017. Building on the success of the G8 and the Irish Open in the north-west, Fermanagh is well positioned to benefit from the growth in our tourism sector.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the end of the period for oral and creative questions to the Minister. We now move to topical questions.

Creative Industries: Tourism

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how DETI is exploring the tourism opportunities flowing from the growing creative industries sector, especially exposure through TV shows such as 'Game of Thrones'. (AQT 1271/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: We should note and welcome the fact that Northern Ireland is getting an increasing amount of global exposure as a result of our burgeoning creative industries sector, particularly in film and television production. The Member mentioned 'Game of Thrones'. We have now completed the filming of four series of 'Game of Thrones' in Northern Ireland. I think that seasons five and six have also been secured for Northern Ireland. I understand that up to season three has generated some £80 million for our local economy, but that excludes revenue flowing from tourism spend as a result of it.

There is a lot of work going on and concentration on trying to avail ourselves of the tourism opportunities that come from having an international series like 'Game of Thrones' filmed here in Northern Ireland. I am sure that Members will be aware of bus tours and walking tours that are being organised, of the interpretative signage that has been put on some of the filming locations and of the campaign that is running from April to June by Tourism Ireland to advertise and showcase, with the permission of HBO, who are the makers of 'Game of Thrones', some of Northern Ireland's most attractive scenery, which has been the backdrop for many of the scenes in 'Game of Thrones'. That has been sent around the world, and, hopefully, we will be able to attract not just those who are interested in the series and have seen Northern Ireland in the series and wondered perhaps where that scenery was, but others who are just interested in going to such a beautiful place.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the clear importance of the link between Tourism Ireland and HBO, what is the Minister's view of the recent comments by HBO executive, Michael Lombardo, when he said:

"Belfast is not the most cosmopolitan of cities to spend half the year."

If there is truth in that comment, what can be done to change it?

Mr Hamilton: The World Cup is on at the minute, and there is an old football saying in

this part of the world, "We're not Brazil, we're Northern Ireland". So, when it comes to filming locations, we are not Hollywood; we are Northern Ireland. I understand that the comments made by Mr Lombardo were, as the Member said, about being away for six months. I am sure that for anybody, no matter who they are, being away from home and family for six months is difficult.

I have to say, though, that the relationship between HBO, Northern Ireland Screen and the Northern Ireland Executive has been incredibly productive. As I said in my previous answer, seasons 5 and 6 of 'Game of Thrones' have already been secured for Northern Ireland, so it seems that we are doing something right for HBO. I think that everybody in the House and further afield would acknowledge that Belfast is a city much improved from 10 years ago. Ten years ago, we would not have dreamt of attracting any sort of series from HBO, never mind six seasons of its biggest show ever. We are a city that is developing and maturing. Belfast has some great restaurants and an improving nightlife. It hosts world-class events and has developed cultural facilities such as the Lyric Theatre, the MAC and the Grand Opera House, all of which are important in attracting visitors.

More importantly, to combat some of the comments made about Belfast, look at other international investors, the likes of Allstate and Citi, which keep coming back to Northern Ireland and investing time and again. Our cultural offering is very important to them and, more importantly, to the staff whom they employ. So I think that Belfast is doing well. It is doing some things right if it is attracting companies such as Allstate, Citi and others that we have heard about over the last number of weeks and months, and we have retained HBO for six seasons of 'Game of Thrones'.

Labour Mobility: Cross-border Possibilities

2. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what efforts are being made to enhance cross-border labour mobility, given the results of a recent survey, which showed that some 14,800 people regularly commute between the two jurisdictions on the island for work or to study. (AQT 1272/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I am not sure how those 14,800 people are divided into those travelling for work and those travelling for study. I suspect, knowing the issues that the Employment and

Learning Minister has, particularly in the North West Regional College, where students from the Donegal area come to the facilities in Londonderry, that the bulk of student movement is northward. Equally, knowing the problems that students from here have accessing Southern universities, particularly the likes of Trinity and others, I suspect that the bulk of that movement, too, is northward. Obviously, some people will choose to do that for personal reasons. Others will be forced into it because of courses or because work dictates that they go in that direction. I am not completely versed in what the Minister and her Department are doing directly about this, but I am sure that we can investigate and furnish the Member with some details.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin.

I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the current challenges of unemployment and emigration, what steps will he take to ensure that both businesses and individuals can benefit from local and island-wide opportunities?

Mr Hamilton: The Member will be familiar with the work of InterTradeIreland, which, as I read over the weekend, has exceeded its targets this year for encouraging companies to innovate and export across the border. As we try to grow our economy and get firms in Northern Ireland to look beyond Northern Ireland for market opportunities, the Republic of Ireland market is an easier first step for many of them than perhaps even Great Britain or continental Europe. So the work of InterTradeIreland is important in ensuring that the market between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which has been growing over the past couple of years, continues to grow. As the economy in the South improves, it is important that firms in Northern Ireland avail themselves of the opportunities of a growing economy there, just as they do of the growing economy here at home.

Open Championship: Royal Portrush

3. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role DETI played in bringing the Open Championship to Northern Ireland, given that Members will all agree that today's main topic, from a sporting and tourism point of view, is the announcement that Royal Portrush in the East Londonderry constituency will host that golfing tournament. (AQT 1273/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. I am surprised that we got as far as topical question 3 before this came up. I join the Member and most of his constituents in welcoming the news that the Royal and Ancient Golf Club is requesting that Royal Portrush be put back on to the rota for Open Championships. We are obviously looking forward to that being agreed and the Open Championship coming back to Northern Ireland for the first time since 1952 or 1953. It has been a long time away, and it will be good to get it back, building on the success of the Irish Open.

The Member will be familiar with the work that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Northern Ireland Executive are doing to secure not just the Open but other events such as the Giro d'Italia, which was so successful recently. The Irish Open was an incredibly successful event for the European tour; it was its first sell-out event in its history. That is the sort of success that proves that we can host events of that magnitude, and which has whet the appetite of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club again. It has led to us hearing this positive announcement today, and we look forward to the Open coming back to Northern Ireland before the decade is out.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his answer. What can be done to provide greater hotel accommodation in the north coast area to cater for the potential of more tourists coming to the area because of the golf announcement?

Mr Hamilton: The Member is right to highlight the potential tourism opportunities that flow from the Open Championship. It is one of the primary reasons why Minister Foster and her team have pursued the Open Championship and worked with Royal Portrush to get it back on the rota. There is an estimated combined tourism promotion and economic return from the Open Championship of some £70 million. That sounds like a lot of money for one event, but you should realise that, last year, when the event was held in Muirfield in Scotland, outside Edinburgh, over 4,000 hours of television and radio coverage were broadcast. So, there is a huge potential for opportunities. Whilst it is one of the world's biggest sporting events, attracting crowds from far and wide, the fact that it also broadcasts the wonderful scenery and the great golf course in Royal Portrush to that big an audience will reap tourism benefits.

Invest Northern Ireland is very much open to considering support for projects to develop accommodation in the north coast area, particularly projects that will underpin a

signature project, such as the Causeway coastal route, as well as the tourism action plan up to 2020. Invest Northern Ireland continues to work with existing hotel operators to support business improvements and competitiveness. An example of that is the support provided to assist the £10 million expansion of Galgorm Resort and Spa, which includes an additional 50 rooms.

As the Irish Open showed us when it was here a couple of years ago, even though we in Northern Ireland perhaps consider that the travel time between here and the north coast is a lot — as I hear when listening to some questions to the Regional Development Minister — that is not how it is considered by people who come in from far and wide to stay in Belfast. They travel up and enjoy the scenery, and they will enjoy the Open Championship and perhaps spend more time in that area.

Business Red Tape Review

4. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the review of business red tape, given the very real challenges to businesses from increasing levels of bureaucracy. (AQT 1274/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: I agree with the Member's concerns. In my role, I regularly hear about such concerns that businesses have about government always getting in their way and costing them money. I see that particularly in some of the surveys that officials from my Department send out to businesses. I am trying to find the information on the red tape review, because I know that I have it somewhere, but I cannot lay my hands on it. I know that the Minister was very keen to take that review forward; she understands that there is that concern. I understand that there is a concern among business, and I think that it is important that we as an Executive look at all of the "red tape" for want of a better phrase.

There is also a responsibility on business to come forward with what it perceives to be concerns about red tape, because, when I travel around the country in my capacity as Finance Minister, I hear people saying, "Government keeps getting in our way" or "Red tape is a problem", but, when you ask for specific examples, sometimes they are few and far between. So, I think that there is an onus on businesses and business groups to come forward with precise examples of what red tape means. The advisory panel on the review of business red tape was scheduled to meet a

group of business representative bodies on 12 June, which was last week, and a seminar workshop for regulators to discuss a number of key issues relating to the review also took place at the start of this month.

Those were very constructive events that will feed into further business engagement.

3.30 pm

An innovation laboratory will be held in the last week of June to consider independent scrutiny of regulatory impact assessments. That issue is being taken forward by my Department. DETI has been keen to join in with that public sector innovation laboratory. There are also two research projects on fees and charges and a possible regulatory business hub. Those are both progressing well, and they will report by the end of June or early July.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that. I appreciate that he had to access the information. Is there any thinking specifically around the challenges of growing businesses in border constituencies or on a cross-border basis?

Mr Hamilton: I do not think a distinction is being made in the review between Belfast and the south, north, east or west of Northern Ireland. If there is a problem in respect of red tape, it will be uniform right across the country.

The Minister for Employment and Learning is taking forward a review of employment law. One of the common concerns raised with me, and, I am sure, with my colleague the economy Minister, is our overburdensome employment laws in Northern Ireland. That is something that the CBI, the Institute of Directors and others regularly raise. There is an opportunity for all of us to get behind the review that the Minister for Employment and Learning is conducting.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Stephen Agnew. We are almost out of time, Mr Agnew, so please move quickly.

Mr Agnew: I will be quick. I wanted to ask the Enterprise Minister about meetings she has had with the Finance Minister, so we have an appropriate stand-in. *[Laughter.]*

Business Tenancies

5. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what meetings she has had with the Finance Minister about the

business tenancies order and the differences in legislation between here and GB that are restricting the growth of free solar PV schemes. (AQT 1275/11-15)

Mr Hamilton: This is for me — you will get me answering no matter what — in my DFP capacity. My understanding is that the civil law reform division in my Department is looking at work on business tenancies and a range of other land-law type issues in Northern Ireland. We will not progress it in the short term, but the Department is looking at it in the medium to long term. I am happy, in my capacity as Finance Minister, to write to the Member to give him a little bit more detail. Perhaps we can correspond about the particular detail to see whether it is something that can be incorporated into any review of business tenancies.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease while we change the top Table.

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

Committee Business

Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes that 16-22 June 2014 marks Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014; further notes the respective themes of shared future and building a united community; and expresses its support for Refugee Week and Community Relations Week, particularly in relation to their shared aim of facilitating positive encounters between diverse cultures in order to encourage greater understanding, overcome hostility and build a shared society. — [Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I support the motion. In light of it being Refugee Week, which coincides with Community Relations Week, it is important that the Assembly sends a strong message that refugees and anyone who seeks asylum are welcome in our communities. There is no point in marking Refugee Week and Community Relations Week unless we act to ensure that people seeking asylum here are treated with equality and dignity. While it is fine to mark Refugee Week and Community Relations Week, we must demonstrate by actions that we are sincere in developing strategies that make a difference.

Refugees come here not out of choice but because they have been forced out of their own countries for many different reasons, including social, political and economic, and they end up in different countries. These refugees face many problems, including racism and isolation. They have difficulty in finding out information on many things that we take for granted, such as how to access benefits and medical treatment and how to have children enrolled in schools.

Sectarianism ranks alongside racism as a hate crime that we must eradicate. Again, we need to demonstrate through actions that we are sincere in tackling this scourge on our communities. While immigration is an excepted matter, nevertheless Departments have responsibilities to provide for communities, their economic development and the elimination of poverty. They have responsibility to provide education; employment; adequate and appropriate housing; healthcare, and mental

health care in particular; other health promotion, including treatment for addictions; recreational, social and cultural infrastructure; childcare and adequate parenting support services; programmes to prevent social isolation and alienation; and the promotion of equality between groups. All these have a positive impact in building a shared future and a united community. Failure to deliver on those social goals has a negative impact on our society.

There are a lot of realities to be addressed. The slave and the master might have had a good relationship, but it was not based on equality. Good relations must be underpinned by principles of equality, diversity and interdependence. We need to promote equality of opportunity and inclusivity across all cultures in order to have a society that is unified and cohesive and which will embrace diversity. People who come to make a home in Ireland should be treated with respect and given equality with every other citizen. As austerity forces many of our young people to emigrate, I would hope that they do not find the same intolerance that many of our ethnic communities and foreign nationals have faced in the North recently. Those who come here make a valuable contribution to our society, and we must provide leadership by standing side by side with these communities in facing down hate crimes and other potential difficulties that they may encounter.

The racial equality strategy has been agreed by Martin McGuinness and should urgently be agreed by the First Minister and quickly go out for public consultation. That 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. It is key to identifying the real needs of our ethnic minority population; it will promote racial equality and tackle racism; it will increase awareness of the issues and responsibilities in this area; it will foster good relations; and it will thereby promote greater social cohesion and equality of opportunity for everyone.

Community Relations Week provides us with an opportunity to take stock and renew our efforts in developing better relations through the programme of events that has been organised.

Mr Attwood: Previously in this House, I have referred to the 2011 Programme for Government for Scotland, which has a number of paragraphs about the requirement for political humility. As a Government going into office in 2011, they warned themselves not to

get carried away with themselves; that is why they refer to the need to show political humility.

I was reminded of that story two or three hours ago at a Community Relations Week event held at the 174 Trust on the Antrim Road where Denis Bradley talked about the need for parties in the North to show humility when it comes to the issues that face us at this time, not least the multiple issues of community relations. I agreed with him that we have been arguing month after month and year after year that parties in this Government and Assembly should be humble enough to admit that the community relations issues that we face are of such scale and volume that we now need to say that we can resolve many of them only if we have the two Governments working with us.

So, given that this is Community Relations Week and that the motion says that we look to facilitate:

"positive encounters between diverse cultures in order to encourage greater understanding",

is it not, in this week of all weeks, the time and place for the parties to say to each other that, for all of the achievements of the parties and institutions in the North since the Good Friday Agreement, and for all of the efforts made in various talks and negotiations, in order to get the community relations issues like flags, emblems, symbols and identity dealt with comprehensively and fully, we now need to be humble and call in the two Governments to assist us in that enterprise? We cannot say to our society, in the week that is in it — Community Relations Week — that we are not going to interrogate those issues to the point of exhaustion and closure unless we recognise that we need help to do so, and that includes the two Governments.

In facing up to the scale of this week and of the community relations issues, one of the decisive ways in which we can move forward is to move forward with the two Governments around Haass and other issues in an effort to resolve all of that. This should be the week when we have the humility to recognise that, to say that to each other and, from a position of strength, not weakness, call upon others to assist us in that enterprise. In that way we will best serve the ambition of Community Relations Week and best serve the resolution of the community relations issues that have so many difficult and turbulent expressions across the face of this society.

In doing so, let us not make holes to jump into, one of which would be to transfer some of the functions from the Community Relations Council to the Equality Commission, as has been proposed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister. It would be folly, at the very moment when we should be concentrating our attention and our fire on community relations issues through more resources and more opportunity for the Community Relations Council, to then take away some of those functions and give them to the Equality Commission that, save some good work in recent weeks, has been a disappointment when it comes to fulfilling its statutory functions in terms of equality responsibilities in the North.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he acknowledge that that position in relation to the joining of the Community Relations Council (CRC) to the Equality Commission — the objection to that — was not the position held by the SDLP in previous rounds of talks in relation to those issues?

Mr Attwood: That is my understanding, but I have the humility to recognise that, if there is a stronger place to go to, you go to the stronger place. The stronger place is not to give some of the functions of the CRC to the Equality Commission that, in so many ways, has failed to live up to its statutory and other responsibilities since it was established under the Good Friday Agreement. If it is the case that the deputy First Minister has signed off on the racial equality strategy, let the measure of OFMDFM, when it comes to the publication of that strategy, be that it deals with all of the issues that it needs to deal with when it comes to the issue of immigration.

I have not yet read the leaked document of the racial equality strategy. Does it deal with the issue of access to primary and secondary health service for immigrants? Does it deal with the issue of simplification and simplicity around immigration processes? Does it have at its heart a child-proofing approach to ensure that the children of immigrants and those who are seeking to live in this country after refugee status will be properly protected and taken care of? If the racial equality strategy is to be published, let us ensure that, when it is published by OFMDFM, it deals with all of the refugee issues —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Attwood: — not only with the issues of racial equality.

Ms Lo: The 2014 theme for Community Relations Week is building a united community. I am glad to see that the week has the opportunity to showcase positive projects that are taking place on the ground by many grass-roots organisations to promote a shared future and allows us to reflect on our need to do more.

Refugee Week recognises the contributions that asylum seekers and refugees make to our society. Asylum seekers often come to Northern Ireland looking for a sanctuary from wars, civil unrest or persecution. However, when settling here, even in small numbers, they face many challenges, including access to housing, education, English classes for adults and a complex welfare system. The assessment process can also be lengthy and soul-destroying for asylum seekers who are not allowed to work, even though they are highly skilled, and have to live on a meagre statutory allowance. A young Somali economist came to my office recently and told me that he has been waiting for two years to hear the outcome of his assessment. He was very frustrated and felt that he could have been working that whole time to support himself.

3.45 pm

I welcome the announcement from OFMDFM in February on the setting up of a crisis fund to help asylum seekers, migrants and refugees. That is particularly helpful during the interim period when they are waiting for the processing of benefits, which can be for weeks and weeks. It can also help destitute asylum seekers whose applications for refugee status have been declined but who cannot be sent back to their home country. An update to the House on the emergency fund would be welcome.

As we know, the growing diversity of our community has presented many cultural, economic and social benefits, but sadly, when wrongly perceived, diversity brings its challenges. Changes within communities often lead to some increased tensions, which have manifested themselves in sectarian and racist attacks. We need to do more than just condemn those incidents. We must recognise the importance of community capacity-building work in bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to enable authentic and meaningful experience with, and of, one another.

Token multicultural events are no substitute for real intercultural and interdependent exchanges. Work needs to happen in areas where frequent racist incidents occur to promote mutual understanding and challenge

sectarian and racist attitudes. We must also encourage reporting, supporting victims in a way that demonstrates care and sensitivity and ensures that the perpetrators of hate crimes are brought to justice and face the full weight of the law. It makes sense to invest in everyone who chooses to live in Northern Ireland to enable them to reach their full potential and afford them the opportunity to develop personally and contribute to society.

I would like to congratulate DEL on the success of its pilot scheme for free ESOL classes for asylum seekers. Early intervention is an effective early investment in tackling isolation and reduced social and economic mobility. That is the DE's responsibility too, and reinforces the idea that cross-departmental working is essential in tackling the issues that underpin inequality and, ultimately, discrimination. I wrote to the Education Minister, but his response was not very helpful, as he just referred to the inclusion and diversity service in his Department in respect of access to education and additional ESOL support for migrant and refugee children.

Society benefits —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is almost up.

Ms Lo: — when people can hold open, mixed and multiple identities, can experience different cultures and express their individual creativity.

Mr G Robinson: As a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I read the wording of the motion carefully and find that I can agree with its thrust and intent. I am not so sure that others in the Chamber can share my positivity.

It is important that Northern Ireland does not forget the crisis that is being experienced by refugees throughout the world, and I welcome positive encounters with those who have suffered first-hand. We should take into account that there are in excess of 15 million refugees and that a stark proportion of them are under 18 years of age.

Daily, we witness thousands of people in distress because of famine, war or weather. I could much better appreciate the impact on families or individuals if I were given the opportunity to speak to them directly about their horrific experiences. The people of Syria and Iraq are two of the most prominent stories today. We must also remember the people of Haiti, who are still in absolute poverty after the earthquake two years ago. Those people

deserve our practical support as well as our thoughts and prayers. An opportunity to meet them could only be an educational and beneficial experience.

There are Members in the Chamber and their colleagues beyond it who have shown recently that their vision of a shared future is not one that I could subscribe to. I walked to church and was intimidated by protesters, and elected members of a number of bodies were among those gathered. The motion contains the buzzwords "shared future", so I pose this question: is this a shared future? Some seem to think that a shared future means one-way traffic but then complain when things do not go their way. That is bullying, not an attempt to share a future.

Across the world, much needs to be done and deserves the support of Northern Ireland and its people, but I firmly believe that we must look at our own difficulties as well as those of the rest of the world in trying to achieve solutions and overcoming hostilities. I will support the motion because we must support refugees throughout the world at the same time as finding solutions to our home-grown difficulties, including looking out for our migrant and refugee communities in Northern Ireland, who, in recent times, have been the victims of race hate. I also support Community Relations Week.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to stick to the motion, please.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion, and, along with my party colleagues, I welcome Refugee Week and Community Relations Week.

Recognising the hard work that goes on throughout the year on these issues is extremely important in building the shared community that the majority of people here want to live in. It is important and necessary work, and there should not be any room for complacency in carrying it out. It definitely should not be taken for granted, and, of course, we should also note that developing a shared community and building a strong economy are inextricably linked.

Community Relations Week presents us with an opportunity to showcase the great work that goes on on the ground all year round. That important work can sometimes be taken for granted, and it results in building and sustaining relationships across cultural divides. Refugee Week and Community Relations Week is a time for us to celebrate the ethnic and cultural

diversity of our community, and it is important to note that long gone are the days when it could have been perceived that there are two or three communities here.

Ireland has changed and is changing, and in a pretty amazing way, I think. We are definitely better off for that. On a side note, when we talk about immigration or about people choosing to make their home here and bring up their family, I am extremely uncomfortable with how people's value seems to be assessed on their economic value. I think that that is a really cold way in which to shape the discussion on immigration, and we should step back and realise that we are talking about human beings who have so much more to offer. We should be welcoming everyone with open arms.

We do not really need to go into it, but the images of the North that were flashed across TV screens and the front pages of newspapers around the world did not exactly paint us in a great light. However, I think that, we have subsequently sent out a clear message that racism and sectarianism — in fact, any form of hate — cannot be tolerated. Unfortunately, it seems to be a minority that always make the most noise, but rallies against racism and different events have firmly shown that the majority of our population want to build a culturally diverse and welcoming society.

The media have an important role to play here as well. They need to take more responsibility for how much influence they have over people's mindset. At times, the media are guilty of sensationalising issues, which, as result, get blown out of proportion or almost feed on negativity. There are plenty of good-news stories out there that need to be given more space, and more space does need to be given to progressive debates. For example, we recently had a debate on equal marriage, and at least two programmes on different TV channels showed only people speaking against equal marriage. There was no balanced coverage.

I think that more space needs to be given to progressive voices, but I suppose that this week is about highlighting the good work that goes on on the ground.

I have problems with the way in which the conversation has been shaped in recent weeks around the word "tolerance". I do not really think that that is good enough. I do not think that we should simply seek to tolerate people. We should accept everyone for who they are. That talk about tolerance does not go far enough; in fact, it is the bare minimum and it

lets people get away with the harmful views and opinions that they hold.

I want to highlight some of the good work that happens in south Armagh. Excellent community relations work is done by larchimí Ard Mhacha Theas, which is an ex-prisoners' group that plays a central role and works alongside former British soldiers and loyalist groups. I have been lucky enough to be involved in some of the different programmes that it has run for young people. It has weekend itineraries, and young people from different backgrounds and with different perspectives are really challenged about their perspectives of other people. Lasting friendships are made as a result. I do not think that we can place any value on that work; it is absolutely invaluable.

I know that a lot of really excellent events have been organised for Community Relations Week. A few members of the Committee will be attempting to play football on Wednesday to highlight racism and to show solidarity with ethnic minorities who are living here. That is just one of the excellent events that have been organised for Community Relations Week and Refugee Week. I support the motion.

Mrs Hale: I very much welcome the debate so far. I know that my party colleagues have spoken about Community Relations Week and the need for greater understanding and respect for our indigenous cultures, especially in the run-up to the parading season, and I heartily agree with their comments. However, if I may, I will focus on the latter part of the motion, which looks to ensure that the Assembly facilitates positive encounters, especially in relation to refugees and diverse cultures in order to create greater understanding, overcome hostility and build a shared future.

As I stated in the House last Monday, the unprecedented growth in 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 up with the most damaging of consequences. In recent weeks, we have seen that there is a greater need to understand one another's background, not only Catholic and Protestant, but those from other diverse and ethnic minorities living in Northern Ireland. A shared future has to be for all the people of Northern Ireland.

As I also mentioned in the Chamber, I have passionately worked with organisations, such as the Horn of Africa, which focuses on working

to integrate refugees in the local community and to proactively find solutions to promote greater understanding. Those organisations and the individuals have highlighted a number of barriers that face refugees in relation to employment rights and entitlements. The most pertinent of those is the massive difficulty associated with the lack of understanding of the English language. Indeed, a representative from one of those leading organisations believed that the inability to grasp the English language was the single most important barrier facing refugees and ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland.

I have witnessed the sheer number of issues and problems that stem from the inability to grasp our language, including young children who have difficulty communicating with their peers and teachers, young adults trying to access employment but who are unable to fill in an application form or conduct an interview process, and elderly citizens who are unable to socialise with others due to their lack of linguistic skills and understanding. There is very little support for those refugees over the age of 18 to access free English classes. Whilst any asylum seeker coming to the Province is admitted to free English classes, that is taken away once refugee status has been granted by the Home Office. The refugees in Northern Ireland are intelligent and very able people, and they want to become an integral part of our society. They want to showcase their skills, and they want an opportunity to contribute to a better Northern Ireland for us all, something that we must understand and respect. Without the ability to communicate with the wider society, it would seem impossible to facilitate those positive encounters that we want to see flourish. The ability to understand one another's cultures and educate one another is also greatly diminished.

I hope that, as part of Refugee Week, we will seek to address a number of issues that stem from the lack of knowledge of the written and spoken English word. We need to do more to ensure that those who gain access to free English classes can do so. We especially need to see a change in the legislation that allows for those coming to Northern Ireland as adult refugees to access language classes. That will create a better opportunity for them and Northern Ireland, as they will have the ability to enrich society at a social and a fiscal level. Finally, this will allow people to communicate, educate and understand each other's culture in a way that is mutually beneficial for all. I support the motion.

4.00 pm

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion and welcome the fact that all those who have spoken thus far wholeheartedly support the motion, as, I presume, will those yet to speak.

As previously cited, the motion is a simple statement of fact and asks us to note that this is Community Relations Week and Refugee Week. From that point of view, all Members will want to take an opportunity to condemn all forms of sectarian, racist and homophobic attacks, and to reject all those who wish to be racist, sectarian or homophobic in any way, shape or fashion through words or actions. They will equally want to commend all those across communities who work daily to build good community relations, promote racial equality and tackle homophobia and other sexual orientation offences. On behalf of our party, I commend all people and organisations directly involved in working daily to build good relations across our community.

My party and I look at community relations more broadly: it deals with sectarianism and cross-community relations, in which people are euphemistically called Catholic and Protestant or unionist and nationalist. We also include race relations in community relations, as we do, of course, sexual orientation. We think that it is very important that the Assembly and Executive do all in their power to support those working on this daily, be they in faith groups, community organisations or other statutory, half-statutory, quasi-statutory bodies, arm's-length agencies — the whole raft of community organisations and the many individuals.

Certainly, in the last number of years representing the South Belfast constituency, I have come across an awful lot of people, very often individuals, working as best they can with refugees in our city. That is because, historically, a lot of refugees and asylum seekers have lived in South Belfast. I have had the benefit and privilege of meeting those people, who are very much unsung heroes. People in the House and across the length and breadth of this country are, unfortunately, all too well experienced, given the number of people from these shores who, over generations, have had to travel the world seeking refuge and benefiting from the support of other peoples in far-flung countries. Therefore, it is incumbent on us — we who have the honour to host refugees seeking relief from oppression, injustice, often brutality and, in some cases, death — to do whatever possible to help them.

In recent weeks, much has been said about the need for a racial equality strategy as part of an overall tapestry. Just last week, I made it clear in the House that I do not believe for one second that any one of the 108 MLAs needs a racial equality strategy to behave themselves, moderate their language and work to build community relations. However, I will say that a racial equality strategy produced by the Executive and Assembly is important because it will demonstrate the Executive's commitment to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and develop good relations. Such a strategy will be key to identifying the real needs of our ethnic minority population and others who find themselves discriminated against.

The strategy will promote racial equality and tackle racism, and it should increase awareness of the issues and the various responsibilities, as another Member mentioned. The strategy also needs to address the issue of protection within the law, and that means enforcement of the law on behalf of the victims, be they of race, sectarian or homophobic crime.

I place on record that our party wants the racial equality strategy to be produced. I know that Martin McGuinness, as deputy First Minister, has signed off on it. I make it clear on the party's behalf that, if Sinn Féin were writing such a strategy exclusively, it would be much more radical, but we are trying to seek agreement with our partners in Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will you bring your remarks to a close, please?

Mr Maskey: I urge all those people out there, including Members of this House, to redouble our efforts to tackle sectarianism, racial discrimination and homophobia.

Mr Cree: Northern Ireland has changed a great deal in the past 20 years since the ceasefires. Unlike Great Britain, Northern Ireland did not experience widespread immigration from the Commonwealth countries in the 1950s and 1960s. Our society was essentially comprised of two main blocs, crudely described as Protestant/unionist and Roman Catholic/nationalist. I am glad to say that that situation is changing.

Since the ceasefires, we have witnessed an increase in immigration from within the European Union, especially eastern Europe, and from further afield. This has brought opportunities and challenges. It is perfectly acceptable that we should debate immigration and the impact that it is to have, and is having,

on housing, education and employment patterns, but it is essential that that debate takes place in a respectful and sensitive manner and deals with the facts, not the myths or perceptions.

We need to decide what kind of Northern Ireland we want to build and to recognise the importance of respect and tolerance for all — Orangemen, nationalists, ethnic minorities. There has been much talk about building a shared future. This applies to all communities and groups in our society. Everyone should have the right to live free from attack or the fear of attack. No one should be subjected to physical or verbal abuse, have their home attacked or live in fear of such attacks.

Recently, we have witnessed a spate of disgraceful and shocking racially motivated attacks on ethnic minorities in all parts of Belfast — north, south, east and west. We still have legacy issues of sectarian attacks on people and property, especially in interface areas. We also have the type of intolerance whereby peaceful parades are threatened with violence by those who cannot show tolerance for those who may not share the same religious or cultural background as the protesters. These are all entirely wrong and must be condemned. A truly shared future will come about when everyone is free to live their life and express their culture free from attack or fear of attack.

We must focus on the contribution made by immigrants and refugees. Our lives have been enriched by the contribution made by the immigrants. You have only to look around any high street or supermarket. We eat in Italian, Indian and Chinese restaurants. No trip to the north coast is complete without a Morelli's ice cream, and if you want to go to Bangor, it is Caproni's ice cream.

In north Down, we also enjoy all these cultures within our community. Those in business contribute greatly to the local economy. Indeed, what would once have been called foreign food is now a staple in the diet of the people of Northern Ireland. More people holiday abroad and travel further afield than ever before.

There is a theory that much of the historical tension between the communities in Belfast was due to competition for jobs and housing. Attacks on ethnic minorities may be due in part to fears that jobs are being taken away or scarce housing resources are being used up and locals cannot get housed in their home area. The message that we need to get out is that the vast majority of immigrants are working,

paying taxes and contributing to this society. Many are playing vital roles, especially in the health service, which quite simply could not cope without them.

This is, of course, nothing new. Our linen industry was built by Huguenot refugees and names like Molyneaux, Pettigrew and Lamont are testament to that. Although he was not a refugee in the legal sense, tens of thousands of Belfast families had cause to thank a certain citizen of Hamburg, a Mr Wolff, who came here in the 19th century to help to found one of the greatest shipyards the world has ever seen and provide employment for generations of our citizens.

As we mark Refugee Week and Community Relations Week, we must commit to working to promote tolerance and fairness and to restore the reputation of this place, which is friendly and welcoming. With Northern Ireland secure within the United Kingdom, we must now devote our efforts to building a united Northern Ireland. Surely that is something we can agree on.

Mr Agnew: I am delighted to speak at the beginning of Community Relations Week and Refugee Week on behalf of the Green Party in Northern Ireland, as it gives us an opportunity to move beyond the language of two communities. We have many diverse communities, including, it is worth mentioning this week, the refugee community, which is very well represented by the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), which is a great NGO that represents the interests of refugees in Northern Ireland.

We have many diverse communities. We speak often about unionist and nationalist communities, which hold two forms of nationalism — British and Irish — but we also have internationalists. We speak of Protestant and Catholic communities, but we also have our Muslim community, which has been much in the news, our Hindu community and people of many diverse faiths and none, all of whom make up part the rich tapestry that is Northern Ireland.

We have our young people communities and our older people communities. We also have our online community, which should remind us more than any other that we are part of a global community. Sometimes, it is important for us to see ourselves in that context.

Community Relations Week in particular gives us the opportunity to talk not just about a

shared future but about the shared now that exists in many parts of Northern Ireland in many different contexts. We have our 62 integrated schools, where young people from diverse backgrounds are educated together. We have shared workplaces, which are common throughout Northern Ireland. We have our shared social spaces, where the narrative of a Northern Ireland of two divided communities does not ring true.

However, we still have segregation; we have segregated housing and segregated education. Indeed, you could even argue that we have segregated elections, with a nationalist election, a unionist election and, arguably, a cross-community election, which take place separately. The segregation in those three institutions — elections, housing and education — is, in large part, the fault of the political institution and how we have operated in the past. We have to challenge ourselves about how we operate in the future to move forward, make this a more shared society and build on the shared now that already exists.

We had the recent comments by the HBO chief executive, who stated that Northern Ireland was far from being a cosmopolitan place. We should heed those words. People might get annoyed about them and say, "Look how much we have done for HBO". We should be upset, but not at the HBO chief executive: we should be upset at ourselves, because that is a genuine perception of life in Northern Ireland.

If we are to change that, we need to challenge some of the issues that we have in Northern Ireland. For example, we do not have a racial equality strategy. We were told very recently by a junior Minister that it was ready to come forward and would be published within the week. That was last week if not the week before. We need to bring it forward and show as an institution that we want to take forward improved community relations, particularly amongst our ethnic communities.

There is no doubt that gay rights are an issue for Northern Ireland. People coming from Los Angeles and Hollywood in the US, as opposed to Hollywood in my constituency of North Down, must wonder why we have such an issue with LGBT rights and with including LGBT rights in our society. If we want to be a cosmopolitan society, we need to tackle those issues.

We need to talk about immigration and be proud that people want to come to Northern Ireland. For generations, we have bemoaned the number of young people leaving our shores. When young people from other countries want

to come here, we should be proud to say that not only is Northern Ireland open for business but it is open for workers who want to come here to earn a living and to refugees who want to come here to seek sanctuary. We should be a welcoming and cosmopolitan place; we should be a place to which people want to come to live, work and raise a family.

4.15 pm

Mr Lyttle: I am pleased to be making a winding-up speech on today's motion on behalf of the Committee. It is welcome and extremely important that the Assembly has marked the start of Refugee Week and Community Relations Week. We are sending a positive message out today. All the Members who spoke unanimously supported the important work that is done in both those weeks.

Bronwyn McGahan said that refugees and anyone who seeks asylum in this community must be given a firm welcome. They must be treated with dignity and respect and have access to the public services to which they are entitled. That was a valuable contribution. She also cited the fact that the racial equality strategy has been agreed by the deputy First Minister. That is the second time that we have heard that in the House, and it really serves only to highlight the fact that, on another occasion when we are debating the important issues of community relations, immigration and asylum, of the four Ministers available to us today, none is in the House, as far as I am aware. I think that that is a real disappointment.

Alex Attwood spoke about a community relations conference that took place today — I was privileged to be at that as well — where Denis Bradley rightly reminded us that the Belfast Agreement was bigger than just this region and that, in order to deal with many of the outstanding issues relating to community relations here in Northern Ireland, we have to include the British and Irish Governments and, as Refugee Week shows us, cast that net even further and build a truly united community for all our citizens.

Anna Lo rightly said that building a united community is the theme of Community Relations Week. She highlighted how complex our asylum system can be at times, but welcomed the fact that OFMDFM is to introduce a crisis fund to assist people through those difficult times. She rightly welcomed and celebrated diversity and the social and economic benefits that it brings for our community. She reminded us, as is timely, that, whilst multicultural events make a good

contribution to building a united community, we really need to see long-term, sustained, meaningful, multicultural contact and exchange across our community to build mutual respect and understanding and, indeed, to firmly challenge sectarian and racist attitudes that might prevail.

Megan Fearon rightly highlighted how central building a shared society is to delivering a strong economy in Northern Ireland. She said that the two are inextricably linked, and I agree with that. She also called on us to celebrate diversity and highlighted the recent rallies against racism, which did indeed demonstrate the strength of public opinion in support of people from all backgrounds in our community.

Brenda Hale rightly suggested that employment rights are an extremely important issue for immigrants in our community and mentioned the importance of sound language assistance and other types of help that we need to promote integration in our community.

Alex Maskey also referenced the racial equality strategy. As other Members suggested, it is becoming increasingly frustrating that we are hearing that that is partly signed off but has not yet been delivered. I think it is high time that we get on with the public consultation and the Assembly and the community are given an opportunity to contribute to a robust racial equality strategy.

Lesley Cree called for respectful debate in our community — I agree with that — and tolerance for all. He rightly highlighted the contribution that migrants have made in our community. Indeed, one of the most famous is Gustav Wolff, who created a huge industry in my constituency of East Belfast.

Stevie Agnew highlighted the work of some of our local NGOs, in particular NICRAS, in offering much-needed help to refugees in our community. He reminded us to challenge discrimination of any kind and to be positive and proud that people want to come to Northern Ireland.

In closing, I will make some comments as a Member of the Assembly. This is an opportunity for us to take stock of how well we are doing as an Executive and Assembly in promoting good relations in Northern Ireland.

Today we heard the new head of the Community Relations Council expressing concerns in that regard and about the fact that an estimated 0.0001% of regional public

expenditure is spent on promoting good relations.

At the community relations conference today, the MLAs who were present experienced first-hand the frustration of many of our local community organisations, which are working tirelessly to promote good relations at grass-roots level. The organisations expressed extreme frustration that they are not getting the resources they need. It is my understanding that OFMDFM's central good relations fund has experienced significant delays in the last financial year and this financial year in allocating resources to those grass-roots organisations that are at the coalface of dealing with sectarianism and racism and building positive good relations in our community. It is my understanding that no central good relations funding has been released for this financial year, and we are now into June. It is unacceptable to expect our community relations organisations to be able to survive and thrive in that particular climate.

The recent peace monitoring report also said that we are in danger of talking a cultural war into existence. Despite the fact that there are more loyalist marches and bands than ever, only a percentage of those marches are contested. The report also said that we are putting our police service in the place of acting as human shock absorbers. With another period ahead where we know that tensions can run high, it is extremely frustrating that some of those outstanding community relations issues, which many of the public want us to show leadership on and deal with, go unresolved. It remains unclear as to when talks to reach solutions on those key issues are going to be achieved.

I read a report today that contained one fairly simple line:

"Daddy, why is that man pointing a gun at us?"

That puts into stark perspective the narrative that we are leaving for generations after us at this moment in time. We continue to have an unacceptable level of tolerance for paramilitarism and intimidation in our community, and it is high time that the Executive, and OFMDFM in particular with responsibility for good relations, showed leadership in tackling these issues.

The Together: Building a United Community strategy sets goals for ensuring that all public space is shared space and for delivering shared neighbourhoods and shared education —

although highly disappointingly it makes little or no mention of integrated education — and it sets ambitious targets for interface removal. We are a year past the publication of the strategy and there is little information about resourcing, budgeting and action plans or target dates for the delivery of any of those fairly modest goals. We need to see urgency from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if, indeed, we are to pay more than just lip service to these important aspirations that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland hold for our community.

I thank the Members who participated in the debate. I encourage Members to attend as many of the Refugee Week and Community Relations Week events as possible and to join together and redouble our efforts in building the truly united community that people in this community want to see.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that 16-22 June 2014 marks Refugee Week 2014 and Community Relations Week 2014; further notes the respective themes of shared future and building a united community; and expresses its support for Refugee Week and Community Relations Week, particularly in relation to their shared aim of facilitating positive encounters between diverse cultures in order to encourage greater understanding, overcome hostility and build a shared society.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask Members to take their ease for a moment.

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

Private Members' Business

North Coast Transport Infrastructure

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

Mr G Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister for Regional Development to invest in the transport infrastructure at, and leading to, the north coast to assist the commercial, commuter and tourist sectors of the economy.

I am pleased to be able to put forward the case for infrastructure development and improvement at and around the north coast to enable all aspects of the economic development of the area to improve and meet the needs of the 21st century user. I acknowledge the work that has been and is being done. It is important that that work be acknowledged.

As the Minister is aware, I have mentioned to him, on a number of occasions, different projects that I believe are worthwhile for the north coast. A dual carriageway the whole way to Coleraine from the end of the M2 on a phased basis, a climbing lane at Gortcorbies on the A37 Limavady to Coleraine road and a bypass for Dungiven to alleviate the congestion and pollution problems in that area are all essential road projects. It is vital that I point out that the A37 is the route used by emergency ambulances transferring patients to Altnagelvin Area Hospital. The A26 is the main route for transferring patients to Antrim Area Hospital and the Belfast hospitals. Improvement in journey times could be viewed as being very beneficial to patient outcomes.

All the projects that I have mentioned would have a great and positive impact on the north coast. The area is home to many commuters. Enhanced road works would benefit them by allowing them more time with their families, by reducing congestion and, definitely in the case of Dungiven town, by reducing pollution.

I have heard local firms on the north coast say that it is frustrating for them, as staff and vehicles are often severely delayed by the

tailbacks on the A26 and A6 arterial routes. Delays cost businesses money that could be used to employ more staff and enhance services. There is also the cost of fuel and the financial impact of that on businesses to be considered, as much-needed income is removed from the pockets of commuters. Many aspects of the economy would benefit if improvements to road infrastructure were made.

There has to be acknowledgement of the high number of people who have lost their life on the A26 and the need for improvements on the road.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he acknowledge that the Department has made quite an investment — £8.2 million — into the A26 as a result of lobbying over a period from his good self and many others from the north Antrim area?

Mr G Robinson: I acknowledge the Member's contribution. I was just about to come to that.

Work needs to be done, preferably to build a dual carriageway to replace the existing old road, to help to minimise road casualties on a phased basis. I appreciate that that road project is among the Minister's priorities. However, I would like to hear a definite start date from him.

In public transport, we have seen much investment in the Belfast to Londonderry rail service. I appreciate that there are legitimate reasons for the delay in the signalling project. However, I am aware that people who are affected by the planned development between Coleraine and Londonderry would like clarity on progress so that they can make plans. I welcome the investment programme so far and eagerly await its ultimate completion, especially of the new rail platform development at Bellarena outside Limavady. As part of the investment in the rail infrastructure, there has been much interest in a rail halt at Ballykelly, especially since the relocation of the DARD headquarters to the site there was announced. I am sure that the Minister will not be surprised at my mentioning that. It would be a beneficial project for DARD staff and locals alike. Perhaps the Minister can give an update on any discussions that he has had with his DARD counterpart on the possible start date for the project.

I mentioned the Gortcorbies climbing lane, a project that the Minister and his predecessor will be aware of my commitment to. In recent years, the need for it has become increasingly

obvious as traffic levels increase. Daily, there are long tailbacks at peak times. Regrettably, that results in some motorists taking chances to overtake, thus endangering lives. A climbing lane would enable traffic to flow much more freely on that arterial route. Inwards investors look for good transport links, which are essential for that investment.

4.30 pm

The north-west also has its own airport located at Eglinton, which I believe could be more fully utilised, with a side effect of saving the council money. That type of transport infrastructure is essential to develop our economy. When the area can boast Project Kelvin, the high-speed Internet project, let us ensure that we have the transport infrastructure to match.

All the projects that I mentioned will improve the connectivity of the north coast to the rest of Northern Ireland, with benefits in so many sectors. I believe that investment in such projects is good value for money, when and if the resources become available.

What I have not mentioned is the impact that transport infrastructure improvements will have on the tourist sector. I want to mention the importance of the Rathlin ferry to the tourist economy. We have been fortunate to host an Irish Open in Portrush and coped well overall. The British Open in 2019, which I warmly welcome, and which was announced today, will require roads improvement in the areas mentioned. Those events are, of course, on top of the annual North West 200 motorcycle race, the Milk Cup and the air show, which are smaller but equally important events that support the north-west economy, and which will benefit also.

Some families are feeling the financial squeeze, and I understand that staycations have become increasingly popular. In 2012, 8.4 million day trips were taken in Northern Ireland. Better transport infrastructure makes travelling by car or public transport a good option for such trips. That scenario supports business and offers a cost-effective option for staycations. Bearing in mind the widespread impact of these projects on the north coast in general, we can see how improvements in the transport infrastructure will provide value for money and be positive.

I appreciate that I may have overlooked specific items, but I am sure that other Members will raise them. I hope that all Members will see the benefit of supporting this motion for the entire population of the north coast. As we all know, all departmental budgets are constrained at

present, and I acknowledge that. However, when funding becomes available, I hope that the Minister will consider the needs of the north coast for the reasons that I outlined.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and most of the proposer's shopping list for the infrastructure that is undoubtedly needed along the north coast, from the north-east all the way over to the north-west.

In recent months, we have had the Giro in north Antrim. Obviously, the Open has been held and will be held again in the Port in the time ahead. I have always said that there is huge tourism potential from north Antrim and east Derry all the way over to Derry city. We have failed to realise that for a variety of reasons, one of which is infrastructure.

In recent weeks, we have referred to the issue of air passenger duty. If we want tourists to get to the north coast, we have to get them to the North first. The Executive and, in particular, the economy Ministers need to get to grips with that.

Last night, I was looking at a brochure for the Causeway Coast and glens, which stated that the route is one of the world's greatest road journeys. The Antrim Coaster, service 252, serves the bus route from Derry to Coleraine to Ballycastle all the way down to Carnlough and then to Larne. However, in the summer during the peak period, for the world's greatest road journey, there are only two buses a day from Coleraine to Larne, and vice versa. So, we need a proper bus service along that route not only for local people but for tourists. It is a case of build it, and they will come.

Historically, there has always been a deficit, particularly in the north-east. The train infrastructure runs to Coleraine, Portrush, Portstewart and Larne, but the transport infrastructure to Ballycastle has always been short. The figures outlined in the research paper that was provided by Dr Raymond Russell underlines that fact. In the North, 6.1% of people use public transport. In East Belfast, 13% of people use it. However, if you look at other constituencies, you see that, in East Derry, only 3% use public transport and, in North Antrim, only 2.5% use it.

That is not because people in those constituencies do not want to use public transport; it is because of the choices available to them. That indicates how poor some of our public transport options are. It is ironic that we in North Antrim, the place where we build

buses, are least likely to use them. Most people there would like the opportunity to avail themselves of bus and train services, and we need to ensure that those services are in place for our rural communities in particular.

I come from an area with a number of villages including Ballybogey, Stranocum, Dunloy, Rasharkin and Loughguile, and they are all just off the beaten track. I sometimes wonder about connecting such villages to Ballymoney and Ballymena, from where there is main transport infrastructure to Belfast and Derry. There should be a bus service for all those villages. If there was, the 2.5% figure would soon increase.

As outlined, a lot of lives have been lost on the A26, and I welcome the work carried out by the Department in moving towards an upgrade. There is a big opportunity there for park-and-ride facilities. Wherever park and ride has been provided, the uptake has been phenomenal, and that would be the case for the A26, too. It would serve the needs not only in the Ballymoney/Ballymena area but of the commuters who come down from Ballycastle on to the A26 in the morning, and they would, no doubt, use it. I have also argued that, if you provided a train stop at Dunloy, you would be able to tap into that arterial route from Ballycastle to the Drones and on to the A26. Many would use a train service if it was handy for their daily commute.

The proposer also referred to the Rathlin ferry. It is good not only for getting tourists to the island regularly but for the islanders. When I went to the island on the ferry recently, there was a lot of chat amongst the islanders that there seemed to be a bit of a baby boom, so the population of the island is starting to increase.

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

Mr McKay: I am sure that a number of factors are involved in the population increase on Rathlin, but it goes to show that good transport infrastructure not only improves the economy and increases tourism but improves constituents' quality of life.

Mr Dallat: I was hoping that we would have a holistic approach to the debate, but I had no idea that we would get a baby boom in the middle of it. The infrastructure deficit, particularly in the north-west, is steeped in history and goes back to partition. Indeed, if one were to read the playwright Harry Barton, one would see that it

goes back to the sixteenth century, when the MacSweeneys, the McQuillans and all the other clansmen perhaps had a more sophisticated form of transport than we have today.

It was during the dark days of direct rule that the railway was in serious danger of disappearing, certainly north of Ballymena. Even today, despite the commitments of the Minister, it would require very substantial capital investment to bring it to a stage at which we can say that there is an hourly intercity service to Belfast and, hopefully, onward to Dublin, Cork, Galway, and so on.

Everyone here knows that Michael Palin described that railway journey as one of the wonders of the world. Recently, the Minister issued a press release on his future strategy, which I thoroughly agree with. I think that the strategy was courageous, and I look forward to hearing the Minister put the flesh on the bones it because I am very conscious that the Budget agreed here in 2011 by the DUP and Sinn Féin somewhat restricts forward thinking.

When the Minister took office, he immediately went to redress the empty money bag left by the previous Minister. I am sorry to be critical of anybody, but what happened was disgraceful. Despite Mr Kennedy being from an opposing party, I give him credit. He found £20 million and stopped what could have been the closure of that line.

I am sure that those who tabled the motion are happy to say that "infrastructure" includes other forms of transport, including roads, ferries, air travel and canals. The ferry service to Rathlin was mentioned, and I am disappointed that nobody mentioned the ferry service between Magilligan and Greencastle. Perhaps that is something that needs to be examined, with a long-term view to developing tourism going both ways, because international tourists know nothing of borders and partition.

I am not sure how we fit the Ulster canal into this motion; but we can, of course, because when the Ulster canal is open, tourists will come in their thousands and that will benefit the Lower Bann, the Foyle as well, and right over to Scotland.

Lots of these issues are European, and, again, I give credit to the Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee who spearheaded a visit to Brussels on this very subject. Again, the Minister has been to Brussels, and I know that the staff there are working very hard to attract funding.

There are, of course, three roads that are important; not just the one or two that Mr Robinson referred to. The A26 brings the traffic from Ballymena and the A6 brings it from Belfast, but remember that the A5 brings traffic from Dublin. Those three arterial routes are absolutely critical to the future well-being of the coastal area; and, of course, the coast runs right up to Malin Head.

I hope that the motion will stimulate thought and provoke action. I do not know of any other area where there is a greater need to develop a long-term plan that puts in place an infrastructure. That infrastructure will bring to the north-west — economically and socially deprived for too long — the enormous benefits of new inward investment and, particularly, international tourism. The relative peace that we have now has created new opportunities to start addressing issues, which were probably neglected throughout the 40 years of the Troubles —

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

Mr Dallat: — but are now awaiting the interest of long-term investors who want to see a stable return for their money.

Mr Swann: I thank those who tabled the motion for bringing it to the House. I welcome the opportunity to speak on today's motion on north coast infrastructure. I start by acknowledging today's great announcement of the return of the Open to Royal Portrush, which will, no doubt, bring a very welcome headache for transport and logistic planners. When we look at the success — it has already been mentioned — of the Giro d'Italia, which took in so many of the north coast's best features, we actually know that they are up to it. And we cannot mention the Giro and the north coast without referring to Councillor Sandra Hunter's pink sheep and the fantastic tourist attraction that those were.

I acknowledge the great support provided to tourism by Translink, through its seasonal Rambler services, including the discounts available at some attractions to those travelling with Translink. Those services supplement the conventional services, many of which are benefiting from new buses with the European funding component. I will return to that point later.

When we think of the contribution made to the north-west by the Department for Regional Development, we often forget about rural transport and community transport. North

Coast Community Transport provides an essential service. It fills a gap for the many people who inhabit rural areas but, unfortunately, cannot readily access public transport services because of reduced mobility. This is a lifeline for many, and I am pleased that, once again, the Department under the Minister has guaranteed the budget for these important services. Some have been making mischief on that front in recent weeks by claiming that the budgets have been reduced, but I am assured — I am sure that the Minister will reassure us again — that, as he has done in previous years, he will seek to secure additional funding for those important services.

I return to European funding opportunities. DRD has the best track record of success when it comes to European funding, whether it is for new buses — I acknowledge the 40 Wrightbus buses now in service with Translink that have a component of European funding — upgraded railway stations or road improvements. I think of the funding secured for the A8 scheme, some £15 million, which is the largest single amount for any project in Northern Ireland. Indeed, European funding has been sought to develop not only a transport hub for Belfast but a signature station for the Waterside in Londonderry.

4.45 pm

I am also informed that European funding will be used for the new designs of the Rathlin ferry and the public information services that will be happening in July. Mr McKay referred to the baby boom that is taking place on Rathlin. As I am sure you know, Minister Kennedy is the Minister responsible for Rathlin; he can answer for his own actions on that later.

There has been mention of two ferries: the Rathlin ferry, which is not only of tourism potential but a lifeline to the island, and the Malin Head ferry. We also need to mention the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry and the tourism potential that it can bring to the entire north coast when it is running.

It is fair to say that, sometimes, a motion like this would be well served by a response from the Finance Minister in which he could set out what strategic projects promoted by other Ministers he is prepared to fund. The A26 Frosses scheme has started, and there is the intention to further dual the section of the road to Coleraine, with goodwill and future funding. That finance might not have come about had it not been for the well-placed photographing of Mr Campbell with the newly installed Finance Minister. That photograph acted as a catalyst

for the funding that we secured for the continuation and start of the A26.

Much has been made of the tourism potential of the north coast and the area. It is something that the new council — Causeway Coast and Glens — will be looking to fully utilise, and it will want to ensure that the infrastructure is there to support that. We need to look at the strategic plan for the tourism potential of the north coast. We can look at the excellent facilities at the Giant's Causeway visitor centre and the fantastic numbers visiting it, but it could have been so much better and greater if the road structure and infrastructure had been put in place before it was built or while it was being built. A complete, holistic package would have fully utilised what is a fantastic tourist attraction. I know that the Minister is supportive of the proposed cycle and walkway scheme from Bushmills through the Causeway centre to the Aird. I look forward to further announcements on that. We will support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party supports the motion and, indeed, would support and encourage the Minister for Regional Development to invest in transport infrastructure throughout Northern Ireland, as it goes without saying that a region with a modern road and rail network can and will prosper through economic development, thereby creating much-needed employment for all our people. If we are to get our economy moving, we urgently need all parts of it to be working at their best. The north coast is an essential part of our economy, particularly because it is a significant tourist venue with attractions such as the Giant's Causeway, the glens of Antrim, Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge and many other wonderful places of interest and beauty. It is almost as pleasant as the Strangford constituency and the Ards peninsula.

Mr Campbell: Just almost.

Mr McCarthy: Almost. It is also an essential piece of our transport infrastructure as it connects our two largest cities. Given that they will be the economic hubs of Northern Ireland, easy transport between them is essential to the smooth running of our economy. As a result, it is crucial that the infrastructure be appropriate. I welcome the presence of the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Kennedy. Somebody said that it would have been useful if the Minister of Finance and Personnel had been available, but on this occasion, not like the last, we at least have a Minister present.

I want to talk about the public transport infrastructure, which is where we should focus our efforts in supporting the motion. The train service between Derry and Belfast is a crucial part of the infrastructure, and it is a wonderful service for the towns that are part of the route. However, as has been said, it serves only the towns at which the trains stop. We should look to bolster that with an integrated transport system that would provide a simple way for people to travel to stations to catch the train, whether by private car or, preferably, public transport. Safe cycle storage should also be part of those plans. Likewise, bus transport should be more available to people who do not live close to the railways. I would be interested to see whether the bus service between Belfast and the Giant's Causeway could be increased to make it easier for tourists to visit that fantastic location. That would be one way of using public transport to stimulate our tourist industry in that area.

As a realist, I know that the roads system is a key part of the transport infrastructure. That is not only because we need to build roads for buses to go on but because it is likely to be the default transport method for many in the future. As a result, I ask the Department for Regional Development to begin to undertake a thorough survey of how roads infrastructure is coping and whether there are any specific bottlenecks or other issues that restrict the free flow of transport. There will be specific local issues that could be fed into that. It could be a useful role for the new councils to highlight those and work with the Department to remedy them.

I have long believed that the north coast is a particularly important part of Northern Ireland for its tourist potential and for providing a link between Belfast and the north-west of this region. An efficient transport system for the area is vital. As a member of the Regional Development Committee, I encourage the Minister to support the motion and take the necessary action to invest in and upgrade the infrastructure of roads and transport around the north coast.

Mr McQuillan: I am sure that many people are all too aware of the beauty and attractiveness of the north coast of this Province. The Giant's Causeway, the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, Dunluce castle, Portrush, Portstewart and Coleraine are all major attractions, with world-leading events such as the North West 200 and the Auld Lammas Fair attracting many thousands of tourists and visitors to the Province. The Giant's Causeway is, without doubt, the largest and most attractive of the entire natural heritage we have to offer. It

attracted over 750,000 people in 2013. The Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge attracted over 250,000 people.

On the back of the motion, the BBC news correspondent Andy West decided that he would try today to get from Belfast to the Giant's Causeway by public transport. He left the Europa Buscentre at 11.40 am on bus route 252 to Coleraine at a cost of £11.50 one way. After numerous stops and one changeover at Coleraine, he arrived at the causeway at 3.14 pm, which is a travel time of three and a half hours. The question to the Minister is this: is that acceptable? Does it provide the most direct route to our largest tourist attraction from our capital city? The visitor figures are magnificent, and they demonstrate the attractions that the north coast has to offer, as well as its market value.

I also mention Rathlin Island and, particularly, the Rathlin ferry, which provides first-class transport to and from the island. It is important that that service is maintained and supported.

In 2013, when Londonderry was the UK City of Culture, an investment was made in the Coleraine to Londonderry railway line. That was in response to the demand to maintain the existence of the railway line to that historic part of Ulster in its 400th year as a walled city. I want to see that sort of investment in the north coast. The Causeway Coast and Glens tourist area plan 2012-17 states that the 2012 baseline provided for growth, especially in the wake of the opening of the new causeway visitor centre and the Irish Open at Portrush. There is, therefore, room for improvement and building on some of the best figures in Northern Ireland.

The motion calls for more investment in the transport infrastructure of the north coast. I echo the call for the Minister for Regional Development to act. Investment in the transport infrastructure would offer better access to the north coast, easy access being the foothold of any business. Such an investment would offer better access to the north coast and the north-west region in order to manage demand better, as well as to attract more visitors and tourists with more efficient transport infrastructure. It would offer an investment in the present market and in the future, presenting a legacy that will sustain tourism in this part of our Province for decades to come.

Tourism is the heart of economic activity in my constituency. It sustains a significant part of the private sector in the form of small and medium-sized businesses such as retail outlets and

accommodation. We must build on that and not ignore facts. The north coast offers the most attractive of places outside Belfast for visitors and tourists. Reducing travel time from Belfast and a more open and efficient transport system will make it even more attractive as a tourist destination, as well as opening up the travel corridor between Northern Ireland's two largest cities. This will offer an economic legacy in attracting more foreign direct investment and will increase our exports through a more reliable and accessible transport system that is open to the main ports and airports in Northern Ireland.

As well as attracting tourism, the north coast covers a large rural network with many businesses such as engineering and farming, to mention a few. Those businesses need the support of sustainable roads that are maintained and upgraded to meet demand. That has not been the case. There are many roads around the north coast, in particular, the A29 from the Bushtown Road roundabout at Coleraine to Garvagh, which has been neglected and is in a poor condition. Parts of the route are eroding into two tracks making it difficult to drive on. I have contacted the Minister about this stretch of road on at least three occasions but, as yet, to no avail. This is the main arterial route from mid-Ulster to the north coast and should, in my opinion, be a priority.

Another issue that is constantly raised with me is the deployment of the red coats on the north coast, particularly in the rural towns of Garvagh and Kilrea, which results in visitors being deterred from stopping and shopping in small, independent businesses in such towns and forces them into larger towns and supermarkets. I ask the Minister to review the deployment of red coats in such an area.

I commend the motion to the House and call on the Minister to act, especially as we are coming into a new budgetary period and given the news that the Open championship is to be staged in Portrush as early as 2019.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin seo. I support the motion, but I am surprised and disappointed that my amendment was not allowed as it sought to further define what is meant by the north coast and the north-west.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that we should not discuss an amendment that was not selected. We are here to discuss the motion.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I suppose that, strictly speaking, the north coast of the North is what lies between Derry in the west and Belfast in the east. It is, therefore, through these two cities that many of our visitors filter. Two of the major bottlenecks in the North are on the A6, at Dungiven and Moneynick, and it is with great frustration and vexation that I see that those works have not progressed with urgency given the economic and tourist development that would accrue. Likewise, delivery of the A5 project would be of great benefit to the entire North. That said, I welcome the commencement of work on the A26 at Frosses and the announcement of the Magherafelt bypass.

The delivery of all these infrastructure projects will be a game changer for the wide variety of events that are on or may come. Today's announcement on the Open is very welcome, as would any announcement be on the all-Ireland fleadh, an Irish City of Culture in 2016 and the possibility of the European City of Culture being in Derry at a later date. That is as well as the top-flight events that we already have, such as the Milk and Foyle cups, the North West 200, the Auld Lammas Fair and visitor attractions such as Roe Valley Country Park, Bushmills, the blue flag beaches and, of course, the causeway.

Phase 1 of the Derry to Coleraine railway line has been completed, and phase 2 will hopefully start soon. This investment, whilst welcome, has unfortunately not led to an improved service time. Indeed, in a unique challenge next week, two of my constituents will attempt to highlight the dreadful amount of time taken by the Derry to Belfast train. Peter will leave the general post office in Derry, walk across the Peace Bridge and board the Belfast-bound train. John will also leave the GPO in Derry on his bicycle and will attempt to reach the central post office in Belfast before Peter. It will be a damning indictment if John were to come in first or even close after. By the way, the train takes nearly two and a half hours, and the distance by road is 75 miles.

Another vital piece of infrastructure that receives no subvention from either Government is the Greencastle to Magilligan ferry, which has carried millions of passengers over the years and can now operate only on a limited and seasonal timetable, a sure impediment to tourists and to social and economic development. A modest investment there would surely increase the number of visitors to the north coast. Indeed some years ago, when I was chair of the North West Region Cross

Border Group, which included many of the councils in the area, we commissioned a report that showed that two thirds of travellers were going on to visit a north coast attraction or to shop locally. Likewise, the EuroVelo route that traverses the North was intended to attract higher spending cyclists from across Europe who wished to visit the most spectacular scenery in western Europe. It unfortunately does neither, and studiously ignores the north coast and its attractions. The possibility of the reopening of the Ulster canal would open up limitless opportunities in tourism. The idea that, once again, we could travel from Coleraine to Limerick, Dublin and Galway by boat would be absolutely wonderful.

The motion calls for an adequate investment in infrastructure in the area and that should include high-speed broadband and enterprise zones as well as transport infrastructure. I support the motion.

5.00 pm

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I welcome the debate, because the transport infrastructure that we have on the north coast, from Belfast to Larne, taking in the glens and right through to Donegal, is not up to standard for today.

One thing that nobody has mentioned, and I will dwell on it for a minute, is the question of health. More and more people are being sent to the hospital in Antrim, and more and more people from my area and around Ballycastle are being sent to Coleraine. If the Minister, under Transforming Your Care, closes some of the present services in Coleraine, those people will then go on to Altnagelvin, which will cause bigger problems. At present, we have no transport to take people to Altnagelvin or even to Coleraine. You are in the hands of private hire.

I experienced the situation myself when I was attending the cancer unit in the City Hospital. To get from the glens or Ballycastle to the City Hospital takes far too long on the bus. You either go on private transport, or if you can get the train to suit your appointment, that is fine. However, if you go to Antrim Hospital from the glens or Ballycastle, you have to take three bus journeys. You can get to Belfast on one bus, but you cannot get to Antrim. Three journeys is far too long. Imagine some of our older people going to Antrim Hospital for a check-up and having to sit there all day waiting to coincide with the three buses before getting home. You

could leave home at 8.00 am or 9.00 am and not get home again until 7.00 pm or 8.00 pm. It is not uncommon for that to happen. I ask the Minister to look at that.

Special needs children from the Ballycastle and glens area who get their education in Ballymena because of its special needs schools are being sent to Ballycastle and Coleraine to see paediatricians. That means that their parents have to take them out of school and then go to Coleraine. The whole thing is not coordinated. If the people in the hospitals would coordinate appointments to suit the bus journeys, or see whether appointments do suit before giving them out, it would make things a lot better, especially for those with special needs who have to go all over the country to get to their appointments. My daughter goes to Coleraine and Ballycastle. She hardly ever goes to Antrim Hospital. She goes all around the place to get to her appointments, and you have to go to Ballymena to take her out of school. I ask the Minister to bear that in mind.

I have been in the tourist industry for over 25 years, and, on the north coast, it has never improved. We have had countless documents and reports. We are now on to our second master plan report, and still nothing has been done. My party colleague Daithí McKay mentioned the bus services coming through — the two Goldliners — in the summertime. When they come to the glens, they are full. They are packed in Belfast so cannot pick anybody up along the coast. My party colleague Cara McShane, who was the chair of Moyle Council, wrote to the Minister on the problems that that was causing in Ballycastle and Ballintoy. We have still not sorted that one out yet. Why send out one bus when it is full before it even gets a quarter of the way along the route to pick up people who cannot then get on?

One Member mentioned the Budget and the carve-up between the DUP and Sinn Féin, but the Budget was an Executive thing, so I do not know where the Member was. Arlene Foster's Programme for Government highlights the north coast, the Antrim coast and the glens, to which we must pay more attention. The one good thing that we did get out of it, which would have been a big draw for tourism, is the national park.

I ask you, Minister, to look at bus journeys for people attending hospital and for those young people who are asked to sign on at a job centre and go for interviews. You go to Ballymoney for interviews and end up having to spend the whole day there waiting for a bus to come back again.

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

Mr McMullan: That is the same when you go to Ballymena.

I support the motion, but I ask the Minister to look at the bus times.

Mr Allister: I welcome and support the motion. I begin by commending the Minister for the fact that, when he came to office, he grasped the issue of the long-neglected A26 improvement, and steps are now afoot to extend somewhat the dual carriageway up to the Ballycastle junction. I suppose that the problem for the Minister is that, when he does something positive like that, he but whets our appetite for more. Rather than him thinking that he has done his bit for north Antrim and east Londonderry, I want to disabuse him of that idea and assure him that, collectively, we are looking for more. We do not want just a quality road to the turn-off at Ballycastle but a quality dual carriageway right through to Coleraine. That spine road is the key to the opening up of the entire north coast area and the exploitation of its full potential. Rather than resting on his laurels — yes, the Minister can collect the accolades for getting something done about the A26 and is entitled to do so — you cause us to want you to finish the job. That should be his ambition and his achievement in that regard.

I also commend the Minister for the manner in which he took an interest in, saw improvements to and is seeing improvements to the railway connection through to Londonderry. I urge him to never forget the fact the Ballymena station still needs considerable improvement and that we need the extension to the park-and-ride facility to really exploit and take full advantage of that. There is much being done, but there is much to be done, and I trust that the Minister will take those remarks in that spirit and continue to aim to please in regard to those matters.

Some useful points have been made in the debate. Mr McQuillan made the point that, to go by public bus from Belfast to the Giant's Causeway, our prime tourist attraction, it can take as long as three and a half hours. That just should not be. Surely, particularly in the summer season, it is possible to have a better facility than that.

I draw a particular gripe to the Minister's attention. There are many day trips to the north coast by coach tour, but one of the complaints that has been raised with me is that they come and return again on the same day. One of the

reasons that has been suggested for that is that there is no adequate de-sludging facility on the north coast to decant the sewage on the tour buses. Surely that can be addressed so that, instead of having to return to Belfast to cope with that problem, the coaches and buses can have a facility in or about the north coast. That could encourage overnight stays and longer coach tours to the north coast.

It is practical issues like that that, as well as the grand gestures like improving the spine structures of the road and the railways, will in fact, bit by bit, make a difference. The Minister has proven himself to be a listening Minister, and I think that he will also be listening on the small details and will continue to press forward with those issues. I am sure that many of us will continue to press him on those issues as well.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I thank all Members who made a contribution to what has proved to be an interesting debate on this important motion. On probably the hottest day of the year, there has been a sense of a Santa's wish list. I hope to deal with many, if not all, of the points that Members raised, and I will endeavour to do so.

As Members are aware, investment in the transport infrastructure at and leading to the north coast is very important to me, and I want to stress that. We could have no better day than today, with the wonderful announcement of the return of the Open to Royal Portrush in 2019, to debate this important motion. We have a number of years to plan for the event, which is much longer than the months' notice of the Irish Open being held there in 2012. I believe that having that time will strengthen my hand around the Executive table in securing greater funding for transport in the north coast region, with the support, I hope, of Members who made contributions here today.

I want to remind Members of some of the key messages about the overall importance of transport, specific transport investment on the north coast and future transport plans in the area. Transport is a key component of fully developing our region economically, socially and environmentally. I am taken by the point raised about using the Open as a focus to target increasing the frequency of rail services on the Coleraine-Belfast line. We have plans in place to dual the Dargan bridge when we undertake work on the York Street interchange, which will remove the bottleneck for services entering Belfast. It seems perfectly sensible to me that we move forward with the infrastructure to expand the half-hourly service on this line,

and, of course, I will look for support across the House to press the Executive and the Finance Minister in particular to get behind the proposal. As an Ulster Unionist Minister, I am proud to have saved the Londonderry-Coleraine line. It was earmarked for closure when I took office, and it will soon move to an hourly service by 2016, hopefully, on the completion of phase 2.

In April, I underlined my commitment to rail travel with the publication of the 'Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy', which set out how we should take forward and prioritise railway investment up to 2035. We now have 13.2 million rail passengers annually, and I am committed to further enhancing their experience. I am committed to building an integrated, modern, reliable and environmentally efficient transportation network that meets the needs of communities and business.

I think that better transport infrastructure improves capacity, and better connectivity boosts trade and creates balanced growth and prosperity. It is essential, therefore, that we invest properly in the transport network across Northern Ireland, especially in areas that need assistance to achieve their considerable potential. That includes the north coast, which, with its unrivalled beaches and scenery, is one of our prime tourist destinations, and home, of course, to our only UNESCO world heritage site. I was interested in the report by Andy West on behalf of the BBC on how long it took to get to the Giant's Causeway. I understand that, and there are issues and challenges for us, but I believe that we can meet the challenges. I am mindful that the north coast, in addition to its world-famous scenic drives and railway journeys, is more than just a place to visit.

Communities live there, and businesses operate amid that breathtaking scenery. It is vital that we create high-quality local and regional transport connections to provide access to major towns and gateways. That ensures that goods and markets and workers and jobs can link seamlessly. I want to see local businesses expand their markets across Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland and throughout the European Union and beyond.

5.15 pm

I think that I have demonstrated my commitment to regional connectivity through major investment in road and rail projects with a direct and lasting benefit to the north coast. That includes the ongoing construction of the A8 dual carriageway to Larne to act as a

gateway to the coast road and the port of Larne, a major upgrade that is under way at the A26 outside Ballymoney and improved access to the airport outside Londonderry at Eglinton. I have further plans to improve the A6 between Londonderry and Dungiven and the A26 all the way to Coleraine, subject to future budget settlements. Those are in addition to numerous investments at local level to improve junctions, roundabouts, footpaths and cycleways along the north coast to provide a better and safer journey for everyone, to help access public services and to reduce traffic delays at peak times such as bank holiday weekends.

Providing better transport infrastructure through ongoing and substantial investment will support the growth of the economy, enhance the quality of life for all and reduce the environmental impact of transport. That means that the people of Northern Ireland will have better access to education, training, employment, healthcare and other key services. All of those topics were raised by Members in one form or another this afternoon. It means that goods and people, including tourists, will be able to travel quickly and efficiently in the north coast area and further afield.

The railway improvements align with the significant investment that my Department is taking forward through Translink and Transport NI to bring forward a number of key transport projects that align with the Londonderry One Plan. I recently announced new plans to bring forward an integrated transport hub on the site of the old Waterside station in Londonderry as part of my commitment to support the One Plan. Consolidating Londonderry's position in Northern Ireland as a crucial economic driver in the region is an essential goal to be achieved. It is important to remember that balanced regional growth must be achieved if we are to eradicate pockets of underinvestment and deprivation, such as those in the north-west.

In addition to improvement in rail, my Department has invested in the purchase of new buses, many of which service the north coast and the surrounding area. Some of them were even built in the area that we are talking about. My Department also provides support to North Coast Community Transport to provide transport options for its members who live in a rural area but cannot readily access public transport services because of reduced mobility. It further provides support to Disability Action to assist people in urban areas who cannot use mainstream public transport because of illness or disability.

Translink regularly engages with stakeholders to develop services to key attractions and to towns and villages and for school services on the north coast. Indeed, access to tourist sites by public transport is a priority, and I am proud to support the Causeway Rambler service, which provides excellent value and frequent services to some of the north coast's top visitor attractions, such as the Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge and Dunluce castle. Translink has also negotiated discounted admission at several of those attractions for visitors holding a valid Translink ticket. We are doing much, and, yes, there is much more to do.

In recent years, the north coast has attracted a number of world-class international sporting events, such as the Irish Open in Portrush and, more recently of course, the Giro d'Italia. I am very proud indeed that my Department has been instrumental in giving hundreds of thousands of people the opportunity to participate in these occasions, which showcase the best that our region has to offer while benefiting our economy through supporting local businesses and ensuring minimum disruption to local communities.

The North West 200, of course, remains a highlight of the European motorcycle racing calendar, and good transport infrastructure is essential for events such as these to be successful for competitors and fans. My Department has worked closely and will continue to work closely with race organisers to ensure that the event runs smoothly, and the recent Road Races (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 increases flexibility for organisers to complete their events, even in adverse weather conditions. When we talk about the legacy of such events, we can say that our improved transport infrastructure has been an enabler and that tourism is an opportunity that we can seize and run with to showcase the very best that Northern Ireland has to offer.

While much has been done — I thank those who acknowledged that — I recognise that much more work needs to be done to rebalance and rebuild our economy. My Department is developing a transport delivery plan that sets out proposals for future investment in Northern Ireland's transport infrastructure. It is imperative that the Executive properly invest in transport to allow us to create an integrated, modern, reliable and environmentally efficient transportation network and support efforts to secure European funding for key projects. Hence, I take the opportunity to urge Executive colleagues to acknowledge and support ambitious investment in transportation

infrastructure not only on the north coast but across Northern Ireland.

I welcome the views expressed by Members and the opportunity to have this discussion. I fully support the motion. Before briefly referring to some of the contributions, I reiterate the importance of transportation to Northern Ireland. It is a vital component of our economy. The stronger our transportation, the better the rate of growth and the greater the improvement in living standards. I therefore hope that Members see that transportation funding is a win-win for everyone and that it will play an integral role in ensuring that Northern Ireland maximises its potential and enhances its attractiveness and competitiveness as a region to do business in, to visit and to invest in and for our constituents to live in.

Many Members extolled the virtues of the area's scenery and its tourism potential, including Mr George Robinson, who had quite a list of work that he still needs to see progress on, and I took careful note of that. Mr McKay is aware of the baby boom on Rathlin, and that is really good news. I can claim credit for some things, but I do not think that I can claim credit for that. John Dallat was kind in his references to what we have done to restore and save the Coleraine to Londonderry rail line, and he saw and identified other potential schemes. Robin Swann referred to the Open and today's very good and welcome news. He also spoke about the success that was the Giro d'Italia and, of course, the rural and community transport that we already provide, which is important. Unfortunately, some people have tried to make mischief about that, but we provide it and will continue to do so. Kieran McCarthy spoke of the importance of improving infrastructure. Adrian McQuillan, again, had a list of things to do. He even brought in the red coats in Garvagh.

It was quite a wide-ranging debate. Cathal Ó hOisín has voiced frustration about the Dungiven bypass, and he well documented that again today. Oliver McMullan dealt with a lot of issues that impact on health, and some of those are the responsibility of the Health Minister. However, —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Minister to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Kennedy: — a coordinated response that meant better cooperation between Departments would be helpful. Of course, Jim Allister wants de-sludging of tour buses so that people can leave more than their mark in the north Antrim area.

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

Mr Kennedy: It is a serious issue, and we will give it consideration.

Mr Campbell: As the Minister said, it was a wide-ranging debate. It is coincidental but entirely fitting that it should take place on the red-letter day that it is: after what we hope will be no more than about 68 years, the Open will return to its rightful place, which is in Royal Portrush.

A number of Members referred to the tourism potential that Northern Ireland and the north coast have. A number of Members indicated that it was a wide-ranging debate. I think both Mr Dallat and Mr Ó hOisín managed to get in the A5. I know there is an ongoing issue about what constitutes the north coast and the north-west, because nobody has clearly defined views, but to go to the A5 is probably stretching it by about 40 miles. Broadly speaking, I think that most people would accept that that is the case.

A number of issues merited inclusion in the debate. Mr Robinson, in proposing, talked about the cost of congestion if we did not get the road and rail infrastructure correct, which is very true. The issue of Rathlin was raised by Daithí McKay and at least two others, I think. The issue of the Open golf, of course, permeated the debate.

The A26 dualling has been referred to not just in this debate but over a number of years. The Minister, quite rightly, has claimed the credit for investing over £8 million of the Budget in what I hope will be the first of a number of schemes that will see the length of the A26 dualled. Any photographic help that we can give will obviously be available and, hopefully, on time, as it was on previous occasions. I am glad that Mr Swann referred to that. I would not have liked that to be ignored or overlooked.

Mr McQuillan talked about some of the tourism hotspots. He also referred, as did the Minister, to the Andy West issue of the travel time between Belfast and the Giant's Causeway. On this, I ask for the Minister's listening ear, because, while today is a red-letter day and an excellent day, hopefully as we get towards the time to ensure everything is in place for the Open to return to Royal Portrush, the one thing we do not want and must avoid at all costs is further headlines about the time it takes to get from A to B, whether it is in the New York papers or the French newspapers or any

international media that could try to put a negative spin on what is a good news story. To avoid that, we have to get the efficiencies in transportation, whether road or rail.

Mr Allister alluded to the Ballymena station, and I am sure that the Minister will have heard that. Mr Ó hOisín talked about the Dungiven dualling, and I am sure the Minister is committed to that. Also, community transport was mentioned and the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry.

All in all, the debate showed what significant and tremendous benefits there are, not just on the north coast, however you define the north coast or north-west, but the jewel that Northern Ireland is in terms of tourism throughout these islands. The reason for tabling the motion is to ensure that people can get to these events. Many events were mentioned — we hope that their number will be expanded — but the key driver, not to use a pun, will be making sure that people are able to get to them. There is not much point in having the best air show in these islands if people are stuck in traffic trying to get there or get away, nor is there much point in having the best youth football tournament if people have difficulty getting to it. With the Open, because of the sheer numbers involved, the same principle applies.

The Minister has responded well. We hope that he will put meat on the bones of his promises, and we will do whatever we can to bring pressure to bear in these austere times as we try to leverage money into an exceptionally worthwhile cause.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls upon the Minister for Regional Development to invest in the transport infrastructure at, and leading to, the north coast to assist the commercial, commuter and tourist sectors of the economy.

Adjourned at 5.31 pm.



information & publishing solutions

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

and available from:

Online
www.tsoshop.co.uk

Mail, Telephone, Fax & E-mail

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

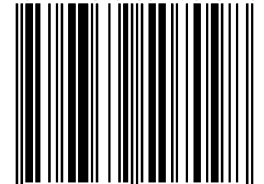
TSO@Blackwell and other Accredited Agents

ISSN 1463-7162

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

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

ISBN 978-0-339-50709-8



9 780339 507098