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Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 1 July 2014

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr P Ramsey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As we have a long day ahead of us, are you minded to relax the guidance on the wearing of jackets?

Mr Speaker: Yes. I am very happy with the point of order that the Member raises.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week, there was what was billed as an important announcement about the future of single farm payments. It was made outside the House, and the Minister has had the opportunity, yesterday and today, to come to the House and make a statement about that important matter. Is there any explanation why there is no statement on single farm payments and the future of CAP in Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: As the Member will know, I always encourage Ministers to come to the House. I do that continually. The Member will know that, under Standing Orders, I have no power to pull Ministers into the Chamber. It is an important issue, but those decisions very much rest with the Executive and with individual Ministers.

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week, I unavoidably missed a question at one of the Question Time sessions. My colleague Mr Ramsey tried, I think, to communicate with your office that I was called at short notice to a hospital where a close friend was undergoing emergency surgery. As a consequence, I was absent. So, apologies to the House, but there were extenuating circumstances.

Mr Speaker: I understand that there are some circumstances where Members just cannot be in the House. I appreciate the Member coming to the House and apologising.

Public Petition: Loane House, Dungannon

Mr Speaker: Bronwyn McGahan has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject matter.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Over 8,000 people have signed this petition, and, on behalf of Sinn Féin, I want to take this opportunity to thank the businesses in Dungannon town, the Clogher valley, Blackwatertown and the Torrent area. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Eithne McCord of the South Tyrone hospital forum. I want to thank members of other political parties who also contributed to this petition, and, last but not least, I want to thank my own parish of Killeeshil, which also greatly assisted us.

In its consultation, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is proposing to close Loane House. There are 45 non-acute beds in Loane House, and eight of those are for stroke patients. A multidisciplinary team of professionals provides care to patients with medical and rehabilitation needs during their stay in Loane House. The closure of Loane House would lead to the further blocking of acute beds in the trust's two acute hospitals, neither of which can cope with their workload as things stand.

There are equality issues, in particular when it comes to gender, as most of the workforce are women. There is an equality issue around age, in particular for those aged 65-plus, and for people with disabilities. There is also an equality issue for people who live in rural areas who will have to travel considerable distances to access services if Loane House closes. The Southern Trust states that it finds it quite challenging to provide equality of access to services. To be quite frank, I find that not good enough. NHS chief, Simon Stevens, recently stated that community hospitals should play a greater role in the care of older people. Loane

House in Dungannon meets that criteria, and I ask the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to ensure that the facility remains open.

Ms McGahan moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward the petition to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and send a copy to the Chair of the Health Committee, Maeve McLaughlin.

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson replace Mr Samuel Gardiner as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Mr Danny Kinahan replace Mrs Sandra Overend as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Mrs Sandra Overend replace Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson as a member of the Committee for Education; that Mr Tom Elliott replace Mr Robin Swann as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; and that Mrs Sandra Overend replace Mr Tom Elliott as a member of the Committee for the Environment, with effect from Friday 4 July 2014.

Assembly Commission Membership

Mr Speaker: As required under Standing Order 79(4), I wish to inform the Assembly that Mr Lesley Cree has given notice of his resignation as a member of the Assembly Commission, with effect from 4 July 2014. Therefore, a vacancy on the Commission will exist. The motion to fill that vacancy will be treated as a business motion. There will, therefore, be no debate. Before we proceed, I advise Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That, in accordance with Standing Order 79(4), Mr Samuel Gardiner be appointed to fill a vacancy on the Assembly Commission, with effect from Friday 4 July 2014.

Ministerial Statements

Review of Initial Teacher Education Infrastructure in Northern Ireland: Stage 2 Report

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Today, I am publishing 'Aspiring to Excellence', the final report of the international review panel on the structure of initial teacher education in Northern Ireland. The report constitutes the key aspect of stage 2 of the review of the teacher training infrastructure. Members will recall that, in November 2011, I announced this two-stage review. The first stage was an objective analysis of the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. The focus of the second stage was designed to set out options for an educationally excellent, financially sustainable and more shared and integrated approach to the delivery and funding of teacher training.

When I assumed office in May 2011, a consultation exercise had been initiated by my predecessor into a then recommended merger between Queen's University and Stranmillis University College. However, it was clear that there was not sufficient support in the Assembly to take forward the necessary legislation to implement it. Therefore, at that stage, while keeping on the table the option of that particular merger proceeding, I took the opportunity to take a more holistic view of our teacher training infrastructure.

It struck me that with five different providers of initial teacher education for a population of 1.8 million, our system was very fragmented and inefficient. It was also apparent that, while all the institutions were open to everyone irrespective of their background, there is, nevertheless, considerable religious separation in the training of teachers. At a time when greater efforts are being made to promote more sharing and integration in our education system as a whole, it was debatable how far this could go in practice if sharing in teacher training was itself not yet being maximised. Therefore, in November 2011, I made a statement to the Assembly to initiate the two-stage review.

For the first stage, independent consultants Grant Thornton were appointed to carry out an analysis of the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. This was reported to the Assembly through a statement in May 2013. That study found that the cost of training teachers in the university colleges is significantly higher than elsewhere,

and it provided sufficient evidence to signal the need to examine the case for reform. While the unit of funding was historically linked to that used in England, it was then enhanced in Northern Ireland by several premia. These payments were intended to compensate the colleges for the unavoidable additional costs incurred as a result of their small size and other diseconomies of scale. The primary objective was to ensure the sustainability of the two colleges.

Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College are the only teacher training establishments in the UK that receive premia additional to their core funding. This amounts to over £2 million per annum and has led to significant differences in the costs incurred in training a teacher here compared with elsewhere. In 2011-12, the cost of training a teacher in the colleges in Northern Ireland was almost 40% higher than in the comparator English institutions cited in the report. The annual cost of training a teacher in our university colleges is also significantly higher than the average cost of training a teacher at our local universities. One year of a BEd course at St Mary's and Stranmillis costs the taxpayer 32% more than a one-year postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) course at Queen's University or the University of Ulster.

Furthermore, these differential costs are not the full story. The teacher training activities in the two university colleges are further supported by income from my Department for non-teacher training courses in other areas. The funding provided to the two colleges for those places amounts to almost £2 million a year. Notwithstanding their inherent value, there is clearly a substantial opportunity cost attached to them, particularly in light of the economy's need for more graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Even with these de facto subsidies, there are questions regarding the medium-term financial sustainability of the colleges, and without those subsidies, their future would be in even greater peril. In summary, our two university colleges are highly dependent on the number of teachers being trained, on the levels of grant per student and on funding for non-teacher education courses to remain financially viable.

On the back of that stage 1 report, I announced that I would proceed to stage 2 of the review. The terms of reference for this stage focused on the need to examine the case for the reform of teacher education provision in Northern Ireland and whether the funding being provided

could be better used by the teacher training institutions if they were prepared to move towards a more shared or integrated system.

In September last year, I appointed a panel of international education experts to conduct the review. The panel consisted of a team of five international education experts: Dr Pasi Sahlberg, Professor Patricia Broadfoot, Professor John Coolahan, Professor John Furlong and Professor Gordon Kirk.

I would like to record my appreciation to the panel for the significant contribution that each of them made to understanding the complexities of our current teacher education provision and for using the information that they gathered, alongside their own knowledge and experience, to focus on how best to develop the Northern Ireland teacher education infrastructure in order to facilitate world-class teacher training.

10.45 am

Initially, the review panel provided an overview of current best practice in the field of initial teacher education provision internationally. Following that, teacher education providers and other stakeholders were invited to make submissions outlining their vision for the structures necessary to create a world-class system of initial teacher education that would also enhance and improve sharing and integration. Over 100 submissions were received and all were considered by the panel.

The panel then directly engaged with each of the five initial teacher education providers and other relevant stakeholders. The discussions focused on the international trends identified by the panel and the issues raised in the stakeholders' submissions.

The panel presented me with its report before the end of June deadline. In the interests of transparency, I have decided to publish it immediately. I urge MLAs, stakeholders and the wider public to read the full report and form their own judgment. For now, I will provide a summary and briefly set out the way forward.

The panel recognised the quality of many aspects of the current teacher training provision, including endorsement by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GCTNI); very positive evaluations from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI); alignment with the standards of university quality assurance regimes; and high rating in the National Student Survey. It also recognised a commitment from all the providers to participating in shared education and preparing

students for an increasingly shared educational environment.

Nevertheless, it also pointed to significant weaknesses in the existing provision, such as its size and relatively fragmented nature and its quality when judged against international standards. It commented on the lack of an overarching Northern Ireland teacher education strategy and urged that such a strategy be developed. It noted a disjoint between initial teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD) and interpreted its terms of reference to focus on the necessary institutional design to address both aspects of teacher education. It further observed that, notwithstanding the existing partnerships between the institutions, the potential for collaboration was not yet fully developed. Finally, it reflected upon an uneven research performance between the universities and the teacher training colleges.

The panel also pointed to a number of anomalies and inequities in the current system. The first was the differential access for students in different institutions to the certificate in religious education. The second was the implications that arose from there being two different admissions procedures. It also noted the difficulties arising from the imposition of non-departmental public body (NDPB) status on the teacher training colleges by the Office for National Statistics.

The panel has given the study a key international focus, analysing international trends in teacher education and identifying them as principles that should underpin a world-class system of teacher education here, and it examined local provision in light of those principles.

The panel emphasises that programmes should be academically strong, practice focused and based on relevant research. In particular, it was keen to stress the importance of the intellectual underpinning of provision, especially the need for practice-focused teacher education built on relevant educational research.

On that, the panel states:

"In our view, teacher education in Northern Ireland needs to be strengthened academically and cognitively. Provision has not yet been sufficiently infused with the intellectual power which university involvement in teacher education makes possible. That intellectual power derives from the universities' research activities. Like any other field of human endeavour,

teaching requires a continuing pursuit of fresh ways of conceptualising, innovative approaches to professional action, and more sophisticated appraisals of how human learning is to be facilitated. All of those involved in teacher education in Northern Ireland must therefore make more determined efforts to bring to the education of teachers and their continuing professional development the fruits of research and other scholarly activity. Without recourse to the findings of such activity teacher education will stagnate and the quality of the education provided by the schools will slip into steady decline, with irreparable damage to the life chances of young people, the country's economic standing and its social well-being."

It also noted that the OECD has recently placed a strong focus on the importance of quality teacher education as a driver for improved educational performance and recommended that teacher training have closer links to universities or university-like institutions.

Across all societies, but in particular given the context of Northern Ireland, it maintains that teacher education should be pluralist, in that it acknowledges the competing interpretations of teacher education and its nature and purpose. The panel viewed that as including the Catholic tradition, other faith traditions, those agnostic on faith matters and specific preparation for a more integrated or shared approach.

In turn, the panel, while recognising that teacher education provision in Northern Ireland should recognise and support different philosophies of teacher education, believes that more should be done to support a shared approach to teacher education. It maintains that pluralism cannot be accepted in isolation of a complementary commitment to sharing.

For instance, it states:

"we maintain that all programmes of teacher education, irrespective of the tradition to which they adhere and within which they operate, should make provision for students of different faith and none to engage with each other across existing lines of social division, through at least the shared use of premises, where possible, through mixed classes, through shared teaching and other forms of social engagement, which bring students from different faith traditions into full participation in forms of activity that increase mutual understanding."

The panel sets out that the establishment of a world-class teacher education system can best be fostered in a certain context. It emphasises four particular elements: an agency or body providing strategic direction for teacher education; an agreed pattern of teacher education programmes; the introduction of a more rational and dependable system of workforce planning; and the effective use of resources.

It is fair to say that the issues involved impact on the work of the Department of Education and my Department. In the report, the panel makes it clear that, in the overall interest of promoting the quality of teacher education, it is hoped that both Departments can work together on the issues. In making that clear, the panel also stressed at many points in the report that comments on the wider teacher training and educational context are not intended to be formal recommendations to the Department of Education. Rather, they should be seen as an articulation of the best circumstances for a successful institutional model.

Four options have been identified for reconfiguring the infrastructure of initial teacher education in Northern Ireland. Each is evaluated by the panel with reference to four key criteria: sustaining and building on existing quality; securing the efficient use of resources; the need to respect pluralism, including different faith traditions; and practicality of implementation.

The panel has rejected the status quo as an option, commenting that it is not robust enough to deliver the change that is required. While recognising that the options proposed differed in character, the panel detailed a number of common features that should be exhibited under each, including that every teacher education course should include a programme of shared education and that all undergraduate recruits should apply through the UCAS system.

The first option, option A, is a collaborative partnership. Under that, initial teacher education would continue to be provided by all four current providers. St Mary's and Stranmillis would continue to exist as autonomous colleges but in an enhanced partnership. It would be a condition of the funding grant to Queen's University, Stranmillis and St Mary's, that they be required to work more closely together, with QUB actively exercising its role as the validating university in the collaborative delivery of a comprehensive programme of initial teacher education, induction and in-service training.

Option B provides for a two-centre model, including a Belfast institute of education. Under that model, there would be two main centres for teacher education in Northern Ireland. The first, based at the University of Ulster, would concentrate its provision in the north-west, including developing its CPD role.

For the second centre, provision in Belfast would build on the existing academic relationship between Queen's and the university colleges to create a QUB institute of education. St Mary's and Stranmillis colleges would continue to exist in their current locations, although with a somewhat changed role and constitutional status.

The institute would offer a single undergraduate BEd programme through its two colleges, with the colleges free to develop the majority of their undergraduate teaching in ways that are appropriate for their particular ethos and mission. All other teaching, including for masters degrees, and research would be conducted under the supervision of the institute.

Under option C, initial teacher education would be coordinated as a federation across Northern Ireland. That supra-institutional agency would be entrusted with ensuring that the various institutions achieve greater efficiency and increase standards. The federation would be at the hub of collaborating institutions.

Under the final option, option D, initial teacher education across Northern Ireland would become the responsibility of a single institution — the Northern Ireland institute of education. The institute would have a single budget, a single suite of academic programmes and a single set of academic and support staff. It would have responsibility for coordinating and quality assuring the delivery of initial teacher training and in-service provision across the whole of Northern Ireland. The governance of the institute would be constituted to ensure the long-term protection of the historic mission and ethos of the existing institutions. That could include the provision of a separate religious pathway in the BEd degree, capacity for the activities of chaplains and the continued availability of a chapel for worship.

All the options are set out fully in the report and are evaluated against current international trends in teacher education.

This is a very comprehensive report, covering complex issues, and is worthy of careful consideration. I plan to use the summer months to consider it carefully and recommend

that Members, the current institutions and other stakeholders do the same. As previously indicated, in the autumn, I intend to use the report and the options for discussions with the institutions and other stakeholders, with a view to finding agreement on a configuration of institutions that delivers world-class standards, achieves financial sustainability and promotes greater sharing and integration.

Mr Swann (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister for his statement. This process has been ongoing for quite a while. I, as Chair of the Committee, and members of the Committee possibly thought that the report would bring a more focused final recommendation rather than the four options that are in front of us, but it gives us something to move on from. In the Minister's summarising, he expressed all the positive sides of option D, but he failed to highlight that the panel sees option D as scoring lowest in practicability. Will the Minister still consider that as an option?

I also note that none of the four options overtly tackles the inequalities that are introduced by the Catholic certificate of education. Will the Minister ensure that whatever outcome he pursues will tackle that inequality? Can he also give an assurance that he will include the Committee for Employment and Learning and this House in any final decision?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair for his comments and questions. This has been a long-standing issue before the Assembly. I suppose the question is how far you want to go back. The Chair and I were talking this morning about Lord Londonderry back in the early 1920s taking an interest in these matters. In more recent times, Members will be aware that there were efforts in the Chilver report back in the early 1980s, and, more recently, in the early 2000s, there were similar exercises. My predecessors in the Department initiated the formal consultation around the potential merger of Queen's and Stranmillis, but I think that this is the first time that, under devolution, we have the opportunity for a more holistic view as to the future of the teacher training infrastructure.

The panel was deliberately asked to provide a range of options. That is important because it gives us flexibility for how we take forward discussions with the stakeholders in the autumn. There is no preferred option that the panel has endorsed. While, personally speaking, I have my own views, and I am on record in that regard, I, too, remain open-minded about the option that will find favour and

will be one that we can deliver here in Northern Ireland.

The panel has provided the commentary alongside each of the options that I have outlined today in a brief manner, in the spirit of a statement to the Assembly. While option D is the most radical in its reforms, hence the comment that it is perhaps the least practical to deliver, it is also worth noting that it scores most heavily in improved efficiency and in the delivery of a world-class system of teacher education. So, it is important that we have a rounded view of each of the options. Again, Members and others can consider those in full detail.

Finally, the Chair made comment in relation to access to the certificate of religious education. The panel identified that as being an inequity in the current system. There are two different ways that the issue can be addressed. Outwith my responsibilities as Minister, there is an issue about our equality law in Northern Ireland and whether schools should have the ability to take decisions based on whether someone does or does not have that certificate. That is a matter for OFMDFM and the Department of Education to take forward.

Plan B, as we could perhaps term it, is to ensure a more readily available equality of access for all students to the certificate, which enhances their employment prospects across the board, rather than the situation today, in which those who can access the certificate more readily have a wider range of schools to apply to than those who do not.

The Chairperson also mentioned engagement with the Committee. Ultimately, we will have to consider how decisions are taken, depending on how the discussions go with the stakeholders in the autumn. I am certainly committed to keeping the Committee fully informed of progress. My officials are appearing before the Committee tomorrow to discuss the report, and I know that attempts are being made to organise a session with the panel in the early autumn for further discussion and scrutiny of the report and its options.

11.00 am

Mr Speaker: This is a very important detailed statement to the House. Apart from the Chair, to whom I gave some latitude, there is an extensive list of Members who want to ask a question. Members should not make further statements on the statement; it should be a question on the statement.

Mr Buchanan: I will certainly stick to the question. I thank the Minister for his statement to the House. Will he advise whether any costings have been done for the four options? Will St Mary's adhere to the panel's recommendation that all undergraduate recruits should apply through the UCAS system?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his questions. The options have not been costed as such, but, in terms of finance, we know that the status quo is not sustainable. We made a statement on that already, and Members will be aware of the Grant Thornton report, which sets out the compelling arguments on that situation. It is worth putting it on record that the panel members found the analysis in the Grant Thornton report to be very persuasive.

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

The UCAS issue was addressed by the panel as being an inequity in the system because it means that students can hold offers from Stranmillis and St Mary's at the same time, and St Mary's is maybe in a better position to control entry than Stranmillis. Even though teacher education is sometimes oversubscribed, we have a strange situation in which Stranmillis has had to fill places through clearing at times, because people have had the double admissions option due to the approach that St Mary's has taken. We have encouraged St Mary's to use UCAS and will certainly continue to do that outwith the wider discussions that we want to have over the general way forward.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement to the House. Does he agree that the review cannot consider the future of St Mary's in isolation from its place in the community of west Belfast and further afield? He is also fully aware that our party supports the right of St Mary's to have the financial autonomy and government support that it requires to promote its mission of academic excellence, teacher education, Irish-medium education and access to higher education for disadvantaged groups. I call on the Minister this morning to engage positively with St Mary's and to support the college in developing measures that will ensure its long-term sustainability. It is time to put an end to the years of uncertainty for the college, years in which management has been forced to be preoccupied with the issues. It is clear that St Mary's resolved to remain autonomous. I ask the Minister, in all good faith, to sit down with —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. We are waiting for a question.

Mr F McCann: Does the Minister not believe that it is time to sit down and work with St Mary's on its long-term future and that the purpose of the report is to close St Mary's either through the front door or the back door?

Dr Farry: There is no set agenda for the outcome of the report. Suffice it to say that the status quo is not an option. I am more than happy to sit down with St Mary's to discuss not only the future of the college but the wider system of teacher education in Northern Ireland. The report is designed to facilitate that. I obviously recognise and, indeed, the panel recognised the important place that St Mary's holds in the community, particularly in west Belfast. The panel has gone to great lengths to stress the importance of pluralism in teacher education, and the point about pluralism and diversity is recognised in all the options set out. It is worth stressing that pluralism and diversity can be accommodated through a range of institutional formulas.

Obviously, the public sector contributes very heavily to St Mary's, but we have to bear it in mind that we have to deploy taxpayers' money with a degree of responsibility and efficiency. We do not have an efficient approach to teacher education in Northern Ireland; our costs are out of step with those in teacher education in other parts of these islands and elsewhere. The panel is keen to stress that, if we find efficiencies in the current provision, they should, in the first instance, be reinvested in the improved provision of teacher education. There are ways in which that could be accommodated. We have a duty to look seriously at the way in which public money is used and to consider doing things differently. St Mary's needs to be part of that discussion. We cannot carry on with the way we are doing things at present.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for bringing the report today. He will acknowledge that it has been fairly contentious, and the Committee did not find favour as we went through the process leading up to this.

I refer the Minister to paragraph 8.21 on page 48 of the report, where the colleges will be required, under the new funding arrangements, to increase shared education and engage in greater collaboration. Will the Minister give an assurance to the House that, irrespective of what option goes forward, he will protect and respect the ethos and integrity of each of the institutions and that they will not be financially penalised?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his questions. Obviously, this issue is highly contentious. In some ways, education and the particular issue of teacher education go deep to the heart of identity issues in Northern Ireland. No one is under any illusions that it is anything to the contrary. In terms of the issues around the ethos and identity of the colleges, the options provide different means by which those can be respected as we move forward. There is the issue of whether that is accommodated through different institutions, through the institutions coming together in collaboration or through a single institution. The historical missions and each ethos need to be consolidated and protected in the new designs.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his statement. How do the options set out in the report compare with international best practice?

Dr Farry: To an extent, that question builds on the one asked by Mr Ramsey. It is worth stressing that the trend is strongly towards the consolidation of teacher training in a university setting. There are numerous examples of that across these islands and the wider world. While there may be exceptions in that regard, where small teacher training facilities continue, they are very much in the minority.

Closer to home, we see examples of successful change. A major reform programme is under way in the Republic of Ireland to consolidate their teacher training institutions, including bringing a number of them together under Dublin City University. In that regard, it is worth stressing that what is primarily a secondary institution is finding a means of accommodating institutions coming into it that have had a very clear denominational background. That should give people reassurance that it can be done.

We also have to look at situations elsewhere in these islands, where you have a number of single institutions that address a number of religious and denominational issues. For example, you have Liverpool Hope University and the University of Roehampton. Roehampton is an interesting example: it was formed by four different religious-based colleges coming together in the mid-1970s. You also have the example of Homerton College becoming a part of the University of Cambridge in the past few decades. Again, that is a college with a long history going back to the mid-18th century. Perhaps the most interesting example is Glasgow, where you had St Andrews, which was a Catholic training institution, forming a partnership with the

University of Glasgow and subsequently becoming a part of the university, with a new institute of education. Again, in that merger, the means were found to respect that historical religious ethos and mission.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his statement this morning. Last October, when officials appeared before the Committee, and again in November, there was a high degree of criticism of the process. There was mention of political interference and the independent review panel having been steered. How do you respond to that? Do today's report and recommendations vindicate that criticism?

Dr Farry: I am not sure whether that comment is valid. This was an independent review panel, and it is its work that has been produced today. The five people involved are of huge standing as international experts in the field of education. They have been very robust in the methodology that they have adopted in engaging with the stakeholders and have sought to find options that accommodate the mission and ethos of the institutions. I have no difficulty in commending and recognising the quality of the work, and I believe that it provides us with a solid foundation on which we can proceed to have further engagement with the stakeholders with a view to finding an agreed way forward.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. What does the report have to say about teacher education for the Irish-medium sector? Does the Minister agree that St Mary's is a specialist and high-performing provider of teacher training through immersion in the Irish language?

Dr Farry: I certainly recognise that, in a general sense, St Mary's is a quality provider of teacher education. The panel members recognised that in the report. They also recognised that we could do a lot better in teacher education across the piece. That is not meant to be a comment on any individual institution, but it is a reflection of the fact that we have an overly fragmented system and that, through a more collaborative approach through a range of options, we all stand to gain a better outcome.

The Member is right that St Mary's has developed a specialism in Irish language. In all the options, there is a commitment to respecting diversity in the education system and to ensuring that teachers are prepared for the range of sectors that may exist in Northern Ireland in the future, including the Irish-medium sector. Where that type of specialism needs to be catered for through all the options, that

space can be carved out to ensure that people are prepared for that sector.

Mr Ross: Will the Minister remind the House of his personal preference of the four options that are laid out; tell us when he anticipates that he will bring his final decision to the Executive; and tell us when he believes the landscape of teacher training in Northern Ireland will be changed?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his questions. I am on record as a supporter of integrated education. I would favour having a single, integrated system of teacher education in Northern Ireland, but, in saying that, I recognise that mine is only one of many voices and that we need to have an agreed way forward on teacher education. I have to respect the views of others, and we have to ensure that what we put in place will be sustainable for the future and will cater to all needs in our society. I believe that the process I intend to embark on in the autumn will address that.

The initial plan will be to have meetings individually with the different providers and some other stakeholders, before moving quickly to round-table discussions. After we have had that initial round of discussions, we will map out further what other work needs to be done to find common ground. I appreciate that this will not be an easy task, in that there are a lot of strongly held views on the future, but I hope that, as a result of the report today, particularly when people properly scrutinise it and fully understand the importance of the comments and observations that have been made by the panel members, people will appreciate that we need to change from the current status quo.

It is not simply about coming up with a different financial arrangement. It is not simply about moving in the direction of sharing and integration, important as they are. There are important educational implications that arise from the particular institutional focus that we have. Ultimately, the real prize here is ensuring that we prepare teachers for the modern world of education.

11.15 am

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an mhéid atá ráite aige go dtí seo. The Minister's agenda is abundantly clear, as, indeed, is that of his panel, which has done likewise in other places. As the Chair said, it demonstrates how bureaucratic the system of governance here is when, three years after getting the job, no decision has been made and

we are no clearer about what the Minister is actually going to do. St Mary's has indicated that it is resolved to remain autonomous, and we support that, but it is willing to embrace —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We need a question.

Mr Flanagan: — shared education if its position is respected. Can I ask the Minister whether he believes that there is something wrong with a teacher training college that has a deeply held Catholic ethos?

Dr Farry: Let me say a couple of things in response to what the Member has said. First of all, this is the first time under devolution that we have had a holistic view across the range of teacher education providers in Northern Ireland. A consultation was initiated by my predecessors in the Department around the Queen's/Stranmillis merger. If there had been sufficient consensus in the House for the necessary legislation to go through, we would have proceeded with that. The opportunity for action in this area was there, but it was not going to find support, so we have taken the opportunity for a much wider look at the issue.

What we have done is taken a structured approach to providing the evidence and the strong case for change in the system. The Grant Thornton report has looked at the financial issues and has clearly spelt it out that the status quo is not financially sustainable, including a context of continued subsidy, never mind a situation where subsidy is gradually removed from the institutions.

The report that we are publishing today sets out the evidence, particularly in light of international trends, for how we can reconfigure our situation. I am clear in accepting that we have to have a system that respects religious pluralism. For the foreseeable future we will have a Catholic sector in Northern Ireland that, of course, has to operate in the context of a stronger framework of shared education. It is important that we prepare teachers for all the different sectors and that we can accommodate the needs of diversity in Northern Ireland through a range of institutional formats. All the options set out are worthy of consideration in that regard.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I want to make it clear that I do not expect to have to remind Members that it is not statements on the statement: it is questions. I hope that is sufficiently clear. The Speaker himself made it clear before he left the

Chair, so it is questions, if you do not mind, on the statement today.

Mr Rogers: Thanks to the Minister for his statement. I am sure, Minister, you will applaud the work of our teacher training colleges in providing good teachers to educate our children. Many parents still choose a faith-based education. What steps are you taking to ensure that there is more equitable access to a certificate in religious education?

Dr Farry: Building on the answer that I provided to Mr Flanagan, I accept that we will see pluralism in our education system for the foreseeable future, and it is important that we prepare teachers in that regard. Let me also say that, in so far as we may have a Catholic sector, that does not mean that children in those schools are taught exclusively by teachers who come from the Catholic faith or a Catholic background. We should have a situation here where any professional teacher, irrespective of their background, should be capable of teaching in any educational setting in a professional manner, irrespective of the particular ethos of that type of school.

In relation to the certificate in religious education, there is a view across a number of parties in the House that we need to address that issue. One option is through amendments to equality legislation, which is beyond my responsibilities. The other option is through ensuring more ready access to that certificate. At present, students from Stranmillis normally access the certificate through distance learning via the University of Glasgow. In other institutions, that is more readily available or, indeed, is hardwired into the curriculum. That creates a certain inequality in opportunities for employment on the far side, and we need to address that — there is no question about that.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree that the two university colleges — Stranmillis and St Mary's — work on joint projects at the moment? Will he assure the House that he will work with the two colleges to ensure that

"sustaining existing quality and building upon it"

will ensure their sustainability into the future?

Dr Farry: Again, I thank the Member for the questions. I obviously recognise the existing collaboration. In so far as the options recommend deeper collaboration, that is not at the expense of recognising the good practice that pertains. That includes the joint special

needs literacy project that Stranmillis and St Mary's are engaged in, some shared continuing professional development (CPD) programmes and the Classrooms Re-imagined: Education in Diversity and Inclusion for Teachers (CREDIT) programme that is funded by the International Fund for Ireland. Those are all good projects that we can build on and deepen.

The process that we are engaged in is all about finding a sustainable solution for teacher education in Northern Ireland as a whole, and the views of Stranmillis and St Mary's are critical in that regard. We are committed to working with them to provide and find a sustainable solution for the system as a whole.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Mervyn Storey, the Chairperson of the Education Committee. We will extend some latitude to you.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): That is a very dangerous thing to do, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Speaking initially as the chair of the Education Committee, I welcome the statement. It includes issues that are of particular interest to the Education Committee, including a highlighting of the disjoint between initial teacher training, continuing professional development for teachers and the issue that has been raised in the House of the differential in access to the certificate in religious education. In the spirit of seeking to promote working together, will the Minister join the Education Minister and work towards an agreed policy that will see the removal of the certificate on the basis of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order? As a member of the Executive, will he ensure that he joins his Education Minister colleague in that?

I want to conclude by asking some questions as a Member. Will the Minister tell the House that the access arrangements for the certificate are fundamentally flawed? Currently, if someone seeks a certificate, they need a letter of recommendation from a local parish priest, which creates considerable difficulties for many young people. Does he believe that Stranmillis is fundamentally hampered? It no longer has representatives from the Transferor Representatives' Council because of actions taken by Sir Reg Empey?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Education Committee for the questions. The report is very far-reaching, and, while the panel has a very

specific terms of reference on options for institutional design, it made wider commentary that is applicable across the piece for education and, in particular, teacher education. I am more than happy to have discussions with my colleague the Minister of Education in that regard.

The Member focused particularly on issues about the certificate in religious education. Again, it is worth stressing that there are two ways in which we can address this, one of which is through amending equality legislation. I am more than happy to give my personal support to working with the Minister of Education and OFMDFM to address that issue.

I concur that the situation that applies today regarding the relative ease of access or otherwise is a major inequity in the system that impacts on equality of access for graduates to employment. I also concur that we have to address that.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he comment further on the importance of links to universities to maximise potential linkages to educational research?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for the question. In some ways, this is probably the key implication that I take away from the report. I appreciate that a lot of Members are focusing on the future of the institutions individually. This morning, equality issues have been a major theme as well. However, the real prize that we have to focus on is the infusion of teacher education into a rich research environment, and that is what is provided through the university setting or through closer links to universities. That is perhaps the background to the trend internationally towards teacher education in the context of a university. It is why there has been a consolidation or reconfiguration of teacher education in different jurisdictions, including our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland, in recent years. There is a real prize to be found, and it means that the robustness of the qualifications that teachers receive will stand on a par with those achieving other academic qualifications. It is important that we ensure that we provide the best opportunities for our graduates, not only for their potential pathway into education but into other fields and endeavours.

Mr Allister: In the best — or is it the worst? — Alliance tradition, the Minister is sitting on the fence when it comes to telling us which option he prefers. I suspect that most of us can work it out. What is the essence of the difference, if

any, between the impact of options A and C on the autonomy of each of the colleges? Under any of the options, is the UCAS requirement enforceable and, if so, under which?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for the question. Let me make it clear that my approach is one of seeking to build consensus. I have put my very clear views on the matter on the record on numerous occasions, including earlier today in a response to Mr Ross. If we are to find something that is sustainable, it is important that it has broad-based support, and that is why it is important that we have options that can be the basis for further discussions with all the stakeholders.

The difference between options A and C is that option A is a collaboration and option C is a federation. In a federation, you will see a move of some constitutional issues towards the central authority. There is a distinction in terms of governance between the two options, and, again, I encourage the Member to read the report in full. Indeed, those options can be further elaborated on in the discussions that we may have with the stakeholders in the autumn.

The UCAS issue is important. I have already commented on the differential opportunities that arise from that and the particular impact on Stranmillis in terms of planning ahead and student entry. It is in the bizarre situation of being simultaneously oversubscribed and having to fill places through clearing because of people holding an offer for St Mary's at the same time through the non-UCAS strand. I certainly will use my best endeavours to ensure a common admissions policy across the institutions, and, indeed, the panel members were keen to stress that point as well.

Improving Unscheduled Care

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Assembly is well aware of the growing concern among the public last winter about the quality of care provided by our emergency departments (EDs) and the robustness of governance procedures across the health and social care system in Northern Ireland. I made clear in my statements to the Assembly earlier this year my disappointment about the events that had contributed to the public's unease and announced a series of actions that I had taken or would take to respond to the concerns. Today, I want to inform the Assembly of the progress on these actions and the next steps to further improve the quality and governance of health and social care in Northern Ireland.

On 10 February, I announced that I had commissioned the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to conduct a review of unscheduled care services in the Belfast Trust with a view to the wider regional context.

That followed the RQIA's inspection of the emergency department and acute medical unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH) following the major incident declared by the Belfast Trust on 8 January. The RQIA has completed its review and submitted its report to me. I have accepted its findings and recommendations, and the authority will publish its report today. I thank the RQIA and the expert team, led by David Stewart, for their thorough examination of the issues and their proposals for transforming the delivery of unscheduled care.

11.30 am

On the major incident at the RVH, the RQIA has identified planning and systems failings by the Belfast Trust in the period leading up to the incident on 8 January. Management of the flow of patients, in the Royal Victoria Hospital and across the trust as a whole, could have been handled better. I am very disappointed by the trust's apparent inability to identify and plan for those anticipated pressures. I am contacting the chairs and acting chief executives of the Belfast Trust and the Health and Social Care Board to ask them to account for those systems failures. I require their assurance that they have learnt lessons from the RQIA's findings and are taking steps to prevent the failures from happening in the future.

While none of the other trusts was in the same position as Belfast, the RQIA has made a number of recommendations for concerted action across the region to improve the delivery of unscheduled care. I believe that, if we are to secure improvements in the delivery of unscheduled care, a regional approach is essential. I am therefore announcing my decision to establish, from today, a regional task group to take forward the RQIA's recommendations, under the leadership of my Department's Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, and its Chief Nursing Officer, Charlotte McArdle, who will co-chair the task group. The task group will take immediate action to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the RQIA's recommendations. I want to see results, and I have set the clear aims for the task group of eliminating all avoidable 12-hour waiting time breaches from this winter onwards and, over

the next 18 months, of making significant progress towards achieving the four-hour waiting time standard.

Members will recall that I commissioned the Health and Social Care Board to examine serious adverse incident (SAI) reporting arising from our emergency departments in the five-year period from 2009 to 2013. The findings are being shared with the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and will be placed on the Department's website.

In summary, the findings are that, in the five years covered, 83 serious adverse incidents were reported. Of those, 48 involved the death of a patient, while 13 identified some element of delay in aspects of a patient's care. Delays arose for a range of reasons, including issues around the triage process, a missed diagnosis, the accurate and timely communication of information, and the speed with which medications or treatments were delivered. It is impossible to say definitively to what extent any delay contributed to any death.

I am very well aware that we often talk about systems and processes designed to prevent things from going wrong or to learn from mistakes that have been made, such as the SAI process. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that at the very heart of all of this is the patient — a son, daughter, father or mother — and families deeply affected and hurt by what happened to their loved one. I am determined that all our processes and systems will be as open and transparent as they can be, while respecting the need for patient confidentiality, and that they fully meet the expectations of patients and their families in being informed and receiving clear and unambiguous answers to their questions. Those are some of the governance aspects that I have asked Sir Liam Donaldson to consider in the work that I am commissioning from him.

There has been some confusion in public discussion and commentary about the role and purpose of the SAI system. It is intended as a means by which incidents and unexpected events are investigated so that learning can be identified, shared and implemented. If things have gone wrong, it is important that lessons are learned, thereby preventing a recurrence. The reporting and learning from SAIs can have a positive impact on the quality and safety of healthcare. An open and learning culture encourages the reporting of SAIs as a valuable means of highlighting and resolving potential problems with services. All our services — emergency services are no exception — are

becoming increasingly complex, and there will always be incidents from which we can learn. Elimination of lengthy delays is critical to ensuring high-quality care and to improving patient experience. I believe that this can be done. The HSC achieved a 44% reduction in the number of 12-hour waiting time breaches during last year. That is a considerable achievement, and I pay tribute to all staff in the HSC who worked hard to deliver this improvement, but there is still much more to do.

I have therefore directed the task group to address, in particular, the design and implementation of more effective patient pathways for our frail elderly people and patients with respiratory conditions. To achieve this, the whole system will have to work together, including our GPs, Ambulance Service, community care teams and staff in acute hospitals.

I believe that the integral involvement of the HSC's professional staff in the work of the task group is essential to its ultimate success. This is not a managerial-focused initiative. It will be strategic in its intent but practical and operational in its delivery. It will also be vital that learning and perspectives emerging from the Royal College of Nursing and the College of Emergency Medicine summits, held earlier this year, are acted on, as appropriate, by the task group.

The task I have set is challenging. However, I am convinced that it can be achieved. The winter period will, no doubt, bring its own challenges. When pressures emerge, as they no doubt will, we must put our wholehearted support and encouragement behind front line staff, who have been tasked to deliver transformation in unscheduled care. It can be achieved by harnessing the talents of our staff, whether they are doctors, nurses and social workers or managers and policymakers. I believe that they will have your support, and I commend this statement to the House.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. It is clear that RQIA has identified planning and systems failures by the Belfast Trust. In the Minister's statement is his quite stark comment:

"I am very disappointed by the Trust's apparent inability to identify and plan for these anticipated pressures."

Will the Minister give the House an insight, first, as to what the systems failings were and what

recommendations will be progressed? Will he also go as far as to comment on the response of the ombudsman this morning to high levels of dissatisfaction with the complaints processes in health trusts?

Mr Poots: I met all the trusts in early autumn and was given assurances that actions were being taken to anticipate rising demand for emergency and unscheduled care, as always happens in the winter. One of the failings in the Belfast Trust that we could identify clearly is that it had too much scheduled care coming in immediately after Christmas. It had a lot of elective surgery and so forth to take place. People had been booked in, and, therefore, beds were taken up. The trust should have anticipated that a greater number of people would come in on the unscheduled pathway and held some of those procedures back further. That was a very clear failing.

It is important that we ensure that we deal with complaints from the public in a clear, transparent and consistent way. Some trusts perform better than others in managing complaints. I have experience of that and would, therefore, like to see a greater level of consistency applied throughout trusts in how they respond to complaints. I am and have been trying, with some success, although work is still to be done, to make the health service a more open and transparent organisation.

We are coming from years and years — decades — of not having the level of openness and transparency in health that there was in a range of other services. I want to change that. If we get it wrong, I want the public to know at an early point and for us to deal with the issues that arise from that.

That is what serious adverse incident reporting is about. I do not want the press and media to jump all over serious adverse incidents because we do them, because that has the potential to actually drive people not to carry out serious adverse incidents when they should be carried out. I want us to do that, and I want us to be very clear with the people who suffered as a consequence of not receiving the care that they should have. That will be made known to them at the earliest possible point.

Mr Wells: The Minister, in his statement, has given a commitment that all avoidable 12-hour waits at A&E departments will be eliminated. Some Members will be fascinated by the definition of "avoidable". Obviously, we all want to see a very significant decline in these waits. Will the Minister define what he means by

"avoidable" so that we have clarity on his commitment?

Mr Poots: On occasion, there will be surges. Sometimes, those surges cannot be anticipated. That is one instance in which you would have an unavoidable delay. One of RQIA's recommendations will be for the trusts to update their escalation plans to ensure that, when things go wrong and when something outside the control of the hospital happens and large numbers of people are in attendance, they can escalate the plans much quicker to get more staff in, make more beds available and ensure that those people are treated more quickly.

So we recognise that unavoidable delays will be there, but that will not leave us with thousands of 12-hour breaches. They will happen quite infrequently, and therefore "avoidable" is not a term that we are putting in to leave the door open for thousands of 12-hour breaches to continue occurring.

Mr McKinney: We were saddened to learn this morning of the scale of the SAIs. We should remember that at the heart of each one is an individual and a family. Given the scale of them, does the Minister accept that there must be a question mark over whether we are actually learning from the SAI process? In that context, does the Minister agree that it is appropriate or necessary to have an external eye looking over the SAI processes, underpinned by legislation, to ensure that the growing dissatisfaction and concern in the public mind is addressed?

Mr Poots: The Member is absolutely right that we are dealing with human beings and individuals. The SAI process takes place over a long period — five years — but that does not lessen the impact for any individual who did not receive as good a quality of care in that period of time as they might otherwise have received.

We are going to have that external eye, and the Member should be aware that we have commissioned someone of real standing to carry out that piece of work: Sir Liam Donaldson. He will be looking at all of this, including the SAIs and all the issues around the quality of care. Quality is something that we want to prioritise, and we have the 'Quality 2020' document, which sets out very clearly what we believe we should be achieving on quality. That is not merely an aspiration: it is something that we intend to deliver on.

11.45 am

Mr Beggs: In the Minister's statement and, indeed, in some of his answers, he placed much focus on 12-hour breaches, which are coming down. However, the 2013-14 A&E waiting time statistics show that there has been a further reduction in the number of patients treated within four hours and a worryingly increasing bulge in the number of those waiting between four and 12 hours — almost 150,000 in the last year. My question to the Minister is this: is he simply dealing with a symptom at the upper end of our A&E rather than dealing with the problem, and does he accept that there will be an ongoing risk of serious adverse incidents whilst there continue to be delays of more than four hours?

Mr Poots: I certainly think that there has been a greater concentration on dealing with 12-hour breaches. Obviously, 12 hours is a considerably longer period of time than four hours, and it was deemed that tackling that was of greatest importance. The Member knows that we have made considerable progress on this issue. For example, when I inherited the job, we were looking at something like over 10,000 12-hour breaches in that year. We are now down to 3,000. That is 3,000 too many, in my opinion, but the figure has come down by 7,000 breaches. That is a significant improvement, and I am sure that the Member will take an opportunity at some point to welcome that improvement and say that it has been a major step forward.

I recognise that there has been a decline in the number of patients treated within four hours, and that is also something that we intend to tackle. So, whilst the focus this year will be on delivering further improvement in the 12-hour breaches, we are looking at the four-hour breaches over an 18-month period. It is something that we will be looking at and addressing, but we will do it in a holistic way. We will deal with the first challenge, which is the 12-hour breaches, but seek to carry out improvement across and throughout the system. The RQIA report and the task force group will assist us in doing that. There are quite a number of focuses that will be applied in how we deal with our elderly population, respiratory conditions and so forth that will assist us in all of that.

Mr McCarthy: Like our Committee Chairperson, I note the Minister's disappointment at the Belfast Trust's inability to plan for unscheduled pressures. We all share that disappointment. The Minister wants someone to account for what he calls "systems failures". What action will the Minister take when someone from the trust or the board is

found to have fallen down on the job, resulting in a bad experience for our patients? Will it be a case of heads rolling, a slap on the wrists, or simply just carrying on and hoping?

Mr Poots: The Member knows that the way that the system works is that I appoint a board and a chair, and the board holds the trust to account in terms of the Executive. There are monthly, public meetings that Members can attend to see how the board is performing in holding the trust to account.

I am pleased that, earlier this year, I was able to appoint a new chair to the board to hold the trust to account; that was a direct appointment by me. I will ensure that the chair knows at all times what my expectations are of the Belfast Trust and that I apply appropriate pressure on the chair to ensure that that organisation, which has over 20,000 employees, a budget of £1.2 billion, and which is by far the largest organisation in Northern Ireland and one of the largest public service organisations anywhere in the United Kingdom, actually delivers on the targets that we set for it. It is absolutely vital to do that, and it is incumbent on the trust to ensure that that is the case.

Mrs Cameron: I welcome the Minister's statement to the House this morning. Can he provide detail of the unannounced hospital inspections to be carried out by the RQIA?

Mr Poots: The RQIA is tasked with carrying out a series of inspections. It has sometimes been said to me that the RQIA places a large focus on our nursing homes and so forth and that there has not been enough focus on our hospitals. So we have asked the RQIA to undertake a rolling programme of unannounced inspections, which will examine the quality of services in all acute hospitals in Northern Ireland each year from 2015-16 onwards. Those inspections will focus on a number of quality indicators about triage, admission, assessment, care, monitoring and discharge of patients. They will focus on a selection of quality indicators that will not be pre-notified to the trusts for each inspection, and no advance warning will be provided to trusts as to which sites or services within a hospital will be visited as part of an unannounced inspection. It is intended that the RQIA inspection reports will be published on a hospital-by-hospital basis as they are completed.

The proposal is to introduce these unannounced inspections from 2015-16, rather than immediately, because the RQIA already has a number of planned reviews under way,

which focus on acute hospitals and which are, coincidentally, more wide-ranging than focusing on particular services. Those reviews include: a review of the experience of older people in acute hospitals, which will be completed within the next three months; a review of discharge arrangements from acute hospitals, because effective discharge arrangements are an essential part of the smooth flow of patients through hospitals, and the work of this review will inform the recommendations of the wider review of unscheduled care; and also a review of the inspection of the regional stroke strategy, the hospital aspects of which are of relevance to the unscheduled care review, and which will examine whether arrangements for fast-tracking stroke patients through the system are working effectively. Combined with the current review covering the Belfast Trust emergency department and the management of flows through the trusts, which also includes some regional elements, our advice is that the programme of unannounced inspections could begin next year.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and I welcome the fact that he has accepted that a regional approach is essential because there are other areas outside Belfast, and other hospitals such as Daisy Hill. I accept that the RVH is a regional centre.

In your statement, Minister, you said that you directed the task group to address particularly the design and implementation of more effective patient pathways for frail elderly people and patients with respiratory conditions. That is very much to be welcomed. I ask that people with mental health problems who present at emergency departments also be considered because they often have particular problems that need to be dealt with, possibly in a different way, and a more effective pathway could be put in place for those particular people.

Mr Poots: With the frail elderly, I have to say that I think my focus is the appropriate one. I do not want to take away from the needs of people with mental health conditions, but I think that it is wholly inappropriate for elderly people to be on trolleys beside all the mayhem that goes on in emergency departments and have to wait for long periods of time, either to be admitted to hospital or to be treated and discharged. Therefore, it is my first priority that we deal with the elderly population, and particularly our frail elderly, with dignity and the care that would be expected for those people. This is an area in which we can deliver considerable improvement. RQIA has made

recommendations to the Belfast Trust. I have discussed those with the chair of the Belfast Trust, and he accepts that those recommendations are viable and the trust will act on delivering them. It is very important that that is the case and that we have treatment pathways, particularly for our frail elderly, that will ensure that we can carry out that level of service with the dignity that should be afforded to those people.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for initiating the report and bringing forward its findings. I think we all agree that it is important that they are actioned to stop any recurrence of what has been found within the Royal. Can the Minister advise as to what is being done to improve staffing levels within the Royal Victoria Hospital A&E?

Mr Poots: In terms of staffing levels within the hospital, we have advertised and recruited considerable numbers of additional nursing staff. I believe that it is around 100 nurses for the emergency department and, indeed, the acute medical unit. At present, there are 10 consultants in the RVH ED. My wife used to work in the ED in the RVH, and I think that it had one or two consultants back in the 1980s, during the Troubles. So, people can see how things have changed even since that period, and the usage of the hospital has changed in that period, because one would assume that it was an extremely busy place when dealing with all the trauma from the bombs, the bullets and so forth.

We have recently recruited four substantive emergency department consultants, although the full complement will not be in post for another number of months. The trust will also increase the out-of-hours consultant cover at the weekend in line with when the additional consultants come into post. It has also recruited three locum ED consultants, whom it hopes will commence on 14 August. The RVH emergency department has senior clinical decision-makers on site from 8.00 am until 1.00 am Monday to Friday, and a consultant on-call rota operates from 8.00 am and from 5.00 pm at weekends. The extra posts will improve weekend out-of-hour consultant cover. Middle-grade doctors work in ED throughout the night, and the Belfast Trust's ED consultant complement is greater than that in any other trust in Northern Ireland, though it does not yet meet the College of Emergency Medicine's recommendation, which is a challenge for all trusts right across the United Kingdom, not just in Northern Ireland. It certainly is not specific to the Belfast Trust.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement. Indeed, I have enormous sympathy for him in his endeavours. I pay tribute to the staff of our hospitals for the sterling work that they do. Will the Minister agree with me that the ongoing hemorrhaging of adverse reports is sapping the energy of those people? Can he assure the House that the people who are now charged with implementing the recommendations are the people to do it, or does he feel that it is perhaps time he relied on some independent source of energy to make sure that he is not let down yet again?

Mr Poots: The Member makes a number of valid points, and if I am let down, the population is let down as well. So, that is not a good situation to be in. Setting up the task group and tackling this in a reasonable way will move some of the responsibility away from the Health and Social Care Board and give additional sustenance and support to the trust in delivering those things, and we should view that positively. We have capable people in our Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer to help us address that challenge, and I think that they are appropriate people to co-chair the task group. We will give them appropriate support.

We have had a series of issues to deal with in health and social care, but unscheduled care has come up over and over and over again. To this point, we have not got on top of it in the way that we would like to have. I think that what we are announcing this morning is significant and puts us in a very challenging position. I will be held to account next January, February and March if things do not show a significant improvement, but, again, I will be holding those people to account. We have inherited a difficult problem and we have been working hard to resolve it. We have not got there as yet, but we are putting the right systems in place to tackle this so that we can deliver a better quality of care in Northern Ireland.

The one caveat is that people need to use the services wisely. I recently noticed on social media that a row had broken out because someone had called 999 and got an ambulance out to take them to hospital because they were dizzy. We have a misuse of ambulance services, but we need those ambulance services to transfer patients and to be there when people have emergencies.

We have a misuse of our emergency departments. We need our nurses, doctors and

professional staff to be able to respond to real emergencies and deal with the frail elderly and the nasty knocks that people will take. However, people abuse the system. We need to get that message out as well. We need the media and the public to support us in saying that it is wrong for people to abuse the service in the way that a significant percentage of users do. We need to challenge those people. It is all well and good for us to seek to correct things, but, if the level of abuse goes up, it will undermine the correction that we carry out.

12.00 noon

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his statement. He will, I am sure, be aware that, until the incident at the Odyssey, the term "serious adverse incident" (SAI) was probably not in the vocabulary of a lot of people in Northern Ireland outside the healthcare family. Bearing in mind that, since the incident, the media, and perhaps even those seeking to score political points, have jumped upon the term and called it what it is not, does the Minister feel that it is now time to reassess how fit for purpose the serious adverse incident system actually is?

Mr Poots: I say at the outset that the purpose of the serious adverse incident reporting system is to identify and promote learning from events. The investigation of an SAI provides a mechanism to effectively share learning in a meaningful way with a focus on safety and quality, ultimately leading to improvements for service users. Where SAIs have been reported, I expect four main things: that there will be an investigation at an appropriate level by people with the right skills to carry it out; that patients and families will be told that the case is an SAI and that an investigation is ongoing; that patients and families will be involved in the process to the level that they choose and will be informed of the outcome; and that learning must be identified and shared.

Whilst the process is a non-statutory system that exists to identify learning and support improvements in the quality and safety of Health and Social Care services in Northern Ireland, it is not the only mechanism in place to identify and support learning. A wide range of work is ongoing nationally and in Health and Social Care to develop and update evidence-based best practice and improve safety and quality. As a learning process, it complements the processes of statutory accountability, which apply to all parts of HSC, in dealing with deaths that meet the relevant criteria for some form of formal investigative process. We will look at all

the learning processes, in conjunction with other parts of the United Kingdom. If we feel that the processes need to be enhanced further or that improvements can be carried out, certainly we will enact those.

North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programmes

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Finance and Personnel wishes to make a statement.

Mr Hamilton (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) met in special EU programmes sectoral format in Armagh, on 30 May 2014. I represented the Northern Ireland Executive and was accompanied by junior Minister Jennifer McCann. The Government of the Republic of Ireland were represented by Brendan Howlin TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

The meeting began with a short discussion on areas of mutual responsibility as part of the ongoing review into sectoral priorities. Minister Howlin then provided a short outline of the informal ministerial meeting on cohesion policy that he attended in Athens at the end of April 2014.

The chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) updated the Council on progress since the previous special EU programmes sectoral meeting in December last year. At the end of March 2014, the Peace III and INTERREG IVa programmes were fully committed. Funding from the withdrawal of the peace-building and conflict resolution centre and the Narrow Water bridge projects has now been reallocated. It was noted that all expenditure targets for the Peace III and INTERREG IVa programmes have been met to date. The INTERREG IVa programme must spend approximately £85 million by the end of 2015 and the Peace III programme approximately £90 million. Those targets are challenging, but the importance of maximising full EU funding allocations was emphasised. Ministers confirmed that they remain supportive of the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge.

Council noted that the INTERREG IV transnational and inter-regional competitive funding programmes were successful in providing an additional £9 million to Northern Ireland in the 2007-2013 funding period. SEUPB continues to work to promote the positive impacts of EU programmes through public events and confirmed that it would hold two conferences later in the year to highlight the

achievements of the Peace III and INTERREG IVa programmes.

Council was updated on the progress of the development work for the 2014-2020 INTERREG V and Peace IV EU programmes. It was noted that the public consultation for the programmes would begin in early June, and, as I am sure many Members are aware, it opened on Tuesday 3 June for a period of eight weeks. I urge those who are interested in shaping the programmes to input into this consultation process. Post consultation, the operational programmes will require approval from the Northern Ireland Executive, the Government of Ireland and the Scottish Government before onward transmission and negotiation with the European Commission.

Ministers discussed the recommendations outlined in the SEUPB staffing review and noted that there is to be further consideration by officials of the recommendations.

Council approved changes to the North/South pension scheme and noted that consultation on further reform of the scheme is under way. Council agreed to hold its next special EU programmes meeting on a date to be agreed in autumn 2014.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, you will be aware that delays in processing applications for INTERREG in particular are a problem that has dogged European funding here for many years. Given that the South and elsewhere in Europe simply do not suffer from these problems, what actions will you take in the months ahead to ensure that the new tranche of funding will not be dogged by the same problems and to reduce the application processing times?

Mr Hamilton: I am aware of the characterisation of the processing of our INTERREG programmes as slow. I support any attempts to hasten approval processes so that from application to decision, whether that is approval or rejection, the process is as quick as it possibly can be. There are some necessary stages in the process, and, having looked at the various stages, I do not think that there are any that, in their totality, can be removed. I want to keep those very necessary legal steps in that process, but that does not mean that the time taken to do each stage could not be sped up. My officials are working with their counterparts in the Irish Republic and with the SEUPB to examine the possibility of doing just that.

It is easy for individuals in the process who, perhaps, have a particular perspective or agenda to say that Northern Ireland is the slowest and worse than everybody else. I accept that, on average, the process takes a year, which is high and could do with coming down, but, if you compare, for example, the Irish Republic/Wales INTERREG scheme with ours, you will see that it is much smaller. The average size of their projects is about €900,000 versus ours at €2.5 million, yet they are only about eight weeks quicker on average at processing. It is a much smaller scheme in its totality: our current scheme is about €260 million; theirs was much lower. Their average project size and, therefore, the complexity of any assessment, was lower, yet their processing was only marginally quicker. It is easy for someone to characterise what we are doing in Northern Ireland as being incredibly slow, but, in reality, when you compare it with others not that far away, you see that they are not much better.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he outline some of the details of the outcome of the staffing review?

Mr Hamilton: A staffing review has been ongoing since 2012. The motivation to review staffing was that, over the years prior to that, the number of staff in the SEUPB had grown, for understandable reasons. It dealt with the early stages and critical middle stages of the Peace and INTERREG funding, and it was felt that there was a requirement to have more staff to ensure that all the assessment work, which the Chairman asked about, was done as quickly as possible and that the money that we were drawing down from Europe, or our entitlement from Europe, could be spent. Given that those projects are now coming to an end and indeed the fact that future programmes are of a smaller quantity, there was a feeling that there was a need to look at the SEUPB's staffing situation again with a view to bringing that down.

In fact, at the last Special EU Programmes Body's sectoral meeting in December, we agreed the staffing review that would see the number of staff come down to 60 last year and 57 this year. There is an expectation that additional staff savings of 10% that were mooted in that report should also be achieved. It is only right and proper that, in circumstances in which programmes are spending less money and there is not the pressure that there was back in 2012 and indeed the years before that, we should, like in all parts of the public sector, look at trying to reduce cost.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá ráite ag an Aire ag an chruinniú den Chomh-Aireacht ar an 30ú lá Bealtaine gur dheimhnigh na hAíre go bhfuil said fós ag tabhairt tacaíochta do choincheap Dhroicead an Chaol Uisce. An féidir leis an Aire a mhíniú cad é atá i gceist leis an ráiteas tacaíochta seo don todhchaí? The Minister stated that, at the meeting of the NSMC on 30 May:

"Ministers confirmed they remain supportive of the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge."

Will the Minister explain what that expression of support will mean in practice?

Mr Hamilton: It means what it says. In fact, support for the concept of the bridge was given initially at the last NSMC plenary meeting. I am trying to recollect when exactly that was. It was a number of months ago. It was certainly towards the tail end of last year. Sorry — it was at the early stages of this year. Given what has happened with the inability to proceed with the Narrow Water bridge and its not being able to be completed, and the associated problems that that caused in getting the money that was allocated to the scheme spent in time on good projects, I am glad that we have been able to do that. In fact, that was discussed at the recent sectoral meeting. The money has been allocated to two projects. One was the upgrade of the cross-border Enterprise rail scheme. The other is the upgrade of the Boyne viaduct, which is obviously related to the Enterprise scheme as well. I am glad that we have been able to ensure that that money has been reallocated and has not been lost.

I can understand the desire of some to perhaps want Ministers to go beyond supporting the concept of the bridge and actually say that they support it and that there will be funding for it. However, in a situation in which we have only recently secured the budget for INTERREG, there is no programme in place. In fact, as I mentioned in the statement, we are consulting on what the themes should be on which we spend that money. It would be jumping the gun somewhat to say anything more than that we are supportive of the concept of the bridge. I think that the record will show that in the past, with the first attempt to build the bridge, nothing was done to stop, prevent or hinder it from happening, going through its processes. I would expect the same degree of professionalism, if indeed a future application were permitted by the next INTERREG V programme, to be carried out by all relevant Departments in Northern Ireland and indeed the South as well.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his report and congratulate him on getting it onto one A4 sheet of paper. That ticks a box.

The Minister expressed the £175 million that there is for Peace III and INTERREG IVa as being both "fully committed" and "challenging". What safeguards are there that that money will be spent by the end of 2015?

Mr Hamilton: Unfortunately, we have wasted a second side of A4, which we should have used for something worthwhile or useful — a crossword or something perhaps.

All of that is challenging. The money has been fully committed, so projects are there for the money to be spent on. If everything goes according to plan, all of the money will be spent. Obviously, there is continual monitoring and assessment by SEUPB.

Of course, some of the projects will be led by some of our Departments here, which will ensure that there is appropriate oversight of the expenditure to ensure that it gets out the door and none of it is lost.

12.15 pm

I suppose there is always a degree of risk. As we know in this place, from time to time, there are reasons why the money that we allocate to Departments cannot be spent. The difficulty we have with European funding is that we do not have some of the flexibilities that we have with our own funding, not that we have many flexibilities. We do not have the same flexibility, and, if we find out very late in the process — we are about 18 months away from the date by which expenditure has to be made — there may be issues.

As for managing that, I understand that, whilst the end date for actual expenditure is December, the SEUPB is keen that most things come to it midway through 2015 so that some of the problems that the Member talks about can perhaps be seen early on.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he outline what he believes will be the proposed themes and budget for the INTERREG V programme?

Mr Hamilton: I am pleased that the INTERREG Va programme now has an indicative budget of €282 million, which is comparable with INTERREG IV. At this minute, there is no agreement on which areas and themes the

money should be spent on. The draft scheme that is out for consultation at the minute proposes four programme themes. They are research and innovation; environmental protection and resource efficiency; social inclusion and combating poverty; and sustainable transport. I am pleased that sustainable transport has been included as a result of negotiations led by my Department but obviously influenced by the Department for Regional Development. We have been able to include that as one of the proposed programme themes. Indeed, research and innovation also includes a substrand for developing renewable energy technologies.

I was very keen that, whilst not denigrating or downplaying themes like environmental protection and social inclusion, there was much greater emphasis and focus on themes that boost the economy, given the economic pressures that Northern Ireland, the Republic and, indeed, Scotland face, hence the need to push sustainable transport and research and innovation, including renewable technologies. Hopefully, both those themes and, indeed, the others will be agreed as part of the consultation and find their way on to the final INTERREG V programme.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement to the House today. Minister, through the INTERREG V and Peace IV programmes, there are many cross-border projects in health and sustainable transport, which you just mentioned. With many councils and organisations going into summer recess, will the Minister give assurances that work through the SEUPB will be ongoing to ensure full cross-border cooperation on those important projects?

Mr Hamilton: I am not sure whether the Member is aware of a particular problem perhaps in her constituency. If she is, I am happy for her to raise that with me, and we will try to deal with it.

We should not fuel the perception that work stops just because this place and councils are perhaps in summer recess; there are people who remain in the country. We are not quite like France yet, where everything seems to be abandoned in August. Work is ongoing, and I hope that there will not be any issues with the continued work on some of the very good projects that are happening across Northern Ireland. If the Member is aware of particular issues, I am happy to investigate them and to do what we can to iron out any problems.

Mr I McCrea: The statement refers to the reallocation of funding for the peace centre at the Maze. He will be aware that the reason behind that reallocation was our party's withdrawal of support, because the requirement for buy-in from the unionist community had not been met. Until that is the case, it will not be built. Will the Minister give us an idea of what that reallocation has meant and how it has been redistributed?

Mr Hamilton: Much like the Narrow Water bridge issue, which was mentioned by Mr Bradley, this presented a significant challenge in terms of the quantum of funding that could not be spent by the end of 2015. Given the time frame that was available to the SEUPB, it was decided — I think, rightly — that it was not possible to conduct an open call for new bids to come in for the reallocation of the Peace III funding that could not be spent on the peace-building and conflict resolution centre. What the SEUPB did — I think that it was right to do it — was to revisit projects that had been on a sort of waiting list. I am very pleased that projects like the Voices from the Valley project in Newtownabbey, which I am familiar with, having had a meeting with council officials from that area, and the EARLS project in Dungannon, as well as extensions for activity to local authority peace partnerships, have mopped up that funding and will now ensure that none of that money, albeit on the basis that all those projects spend all their money, is now lost back to Europe.

Mrs McKeivitt: I thank the Minister for his statement. I will touch on the Narrow Water bridge project, as Mr Bradley did. I welcome the comments that the Ministers are behind the project, but does the Minister agree that the Narrow Water bridge project would fit well into the theme of sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks and key infrastructure networks?

Mr Hamilton: I am cautious about getting into assessing the relative merits of projects against a funding programme that has not been agreed. I do not disagree that the project that the Member talks about may well fit into the broad concept of a theme around sustainable transport. However, it would be foolish of me — indeed, it would be foolish of any of us — as we stand at the minute with the scheme out for consultation, nothing agreed and no indicative budget allocation to each of the themes in the programme, to say, "That it is a good scheme, and we should go in there. That is another good scheme that should go into something else" and

start to pre-commit funding to certain projects without also knowing the merits or otherwise of other projects that might come forward. There might be a raft of sustainable transport or other projects that come forward through a call as part of INTERREG V that might be even better for meeting those achievements than, say, the Narrow Water bridge or some other project. It is a little too early to start saying, "That is a good scheme, and it fits in there. Therefore, it should get funding". We need to be incredibly cautious about taking that approach.

Mr Allister: Since its inception, SEUPB has been quite a bloated bureaucracy. Whereas I welcome the indication of some reductions in staffing, are those reductions not much less than was anticipated at an earlier stage? Given that the budget for it to handle is falling so dramatically, surely they should be more substantial? Has any progress been made on bringing balance in community background to the staffing of SEUPB, where, notoriously, the Protestant community has been grossly underrepresented in the complement?

Mr Hamilton: On the first point that the Member raised, we should all welcome the fact that staffing levels in SEUPB are heading in the right direction. I agree that they are not as low as I think they should be, and I would like to see them falling further. There is agreement to get them down to 57 this year. The report that was carried out and conducted by my Department and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in the Irish Republic identified scope even beyond that 57 for a further 10% reduction in staffing numbers. We are also investigating the situation where this organisation has three offices across Ireland, two in this jurisdiction. That is also excessive and unnecessary moving forward, given the reduction in the organisation's budget or the budget that it manages on behalf of both Governments. That is something that I hope to report some positive news on after our next sectoral meeting.

Figures from 1 January 2013 show the community breakdown of staff as 21 from the Protestant community, 34 from the Catholic community and four non-determined. That was slightly up on the Protestant side, but it was slightly up on the Catholic side as well. When you look at the April 2014 figures, you will see that it has fallen back again on the Protestant side. I take a view on this sort of issue — it does not matter whether it is SEUPB, parts of my Department or, indeed, parts of anybody's Department, as I look at them in my role as being responsible for HR and personnel issues in the whole of the Civil Service — that I do not care what an official's religion is, as long as

their work is up to scratch and up to standard and their advice is good. If there are issues, however, and individuals from a particular community background are being deterred from applying, work needs to be carried out to encourage people from that community to apply for work, as we have done across Departments, agencies, arm's-length bodies and grade levels in the Civil Service. If there are certain barriers, work needs to be undertaken to remove those barriers. I have no concern whether the staff are Catholic or Protestant, as long as their work is up to scratch.

Mr Dallat: I concur with the Minister's last remarks. Recently, however, we have talked a great deal about scaling back the staff and about reduced budgets. Does anyone in the House seriously believe and does the Minister believe that we have reached a stage of integration, cohesion, peace and infrastructure at which we can seriously engage in a conversation of that type, rather than looking for increased budgets and for more work that could be done to rebuild what was destroyed in the past?

Mr Hamilton: As the Member was so nice to me at the start, I do not like to be nasty back to him — it is not my style, anyway — but this is not a matter of seeking to increase the budgets at the disposal of, in this case, the SEUPB. The budgets that it administers are set by Europe, and the match funding is set by this Executive and the Government of the Irish Republic. It is not a matter, therefore, of increasing its budget; the reality is that the budget that it has been administering has been going down and down and down. The budget for the programmes that it will administer in the future is much lower than it was in the past. That is a reflection of tight times across the whole of Europe. In those circumstances, it is completely unjustifiable for us to have less money to administer but to keep the same staffing in place. That is not how any business in Northern Ireland or, indeed, the Republic of Ireland would do business. If they were doing less, they would have fewer staff. It is absolutely sensible, prudent and right for myself and Brendan Howlin to look at what the right quantum of staff is to do the job that we require them to do — not a person more than that should be in place.

Whilst I have doubts over the merits of many parts of our North/South apparatus, one thing that it absolutely is not — everybody in the House should agree — is a job creation agency. It is there to do a particular job, and, if it does not require the staff who are there to do that job, they should be reduced. That is the

plain and simple way in which business should be done.

Private Members' Business

Parading: Demonstrating Respect, Restraint and Tolerance in Contested Parades and Associated Protests

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

Mr Elliott: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes, in the absence of a formal agreement on a new way forward for contested parades and associated protests, that it is essential that everyone involved, whether participants, spectators or protestors, demonstrates respect, restraint and tolerance for those of differing opinions.

12.30 pm

Thank you very much, Principal Deputy Speaker. I trust that, given the current circumstances here in Northern Ireland, the motion will be debated in a calm and respectful manner and that comments will be helpful to the situation as opposed to being unhelpful. It is unfortunate that, during the multi-party talks, we could not find agreement on the issue of parades and related protests. We came reasonably close to getting an overarching agreement. However, even if we had reached that agreement, it would not have dealt with a number of the contentious parades. That is a major difficulty that we will have, even if we find the resolution that we are looking for.

While we accept that the vast majority of people are content to have respect and tolerance for a culture or event that they do not have any affinity with, do not agree with or do not support, it is clear that there is a section of people who will not tolerate an opposing culture or opinion. That is not new: intolerance has been ongoing for decades and, indeed, centuries. Many citizens have been murdered by terrorists due to the intolerance of the terrorist community, who could not accept them for what they were, whether that was because

of their religion, their basic principle of wanting to serve the community as a member of the security forces, their culture or because of some twisted or vindictive reason. Even in recent decades, it has been an ongoing problem. In the mid-1980s, republicans opposed parades in the Obins Street area of Portadown. An agreement was eventually reached that the Orange Order would not use that route; instead, it would use the Garvaghy Road route. However, of course, as we are aware, just 10 years later, republicans opposed that route, and they have stopped the parade for many years.

Around the same time, we had similar problems in places such as the Ormeau Road in Belfast, Bellaghy, Pomeroy and Newtownbutler to name but a few. We have seen another upsurge in more recent times, particularly in parts of Belfast. Ardoyne and Twaddell is an example of how republicans have increased tensions in the area and put a wedge between communities and community relations in general. Of course, that is a means to an end for republicans. Anything they can do to create problems for the unionist and British culture, they will do.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am happy to give way.

Mr Lyttle: I am conscious that the Member has quite a time to go. I do not dispute the rightful condemnation of violence, but is the Member going to address any offences committed by people participating in parades that have contributed to community tension?

Mr Elliott: Of course. The point that I was going to make, had the Member waited, was that, sometimes, those on parade and those supporting parades have questions to answer. Not every action that they carry out is appropriate or acceptable. However, small numbers on both sides of the argument are determined.

I may not support, appreciate or accept every part of society here; I may not like some events or the organisations that participate in them. I highlight one example, as I quite often do: the GAA. I do not have an affinity with GAA culture or sport at all. Some people from that organisation have given me personal abuse in the past. However, I do not link the organisation to that; I have respect and tolerance for that organisation, what it does and how it plays its games. I do not point out that a small number of people in that organisation do

not give me respect. I do not lump them all in as one, just as I ask others not to lump in all those in the parading organisations who do not behave in the way that most would expect them to behave. I hope, in fairness to Mr Lyttle, that that goes some way to addressing his query.

The point about republicans is that nothing will ever be enough. If they do not get what they want, they will increase tensions and, what is more worrying, increase violence. That is what happened in recent years in the Ardoyne/Twaddell area. I have here a number of police reports going back to 2009. If you analyse them, you will establish that a small amount of the violence and tensions came from the loyal orders and the Protestant/unionist community, whereas the vast majority of the trouble, tensions and violence came from the republican/nationalist sections. I believe that that is what prompted the Parades Commission to make its decisions in recent times. Why else, if it had read those reports, would it have banned last year's return parade past Ardoyne and through Twaddell? In my opinion, it was for no other reason than the fact that the threat of violence from the nationalist/republican community was greater. In recent weeks, the same attitude has been adopted by the Parades Commission. It gives in to the greatest opportunity for violence.

I will refer to my more localised situation in Newtownbutler. For many years, parades in Newtownbutler were banned or restricted. Indeed, they are still restricted. If you ever want to watch an inoffensive parade, go to Newtownbutler in County Fermanagh, where you will see one small band leading a group of loyal orders, whether Orangemen or Royal Black Preceptory members, up the street. One of the most disgraceful decisions that the Parades Commission made was when it stopped the Orange Order parade at the bottom of the lane that goes on to the main road and did not allow people to go back to their hall. What do you do when you stop a parade? Loyal orders normally play the national anthem. They were stopped right outside a home that people would term nationalist. Out of respect, the Orange Order members moved away from that home so that they would not be playing the national anthem outside it. If they had been allowed to go back to their hall, they would have gone inside to play the national anthem, away from any prospective trouble that it might have brought about. That was a Parades Commission nonsense, and we still witness that to this day.

Where will we develop the respect and tolerance that I referred to? Over recent years,

even Members of the Assembly have inhibited the Police Service in its role. I hope that people take cognisance of this debate, but, most importantly, I hope that the Parades Commission takes cognisance of it. At this stage, I warn that nothing will ever be enough. The Parades Commission has insisted in recent years that dialogue take place. We have read many of its determinations that dialogue must take place. I can tell you that, for the last 10 months, and others will be able to relate this much better than I can, dialogue has taken place with all sections of the community in the Ardoyne/Twaddell area. At least, I understand from the community that I represent that dialogue has taken place. Some from the nationalist/republican community may be sore that they have not been involved in that dialogue, but that is not the fault of the loyal orders; that is for others to answer.

The talks have taken place. We have heard that, for the last number of years, talks were offered by the Orange Order in Portadown but rejected by the nationalist/republican community. The loyal orders have done what they can.

Mr Anderson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: My time is nearly up, I am sorry.

They keep moving forward, they want to progress and they want tolerance and respect, but that is not being reciprocated.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move the following amendment: At end insert

"; and calls on all organisations and parties involved, particularly elected representatives, to demonstrate unambiguous adherence to the rule of law."

I rise to support the motion and to propose the amendment. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue. I welcome the motion and agree that, in the absence of new arrangements to adjudicate on parades and protests, principles such as respect, restraint and tolerance should govern our approach to parades and protests in Northern Ireland. However, the Alliance Party believes that the motion could be strengthened by an explicit reference to the need for the principle of an unambiguous adherence to the rule of law as well. We have put that forward, and we hope that the motion as amended will receive the united support of the House today.

I do, however, hope that these words will be followed by positive actions. On a number of occasions, we have seen statements put forward by the Executive and the Assembly but the actions following that have not met the high standards of the statement. We have seen members of the proposing party, the Ulster Unionist Party, frankly, whip up tension by telling international mediators to go home when their party leader was in negotiation with that international mediator around these difficult issues.

We have seen people paint the Alliance Party as anti-British in relation to some of these issues, which is a disgrace and is false, not least considering the members of our party who have given service to Britain and British values in most important ways. Those people have talked cultural war and community tension into existence, the consequence of which is sustained dereliction and deprivation in areas that need redevelopment the most, relocation of business and reduced foreign direct investment. It is putting our Police Service in the position of being a shock absorber for failed political leadership. Although I do not agree with every PSNI approach, I would like to put on record my thanks to every PSNI officer who has served our community by upholding the law in some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. I encourage them to maintain their restraint and professionalism in those situations that they find themselves in.

I hope that the motion that has been put forward today is a departure from some of that difficult behaviour that we have seen in recent times, and I hope that we will see more leadership. I hope that we will see more reference to the positive aspects of cultural expression in Northern Ireland. Queen's University research has shown that the number of parades in Northern Ireland has doubled since 2005. We now have around 4,600 parades, the vast majority of which pass without restriction in a peaceful, enjoyable manner for those involved. Indeed, our marching bands are at an all-time high. Some would say that loyalist culture has never been better represented.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I am happy to give way.

Mr Campbell: The Member alluded to the Queen's University research. Does he agree with me that a considerable amount of the increase can be vouched for by applications that are put in by people who have their

legitimate parades thwarted and who go through the motions of reapplying on hundreds of occasions to try to get the one parade, which, if it had been granted, would have meant that that increase would be nothing like what it has been perceived by the research, and also that many of the parades that he has alluded to are not loyal order parades but are ordinary annual band parades that occur on a regular basis?

Mr Lyttle: There is obviously a mixture of parades. I do not think that anybody should object to following the proper procedure in order to have a peaceful, democratic right to exercise their parade. I will also reference the positive work that goes on in community development with many of the people involved in that cultural expression and, indeed, the fact that, in any democratic society, parading, festivals and those types of organisations should be regarded as positive and as making a positive contribution to society.

It is remiss, however, in an unfortunately still deeply divided society like Northern Ireland not to realise that there are real issues and that it will require fine human rights balances at times. We must ensure that all cultural expression is done within the rule of law and in an inclusive manner. Indeed, the OFMDFM community relations strategy, *Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC)*, clearly suggests that all public space is shared space. It is not an aspiration, but a principle that is set out in the strategy. It is not, as I have heard many people falsely say, neutral or anaemic space, but is about the behaviour that takes place while you are in that space. It should be based on dignity and respect and should not be about triumphalism or intimidation.

12.45 pm

From the point of view of the Alliance Party, the approach to parades and protests must be based on human rights, take account of responsibilities and be about improving relationships. There are, of course, rights to assemble and rights to a private life, key principles in the Good Friday Agreement about freedom from sectarian harassment and, indeed, the aspiration of our Executive to see all public space as shared space. As MLAs, we should make it absolutely clear that violence never pays. It has always been counterproductive and self-destructive and it has always divided rather than united this community.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Who to? I will take here and then here. Go for it.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. Can you tell me, as someone who has spent his entire adult life working with young people in north Belfast, how I tell people, particularly young people, that violence does not pay, when the Parades Commission rewarded the violence of republicans in 2012 and when the House, only a few weeks ago, refused to sanction a Member who willfully broke the law? How do I tell people — how do you tell people — that violence and lawbreaking does not pay?

Mr Lyttle: I want to make it very clear that I supported the sanction. I think that it was a missed opportunity for the Assembly to make clear what type of behaviour is unacceptable. Unfortunately, we missed those opportunities on other occasions with MLAs from other parties.

I say that violence does not pay. You tell me the state of community relations in the area where you are having to work extremely hard to repair them? Violence and the threat of violence is not productive, and because other people behave in a violent manner should not lead you to encourage anyone else to meet that violence with violent behaviour.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes.

Mr Allister: The Member rightly says that violence should not pay. However, how can anyone analyse the Parades Commission's decisions on the Ardoyne and not conclude that violence most certainly has paid for those who have used and threatened it. It has shaped the determinations of the Parades Commission, which simply bowed to the biggest stick. Is that not the story of Ardoyne?

Mr Lyttle: I am sure that the Parades Commission would robustly disagree with that analysis. I do not think it is helpful. The Parades Commission has to consider a number of things, and once a determination is made it is incumbent on all elected representatives to uphold that lawful determination.

Frankly, words are not enough. There have been opportunities. We had the shared future strategy in 2005, a draft cohesion, sharing and integration strategy in 2010, *Together: Building*

a United Community in 2013, the Haass process and now another opportunity with party talks. Elected leaders need to get their heads out of the sand, and we need to deal with these issues. If people want an alternative way to deal with parades and protests they should show leadership and create it, but, in the absence of any new arrangements, as the motion suggests, Parades Commission rulings must be respected and adhered to as the rule of law.

There can be no equivocation or cherry-picking of what the rule of law is. That equivocation and cherry-picking is heard by people across our community, who take their lead from elected representatives, and it is wholly unacceptable.

A statement was released by the leaders of the DUP, UUP, Sinn Féin, SDLP and Alliance last year. In it, they said:

"violence is not acceptable in a democratic society, nor is it inevitable".

They also called for:

"the law to be respected and upheld at all times."

They continued:

"Whatever any of the parties may believe about the wisdom of any Parades Commission determinations, it is the lawful authority dealing with these matters and its decisions must be observed."

I appeal to all elected representatives to make their actions in the coming season match those words that were set out last year.

Mr Humphrey: The context for the Ardoyne situation is that, in July 2012, 2,000 republicans came onto the Crumlin Road. They attacked Twaddell Avenue, they set fire to a car and pushed it into the police ranks, and they attempted to murder police officers with automatic gunfire. Contrast that with how the Orange institution behaved when it returned on that same day from the field, adhering to an appallingly discredited determination. A token number of them returned at 4.00 pm, and they passed without incident, as they had always done in the interests of peace and community relations.

All violence is wrong and should be condemned from whatever quarter it comes. The former Parades Commission, however, clearly

rewarded violence, and it rewarded wrongdoing. It is important to remember that it also rewarded the threat of potential violence.

For republicans at Ardoyne, there is no shared space and there is no shared future. The current Parades Commission, of course, has followed sadly along those same lines of continuing to reward the threat of violence and enshrine a nationalist veto. Rewarding violence, evil and wrongdoing is wrong. It undermines democracy, and it undermines the rule of law. For some 125 years, lodges from Ligoniel have processed down the Crumlin Road. I have to say to nationalists, if they do not come down the Crumlin Road — and nationalists are happy for them to come down the Crumlin Road; they are just not happy for them to return along the Crumlin Road, even at 8.00 am or 9.00 am. Where do they process, then, for their human rights and civil rights to be recognised? Do they go down the Oldpark Road or the Cavehill Road, or do they go down the Cliftonville Road? It is strange that nationalists are prepared to tolerate morning parades but that they absolutely reject an evening parade on 12 July. Six minutes of intolerance.

I believe in civil and religious liberty. I am a proud unionist, and I am confident of my history, tradition, culture, heritage and politics. I am confident, and I accept others' traditions and their right to celebrate their culture, and I respect their right to do so. "Tolerance", "respect", "accommodation" and "dialogue" are words that we have heard much of from nationalists, and I hear constantly from nationalist and republican politicians about dialogue and the need for dialogue to resolve issues.

Around the issue of Ligoniel lodges, there has been dialogue now for over 10 years. The current process started before Christmas, when nationalists failed to turn up. There were intensive talks in March and April, and, unfortunately, they led to no resolution. I have to say that when nationalists talk about dialogue, they are being completely disingenuous. Sinn Féin, the SDLP, the Crumlin Ardoyne Residents Association (CARA) and the Greater Ardoyne Residents Collective (GARC) have opposed an evening parade. Their starting point is no evening parade, and that veto is continuing to be protected.

The opposition to a traditional Orange parade was not simply a policy that was thought of on the hoof. It was hatched by Sinn Féin and the IRA, going back to a speech when Gerry

Adams revealed it all in Athboy, when his mask slipped. People like Mac Cionnaith, Nelis and Rice were deliberately put in place. How can unionism and loyalism reach accommodation with those who talk of dialogue and want local solutions when these parties campaign against parades, lobby the police against parades, lobby the Parades Commission against parades and, in the case of the SDLP and Sinn Féin, protest at those same parades, including church parades? Gerry Kelly said last year in relation to the Orange brethren at Twaddell and the Crumlin Road:

"They can stand there all they like. They won't be getting up."

Paul Carson recently said on 'Spotlight':

"We will mobilise thousands to come to Ardoyne if a parade is allowed up."

His words were echoed by Dee Fennell, another dissident spokesperson from Ardoyne in the 'Belfast Telegraph' last week. I was recently part of a joint delegation to the Parades Commission, when the chair of the commission said in relation to Ardoyne:

"There is absolute rejection from what we have heard from all nationalist parties to an evening parade."

So, accommodation, shared space, shared future, dialogue, tolerance, respect — there is not any. There is absolute rejection from all sides.

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

Mr Humphrey: Last week, Gemma McKenna of Sinn Féin said:

"We maintain the view that there is no rationale for any loyal order parade in this area".

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. I call Daithí McKay.

Mr Humphrey: There is no tolerance for the Orange tradition in this place.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. We will be supporting the motion and the amendment. It is important that the motion highlights the absence of agreement, because that is the real issue here

— the absence of agreement on parades, flags and the past. When I looked at the research paper and at the speech that I made the last time that we discussed parades, it seemed like Groundhog Day; we are going over the same issues again and again. The only way that we are going to resolve that is by engaging with the talks process that is being put in place, following on from the developments of the Haass proposals, engaging positively, and not having an eye on the next election down the road but thinking about how this will secure better outcomes for the future of all society.

Indeed, I wish the new Chief Constable well in his role over the summer period. The proposer of the amendment was right to say that the police, in recent years, have become the shock absorbers because there has been an absence of agreement around all these issues.

Many parades take place that are respectful and where participants do not wish to cause offence. They are dignified and pass off peacefully. There are good examples, and we look to Crumlin and Derry, where accommodation and agreements can be made if there is a willingness on all sides.

But this is not an issue that cropped up only in the past number of years; it is not something that was conjured up by Gerry Adams, Gerry Kelly or anybody else. This has been going on for hundreds of years. This is part of our history. If you go back to the 1800s or back to the early 20th century, you will see that there were always issues around parades, and they have never been resolved. This is an opportunity to resolve these issues once and for all.

We need to learn from last year's mistakes. We cannot afford to see a repeat of any Grand Old Duke of York act up to Ardoyne, whether that is at the behest of the Orange Order leadership or elsewhere, because that is not good for police officers and their safety, it is not good for business or the image of Belfast, and it is not good for young unionists who get involved at the interface and end up having to go into the criminal justice system, the process and the slippery slope that leads to unfortunate social outcomes. Those are the consequences of a lack of leadership on parades in Belfast and elsewhere.

The Parades Commission should be allowed to get on with its job without being threatened by the DUP, the Orange Order and others, and without pressure being exerted by the NIO and other parties. We need to ensure that the role of the Parades Commission is respected,

because we have not come to an agreement on the way forward on parades, flags and the past. Until we reach that agreement, I cannot see how anybody can complain about the Parades Commission, given that they did not follow through on previous negotiations.

The public want these issues dealt with. I spoke to a taxi driver in Belfast the other day, and he was fearful because of some of the rumours that he had heard about what might happen over the coming days and weeks. That will obviously permeate throughout the city and the business community, and it will affect tourists as well. The economic and social consequences of this are not a price that I feel is worth paying.

We need to move this issue forward. People do not want to see the policing budget spent on camps and parades and being taken away from community policing in rural and urban communities. They want to see that money put on the front line where it belongs.

Ms Ruane: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Ms Ruane: Does the Member agree with me that the money spent currently on Twaddell Avenue would be far better spent on welfare and protecting the most vulnerable?

Mr McKay: I absolutely agree.

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

Mr McKay: Some of the areas and interfaces that are affected as a result of parades are some of our most deprived societies. The proposer of the amendment —

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

1.00 pm

Mr McKay: I will not take another intervention, sorry.

The proposer of the amendment referred to that as well. So, those who end up being involved at the behest of some politicians' words end up entering the criminal justice system and a vicious cycle of deprivation. We need to break that cycle. We need to ensure that there is agreement on parades, flags and the past — issues that dog our society every summer.

People are sick and tired of it; the police are sick and tired of it; we are sick and tired of it. It is about time that unionist parties in the House showed some leadership, first and foremost for the benefit of their community.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I remind Members of two things: first, the actual language and text of the motion; and, secondly, to be mindful that words spoken here resonate in our community. The mover of the motion was wise enough to remind us of that.

Mr Attwood: The SDLP will support the amendment and the motion. However, when you cut through all of this, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker — this may touch on the point that you have just made — in the times and weeks in which we are living and in the debate that we are having, does it not come down to whether people in every party are prepared to say today that, whatever may happen over the next two weeks, their parties will advise people, wherever they may be in Northern Ireland, to accept the decision of the Parades Commission?

I make that point for a number of reasons. First, more than any other party, last autumn the SDLP was publicly and privately profoundly critical of the Secretary of State's decision to stand down the previous Parades Commission, to reduce the membership of the current commission to five, to reduce the number of days that it works and so on and so forth. That was because we saw, in doing that, the potential for bad outcomes. Despite our concerns about how the British Government, and the Secretary of State in particular, conducted themselves at that time, and whatever about the democratic right to peaceful protest, we are telling people, unambiguously, to accept the decisions of the Parades Commission. Save for the Alliance Party, we can say that with more integrity and authority than any other party in the Chamber.

Not very long ago, the party on the Benches to my right referred to the Parades Commission as "cheerleaders for sectarianism" and "obsolete". Those words have been echoed by other parties in the Chamber too often and in too many disputes over too many years. In doing so, they undermined the rule of law. Whether you like it or love it, the Parades Commission, as an institution over all these years, is the expression of the rule of law in our society. So the question is this: is every party prepared to say, during and at the end of this debate that — whatever transpires over the next days; whatever our misgivings about the Secretary of

State and her conduct; whatever our views might be about the Parades Commission and the democratic right to peaceful protest — we accept the determinations?

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will. We in the SDLP have found certain Parades Commission determinations over the years difficult, but we told people to accept them. That is the standard of this debate; that is the standard of these days; that is the standard that we have to live up to on 12 July.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he reflect back to — I need to check the date, but I think that it was 1998 — when their elected representatives in Portadown strongly opposed the decision to allow a parade down Garvaghy Road and, as far as I recall, protested very strongly, *[Interruption.]* maybe legally.

Secondly, will he reflect on supporting the petition of concern that stopped the Assembly bringing sanctions against Mr Gerry Kelly, who broke the law in north Belfast recently?

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

Mr Attwood: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. On the first point, I was with Bríd Rodgers on the Garvaghy Road when the decision was made at a political and policing level to send a parade down it. It was the first Parades Commission that then laid down the principles at the heart of disputes in this society. In the year that it was established, and in making the first decision about the Garvaghy Road, it said that, at the heart of disputes about parades, were relationships and that relationships needed to be resolved in order to resolve parading disputes. It said that to resolve relationship disputes, you needed sustained, direct and meaningful dialogue.

Mr Anderson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in a second.

That is what the Parades Commission said. So, yes, there were times when even I was on the Garvaghy Road, objecting to what the police and the political authorities had decided, but the Parades Commission then laid down principles. If our society, our communities, our protesters and our Orange lodges had lived up to the standards of sustained, direct and

meaningful dialogue in every year since, we would be in a better place.

In the next number of days, the political parties will have to challenge themselves again to engage in direct, sustained and meaningful dialogue. We do not need the appearance of talks, which is what we have; we need direct, sustained and meaningful dialogue. In that space, we can create the paradigm shift that we need to resolve the multiple expressions of conflict and division that are all around us in the Chamber and in our society.

Mr McCausland: The motion refers to the need for "respect, restraint and tolerance". Is it too much to ask, then, that nationalists and republicans show sufficient respect, restraint and tolerance to enable them to get to the point at which they do not oppose and object to three small lodges and one band returning home on the Twelfth night along the main Crumlin Road to their starting point at Ligoniel? Is it too much to ask? Is there sufficient respect, restraint and tolerance on that side of the Chamber to allow them to do that?

They may vote for a motion that speaks about those things, but the reality is that there is no respect or tolerance. Five minutes — 10 minutes at the most — is all that it would take for the brethren and the band to return home. However, 10 minutes of tolerance is too much for the SDLP and too much for Sinn Féin. They could not even find it in their hearts to show 10 minutes of tolerance.

My colleague William Humphrey referred to the speech by Gerry Adams in 1995, in which he pointed back to 1992 and said:

"Three years of work went into creating that situation and fair play to those people who put the work in."

On the Ormeau Road and in Portadown, Fermanagh, Newry, Armagh, Bellaghy and Londonderry, the work was put in by Sinn Féin to create that situation. Daithí McKay took us on a journey back through the centuries. However, in the years since 1992, when the Sinn Féin machine went into operation on this, there has been a sustained attack by republicans on Orange culture and tradition, and not just on parades. Alongside and linked in some way to it, as pointed out earlier this year by the Grand Secretary of the Grand Orange Lodge, has been the burning down of Orange halls. In the 25 years before the Sinn Féin campaign, 39 Orange halls were burned down; in the 10 years after it began, 192 were burned down. Between 2010 and 2012, some 114 attacks on Orange halls were reported to

the police. If burning down that number of Orange halls is not a cultural war — and I noted that Mr Lyttle said that he does not like the term "cultural war" — I do not know what it is.

As regards the parade at Ligoniel up the Crumlin Road, the first Orange lodge was formed there in 1865. They have been parading there for 150 years. That road is generally seen as a shared road. It has on it a car wash, a public library, an ambulance station, a health centre and shops. Those are, or should be, used by people from both traditions. Is it too much to ask that Orange brethren are allowed to return along that road?

What republicans want to do is sectarianise the road. They want to claim control of it. The reality, in the case of Ardoyne, is that it is people who are not in the Chamber, the dissident republicans and GARC, who are the tail wagging the nationalist and republican dog. They are scared to face them down. Two years ago, GARC brought 1,000, 2,000 or whatever number of people — a howling mob — out onto the front of the Crumlin Road. That was a shambles that was authorised and approved by the Parades Commission. At the very point where Orange brethren should have been having a peaceful, dignified parade up the road, the road was occupied by a howling mob of people going down, throwing missiles and howling abuse. Is that the sort of society that we want?

I noted that Alex Atwood spoke about the principles of the Parades Commission. The principle of the Parades Commission is to reward violence. Dee Fennell said in the 'Belfast Telegraph' the other day:

"We told the Parades Commission that in the past we have shown our willingness and ability to use radical means to stop parades taking place. We said we would do so again ... We would have mobilised people and we would have blocked the road".

We have seen what "radical means" actually means on the streets of north Belfast. Talk about dialogue. There have been 10 years of dialogue.

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

Mr McCausland: What is there left for brethren there to talk about with republicans and nationalists? Are we down to discussing the colour of the laces on their shoes? That must be about the only thing that has not been talked

about after 10 years of dialogue, and still there is no tolerance.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion and the amendment. The motion rightly calls for the principles of respect, restraint and tolerance to be upheld. The motion and the amendment highlight the responsibility that is placed on elected representatives. The Assembly should, and must, endorse these principles. Equality should not be simply a buzzword; it must be actioned.

My constituency in Derry has done that. Derry has very clearly sent out the message that we can negotiate, take risks and accommodate. Increasingly, in Belfast, the lack of engagement with residents' groups, the illegal protests, the cost of policing these protests set alongside —

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: No, I will not.

All that, set alongside the continuing work in Derry, means, as the deputy First Minister said recently, that it has become a tale of two cities.

If we are genuinely serious about inward investment, tourism, job creation and the ensuing economic growth, we also need to be serious about resolving the parades issue. We, in the House, must all ask ourselves this question: why is there not dialogue or negotiation with a view to finding agreement? Negotiation should not take away from anyone's culture. We can work collectively towards marches that are not contentious. Equally, residents who have problems or issues should be listened to.

We should effectively take on what are our responsibilities. After all, we are the elected representatives. We are the people who are supposed to give leadership, come up with the initiatives, programmes or projects, and sit down in a calm, rational and mature way. We do not have to do it in this Chamber. We were able to do it in the city of Derry, in a process very much accommodated by the DUP's own Willie Hay.

1.15 pm

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: No, I will not.

It was a process very much facilitated through the Speaker of the House. It was greatly encouraged by, and did indeed greatly

encourage, the process of negotiation and accommodation. It was a process that involved dialogue and risks, but it also involved accommodation based on the principles of respect and equality. The question before us is this: if that process can work in Derry, why can it not work in Belfast?

Mr Anderson: I must declare an interest: I am proud to say that I am a member of the Orange Institution, the Royal Black Institution and the Apprentice Boys. As a representative of Upper Bann, I come from a constituency that has experienced more than its fair share of difficulties over parades. Despite what some would have us believe, the parading issue in Portadown has not been resolved; far from it. We have just had another example of it in the last few days, and I will return to that in a few minutes.

The motion speaks of "respect, restraint and tolerance". I agree that those things would go a long way towards resolving the problems surrounding parades. For many decades, there was little or no difficulty over parades simply because there was that mutual respect, restraint and tolerance. For many years, traditional loyal order parades passed off in a peaceful manner, and I believe that the vast majority of the nationalist community is still quite prepared to let the Orangemen have their day.

The parading issue has been hijacked by republicans determined to create a range of contentious parades, conveniently selected to cause maximum tension and disruption. Sinn Féin and the SDLP lecture us about civil rights, equality and parity of esteem, but this is nothing but hypocrisy, for it is quite clear that those parties are determined to do all in their power to deny the Protestant/unionist community its civil and religious liberties. I go further: to me, Sinn Féin and the SDLP are guilty of bigotry and sectarianism. Loyal order parades are Protestant parades. Nationalists demand the rerouting of sectarian marches, but this really means Protestant parades and often Protestant Church parades. The real sectarianism is to be found among those who oppose these loyal order parades.

All that is well illustrated by the parade planned for last Saturday in Portadown. That one-off parade and service was simply to rededicate an arch in memory of a member of the Parkmount arch committee who sadly passed away a few months ago. It was along a short stretch of road known locally as Victoria Terrace, which is not part of the Garvaghy Road; neither is it part of the impasse over the Church parade

returning from Drumcree Parish Church along Garvaghy Road. False assertions about the whole issue are part of the propaganda and war waged by Breandán Mac Cionnaith, who was once trained by Sinn Féin, and today is still supported by Dolores Kelly, who is not in the Chamber, and John O'Dowd, who is in the Chamber.

Victoria Terrace contains 22 houses occupied by ethnic minorities, Protestants and those of mixed religion. I surveyed most of those homes last week and not one of the residents had any objection to the parade. In fact, they saw it as part of our culture and they said that they had enjoyed the recent junior Orange parade at the end of May. Some residents felt that they were being used by those opposed to the parade and no one had sought their views. Residents also felt that they were being placed in danger because of this particular campaign.

What we are now witnessing in Portadown is another illustration of republicans and nationalists seeking to further exclude and alienate Protestants and to take control of another area, which is adjacent to and within yards of a public park, which is undergoing a shared space programme to the tune of over £5 million of EU funding. That park has been a no-go area to the Protestant/unionist people for over 40 years, and now we have these same people trying to further extend the alienation of the Protestant/unionist people by denying them their right to walk along Victoria Terrace.

The hard-line attitude being taken by Mrs Kelly and Mr O'Dowd in supporting Breandán Mac Cionnaith sends out a very alarming signal to the Protestant/unionist people of Portadown and beyond. It is a case of "not a Protestant about the place" and marking out more territory.

I was part of a delegation led by David Simpson MP that recently met the Parades Commission about last week's parade. We presented new evidence and were left with a clear impression that it would consider the issue again. Of course, that was a forlorn hope.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Anderson: OK.

Mr Givan: Having met the Parades Commission, does the Member agree that, given the way it handled that decision by doing that U-turn, it has, some would say, lost any credibility that it ever had, if it had credibility in the first place to lose?

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

Mr Anderson: I certainly agree with my colleague. We put forward an argument on that occasion and thought that the issues were being addressed. We thought that we had put forward a very robust argument as to why this should be overturned, but the decision that was originally taken and then overturned shows that the Parades Commission was prepared to listen to untruths, because that is what they were. As I have already said, the Parades Commission was told untruths about the people along Victoria Terrace.

There are those on Garvaghy Road who state that the parading issue in Portadown is a dead duck. Let me assure those people that it is still very much a live issue and will continue to be so until nationalists and republicans display respect, restraint and tolerance towards their Protestant and unionist fellow citizens. That way, Portadown and other areas can move forward with genuine hope.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. It is very regrettable that we are even here in the Chamber this afternoon discussing this matter. As both my colleagues have said, our party will support the motion and the amendment, and why would we not? When you consider what the motion suggests and says and what the amendment calls on all of us to do, why would we not subscribe to all of that? Quite clearly, we are more than happy to support the motion and the amendment.

The remarks from Tom Elliott, who proposed and spoke to the motion, really added nothing to the discussion. With all due respect to Tom, it added nothing to the debate. It gave us no new information and nothing additional to consider; it merely rehearsed a number of the arguments that we hear frequently. I do not believe that the vast majority of the public out there, if they tune into this debate this afternoon, would, first of all, be at all surprised. I think that they are likely to be disappointed and more likely to be bemused that we are having this discussion in the Chamber today despite the fact that talks are starting tomorrow. So, within 24 hours, all the parties at senior levels will have dedicated discussions/negotiations around this and other very important matters that are left over from the Haass discussions. I think that most people will be scratching their heads and wondering, since we are going into negotiations, why we are having this debate in the Chamber today at all. I would have liked Members either not to have moved the debate this afternoon at all,

which I think would have been the sensible thing to do, or, in the absence of that, if we are to have a discussion, I would have liked us at least to address how we might conduct ourselves in the negotiations that are starting tomorrow.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

It is very late in the day. This is already 1 July, and the Haass talks ended six months ago. Notwithstanding that, they recommence tomorrow, and we have had a period of party leaders' discussions on and off for the past couple of months. Tomorrow commences a set of negotiations, and none of us knows where they will go. Our party is very committed to making sure that they are successful and that we conclude the business laid out by the Richard Haass and Meghan O'Sullivan final paper because, quite clearly, the way to resolve these issues is through dialogue, respect and, unfortunately, regulation and enforcement, if that has to be the end result. We have many examples — Members have addressed this already in the debate — of where parades have been more successfully conducted because there has been some local dialogue. We have heard how the situation in Derry was addressed. We have heard what happened in Crumlin and other places. Even in my city, Belfast, there have been some examples of, where there have been discussions, some understanding being reached locally to minimise a lot of the problems. However, we still have a small number —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: Yes.

Mr Campbell: The Member referred to a number of locations where dialogue has occurred but he did not mention Portadown. Portadown Members are here on all sides, but my understanding is that repeated attempts have been made to get dialogue in Portadown, but that those who say they represent people on the Garvaghy Road will not have that dialogue.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Maskey: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. The fact is that, when people want dialogue, it is like everything else: if people are invited in to dialogue, they have to have an understanding that it will be meaningful and respectful. It is up to people to decide — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Maskey: I am doing my level best to be very patient and generous. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am trying not to rile Members opposite because I know that, getting into this period of the year, it is quite difficult for them to keep settled. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Maskey: That is my direct personal experience of growing up in the city of Belfast, which I will never leave, by the way, because I love my city. I do not like aspects of it, but that is par for the course.

I am determined to send the message that, tomorrow, an opportunity will commence for all parties to enter negotiations with an absolute commitment to resolve the problems. That is what we need to do. That is what people out there want to hear. They do not want to hear a meaningless debate in the Chamber that only facilitates some people rehearsing the arguments.

Daithí McKay and other Members referred to other situations. Ardoyne is not just a current problem. Many would cite Ardoyne, 1969, as a milestone in this phase of the conflict. But Portadown, 150 years ago, was a problem. I am not even going to say where the problem emanated from, but the problem was there. Parades in that part of the world were universally banned for quite some time because of difficulties. For me, the legacy of what we have learned over the years has to be that, where people are committed to respectful dialogue and serious engagement, we can get a positive outcome for those who want to parade or those who feel offended by certain aspects of some parades. Where we have tolerance, respect and a dignified celebration of our culture, rather than people going to the toilet outside chapel gates —

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

Mr Maskey: — we can get a resolution that meets everybody's needs in a respectful manner. Tomorrow, the clock starts ticking for all the parties to do that.

Mr Eastwood: It is very difficult, as has already been said, to play any part in the debate and, at the same time, try to keep tensions reduced and things calm. Everybody has their own perspective on the issue. There is not just one issue but a number of issues, across the North. People have different feelings about all those issues and difficulties. I will do my best to try to heed Mr Elliott's advice. Whatever the content of his speech, his plea for calmness and tolerance is the right one.

We need to acknowledge, as the Principal Deputy Speaker said, that what happens in here is heard out there and that we are in a very difficult time. Every year, we come to this time of year, and, unfortunately, it is difficult. Whatever people say, a lot of the issues that have already been talked about have not just arrived in anybody's in tray; they have been there for a long time. Parading is a historic issue in Ireland and one that we have never really got to grips with. Luckily, parades can pass off peacefully in many areas, but there are many reasons why they do not in other areas and why people feel that parades should not go through particular areas. The bottom line in all this is that, whatever we come up with in these talks, we have a process for dealing with parades right now. I cannot honestly see a very different process coming out of any negotiation.

1.30 pm

The process at the moment is that we have an independent commission that decides on controversial parades. That is as good as we are going to get. We go to negotiations, as we do in all negotiations, with a will to try to solve things, and I hope that everybody else does the same. However, we need some sort of independent arbiter to decide on these issues. If people cannot decide on them themselves through negotiation, respect and long, hard slog, somebody will have to make the call. Many times, I will not like the call and, many times, other people will not like it either, but we have to be prepared, as Mr Attwood said, to live with those decisions. It does not mean that we cannot protest them, but it means that we have to do so in a peaceful, dignified and respectful way. That goes for everybody, whatever the decision may be.

Members talked about the PSNI. Over the last 18 months to two years, we have put members of the PSNI in the firing line from people from different sections of our community, and that is not good enough. We have all, thankfully, signed up to the justice system, to policing and to the rule of law, and we need to do everything that we can to protect those PSNI officers

whom we put in harm's way but also to protect the communities that have to suffer this, year in, year out.

Derry was mentioned. I am not going to stand here and lecture anybody, because Derry is not Ardoyne, Portadown or a whole lot of other places. However, the principle that underpins what has happened in Derry — you know it very well, Mr Speaker — is one of constant conversation, where people will get round the table when difficult issues are on the horizon and talk things through. That is not always easy; we do not always come to it

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. You are quite right; I do not know the situation in Londonderry, but, clearly, both sides in Londonderry were willing to reach an accommodation and to show tolerance and respect. Given what other unionist representatives and I were faced with when we went to the Parades Commission, if you are confronted with a situation where it is said that there is absolute rejection of a parade from all nationalist parties — including yours — what exactly do people who want to parade do in that context?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Eastwood: Sometimes, we are all very good at talking about our rights, but with rights come responsibilities. Sometimes, you have to step back and say, "I do not want to exercise that right today", because you think that it will cause mayhem on the streets of Belfast, Portadown, Derry or somewhere else. We all have responsibilities to ensure that everything that we do is done in a respectful way and in a way that understands that we have to appreciate everybody else's opinion. I encourage everybody in north Belfast and Portadown to get round the table to try to resolve these issues. My party will not be found wanting when it comes to that; it never has been before.

Someone on the other side of the Chamber said that we were scared to face dissidents down. I can tell you that we are not afraid to face dissidents down; we face them down every day. I just hope that the same spirit of facing down the dissidents in our community and those who are determined to cause mayhem in the streets of Belfast or anywhere else is carried through by Members on the other side of the Chamber.

Mr Allister: Parading is, above all, an expression of culture and, particularly in our

historic situation, that is how it has evolved. Of course it is right that for centuries, perhaps, there have been instances of conflict in that regard. However, it is indisputably clear that, in recent times, there has been an accentuation of the difficulties over parades, not by accident but by design. That design has already been identified in this debate by the quoting of the remarks of Gerry Adams in the mid-90s, when he pointed out that what was now happening with parades, stopping and protesting about parades, was, indeed, no accident but was the design of Sinn Féin.

That is what we have seen ever since.

This year, the focus is, of course, on Ardoyne. That is because it epitomises much of the issue at the heart of this. If parading is an expression of culture, it comes down to a question of the capacity for toleration of others not of that culture to abide and permit the expression of pursuit of that culture. The very fact that Sinn Féin had a hand in orchestrating opposition to that indicates where it is coming from. That is why unionists, and I include myself, see all of that as part of that orchestrated cultural war in which Sinn Féin is engaged. You can reduce that to a number of quite compelling factors. One is that Sinn Féin is a party that demands shared government but is not prepared to share the public road. It has the audacity to say, "We demand, as of right, to share in government, but we will not tolerate, permit or allow the sharing of public space." That attitude persists. Maybe the lesson should be learned that it is a quid pro quo in some respects.

It was pointed out that what is asked for at Ardoyne is for public space to be processed for a few minutes. Those who say no demonstrate their deep belligerence and bigotry in so doing. Then, of course, they are helped on by the pernicious, perverse Parades Commission. I say "perverse" because — take the Ardoyne decision — it decides, quite rightly, that it is appropriate for the Orangemen to leave their hall, but, perversely, that they cannot return. Why is that being said by the residents of the area, who put themselves in the way of being annoyed by that parade? It is another way of their saying to the Orangemen that, "There is no home for you here. You are not coming home here. This is not your area. This is our exclusive, 'Ourselves Alone' area." That is why they argue that, "You can leave it in the morning, but you shall never return to it because it is not your home."

That is the message that Sinn Féin and the SDLP, by their belligerence, convey to those of the Protestant and unionist tradition about what

should be that shared space up the Crumlin Road. We had some sanctimonious lectures from Mr Maskey about all of those things. They should look in the mirror and see why it is that they are so belligerent and bigoted in their inability to show the modicum of tolerance required for a resolution to the situation.

Mr Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Allister: They have been told, "No talk, no walk".

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Allister: Maybe, if there is no walk, there should be no talk.

Mr Lyttle: Some Members have questioned the purpose of the debate. I think that the opportunity to endorse the important principles of respect, restraint, tolerance and upholding the rule of law is an important one. I thank the Members who took that opportunity and responded in the spirit of the motion. I regret that some used the type of inflammatory language that does not help these extremely sensitive situations.

Tom Elliott rightly condemned extreme violent intolerance from some people who call themselves republicans, and I agree with that condemnation.

William Humphrey said that, for republicans in Ardoyne, there is no shared future. Whilst today's debate was about principles rather than individual areas or decisions, I regret that the challenge was not taken up by some of the Members and parties that it was aimed at to try to explain what their vision of a shared future actually is. I agree with Mr Humphrey about comments from Gerry Kelly like:

"They can stand there all they like."

That is some of the unhelpful, inflammatory language that I referred to earlier. To say that there is absolutely no rationale for loyal order parades in that area challenges some of the principles set out in Together: Building a United Community, including that all public space should be shared space. I think that there are challenges for all Members of the House to respond to some of those types of comments.

We have to get away from labelling areas as nationalist or unionist. That flies in the face of the OFMDFM Executive target of building one united community in this region, where all public

space is shared space. I think that Members, especially those in the DUP and Sinn Féin, which hold the positions of First Minister and deputy First Minister, should respond to the contradiction that lies within that.

William Humphrey asked me what he should say to young people in his area about violence. I encourage him to tell them that violence has done absolutely nothing for this community, other than achieve criminal records, injury and loss, destroy community cohesion and prevent community development across our community. To engage in violence also does a great disservice to the many responsible people involved in the organisations that he said he represents and engages with. Peaceful, lawful and democratic action is key to responding to these issues, and I am willing to represent and meet anybody who has legitimate concerns within that context.

Alex Attwood rightly said that a core concept that must come out of today is that, regardless of disagreements, we must accept the determination of the Parades Commission as the rule of law. He also helpfully said that, whilst rights and responsibility are important, relationships are key, and I agree with that. If Mr Attwood were in the Chamber, I would ask him — I am sure that he can respond to this on another occasion — whether he therefore agrees that to deal with parades in isolation will not get the job done and that, although we can change the architecture for parading, we must have robust good relations strategies in place that encourage equality, good relations and mutual respect across our community.

Nelson McCausland —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, briefly.

Mr A Maginness: On the contentious parade in Ardoyne, does the Member agree that it is vital that local resolution not only be tried but be successful to resolve that continuing situation?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Lyttle: I wholeheartedly agree. Strong leadership from the Assembly and from elected representatives is obviously key, but, ultimately, local dialogue has to take place to reach a resolution to what is now an extremely entrenched issue, unfortunately.

We again had accusations of a "cultural war", which I regard as an astoundingly dangerous and unhelpful phrase. Nelson McCausland and Jim Allister both mentioned that. Burning down Orange halls, attacking Catholic churches and other sectarian crimes are heinous, counterproductive and violent sectarianism, but to talk of wars against entire cultures is astoundingly dangerous, and, to be frank, to associate the Alliance Party with that at times is an absolute disgrace. We need to get away from that type of language and get back to building the united community that we want to see.

Maeve McLaughlin said that this was an opportunity for the Assembly to endorse the principles set out by the motion, and I wholeheartedly agree with that.

Paul Givan again questioned the credibility of the Parades Commission. This is a Member who, during an OFMDFM Committee meeting, called the Parades Commission "anti-Protestant" and was suitably rebutted by a parades commissioner whose family holds Orange Order membership. So the credibility of that accusation towards the Parades Commission is wholly unfounded, and it is unhelpful in the spirit of today's debate.

1.45 pm

In conclusion, an increasing number of people in our community are fed up with our inability to address these types of issues and move on from them. Derry/Londonderry has shown leadership on these issues, and, indeed, people want to hear about other issues, such as the increasing number of jobs and apprenticeships that are being created. People want to hear about and focus on those issues. So I hope that is the message that we send from this Chamber today.

Mr Speaker: I call Michael Copeland to wind on the motion. The Member has 10 minutes.

Mr Copeland: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I may not even need the 10 minutes on this occasion, which, I am sure, will be very welcome. This portion of a debate is traditionally called "winding up", and I would say that there have been a good deal of useful contributions from pretty much all quarters, and I found something of merit in some of the things that were said by most people. I did note a degree of winding up, which could be expected in a debate of this nature, even when it is not the winder-up who is winding up.

The truth is, if we aspire to live in a democracy, incumbent on that is the notion that you will hear things that you do not like. Incumbent on that notion is the reality that you will see things that you do not like, and the truth is, when you take it upon yourself to restrict someone else's freedom to say things and do things, you actually challenge your rights in that society.

Parading, walking and demonstrating were the terms that I always heard used in connection with Orange, Black and Apprentice Boys' parades in the past. Marching — and I know something about marching, having once been a soldier — does not equate to a lot of what goes on at Orange, Black and Apprentice Boys' demonstrations. They are walks and parades, and they were not designed to give offence, following the routes that they traditionally followed. Then, some years ago, for whatever reason, there was talk of marching, which gave, in my view, a militaristic and aggressive resonance to the parades that was not there originally.

Tolerance, respect and restraint should not only be confined to contested parades. Those values should be present in every relationship that every citizen has with every other citizen in this country. We can talk in this place until we are blue in the face, and the truth is that on a particular night, at an interface or at a protest or demonstration, our society will be reduced to the lowest common denominator by he who throws the first stone.

There is much myth about the content, even of the music, which, on occasions, is contested. I well remember Michael Fisher of RTÉ pursuing me up Templemore Avenue, wanting to know why one of the better-known flute bands in east Belfast had just passed by playing 'The Patriot Game', which is a well-known tune in Irish nationalism and, indeed, republicanism. The truth is that the band was not playing 'The Patriot Game'; it was playing a tune called 'Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!', which grew from the American civil war, came to Ireland with the Fenian movement and became 'The Patriot Game'. It then came north of the border with the words, "No Priest, Pope or Holy Water", set to the same piece of music. The same piece of music.

The people for whom I feel most sorry are those who have been made to feel that their sense of being is in some way unfit to be seen by their neighbours. The people who feel that the colours that they wear render them a lesser human being and that their expression of who they are should be subject to regulation by a body such as the Parades Commission. I am

sure that body is well intentioned, but some of the decisions that it has made down the years have, on occasion, made things worse because, once you surrender the principle of citizenship in a democracy, all else — all else — comes onto the table.

God knows, the United States is an example of many good things, but it is also an example of many bad things. Some years ago, protected by the constitution of the United States, an awful grouping of people — neo-fascist white supremacists — paraded through the Jewish district of one of the major cities, the notion being that if the constitution protected scum like them, it protected everyone. We need to create the notion that a person's liberties and rights are not restricted by law, but defended by law. That, at some stage, I am sure, will give a very major difficulty when the coin flips on to its other side.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Copeland: Chris, not today. There is an angst felt by members of loyalist flute bands. They are viewed in disparaging terms by many, yet they are extremely democratic organisations. They raise their own money. Their leadership is only as good as the first vote of no confidence. They teach young people music, and they take them off the streets, but they are castigated because of initials on a drum or because of a symbolism on a uniform. Then they see those who castigate them for those things perambulating around with children armed with AK47 rifles, and they see sporting clubs being named after people who would be adjudicated by them as being dead terrorists. The thing does not seem fair. It may well be — I may be stupid — but it does not seem fair.

It is that growing sense of resentment and feeling of being under pressure, coupled with economic decline and the removal of the great things that were once there when people were proud to go to work and make things and stamp "Made in Belfast" or "Made in Northern Ireland" on them. They now find that education prepares them for a life of being dependent on others.

Culture is a very valued thing. Aberrations of culture can be dangerous. This is the ninety-eighth anniversary, I think, of the commencement of the Somme offensive. It is coming close to 2.00 pm here. In our time, it began at 7.00 am. There are famous pictures of soldiers of Irish, Catholic, Ulster and Protestant heritage performing deeds that I can only stand in awe of. Tonight, in my constituency, there will be one of the oldest

Somme anniversary parades. It will be accompanied by tension and by screens to separate the citizens of the Short Strand from the citizens of the Albertbridge Road, for their mutual safety. There will be young people there with Union flags tied round their waists — they are young. There will be alcohol consumed on the streets from blue bags. All the ingredients are there in preparation for the first stone. They do it because they do not know what it is about. They do not know the magnitude of what took place over 100 years ago in France, yet an aberration of history drives them to express themselves in ways that will cause them no good. The answer to this lies not in those who wish to parade, but with those who wish to restrict the basic freedoms that should be available in every democracy.

The amendment includes the word "law". I thought that the aspiration inculcated in the initial motion made respect for law quite clear. I served the law. Sixty three thousand people served the law with me, and many hundreds of them were killed. To this day, many thousands are affected by the injuries that they received, and many thousands more are affected by the mental trauma of what they witnessed.

My wife was 18 years of age when a bullet passed through the constable beside her on the Springfield Road before hitting her. No one can tell me about the price of defending law. I have tried to explain my thoughts to those in the Chamber as best I can. I hope that, as this place settles down and begins to discharge its obligation towards people to defend them from the real ravages of poverty, unemployment and educational underachievement, which affect all our people, regardless of race, religion, colour, creed or gender, the sacrifice on the Somme may well have been worth something.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes, in the absence of a formal agreement on a new way forward for contested parades and associated protests, that it is essential that everyone involved, whether participants, spectators or protestors, demonstrate respect, restraint and tolerance for those of differing opinions; and calls on all organisations and parties involved, particularly elected representatives, to demonstrate unambiguous adherence to the rule of law.

Mr Speaker: As we move to Question Time, I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.55 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, we have to wait for the Health Minister. That disadvantages Members who are in the House for Question Time.

Question No 3 has been withdrawn.

GP Out-of-hours Framework

Mr Boylan: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I would like to take the opportunity to apologise to you for missing a recent Question Time.

1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the GP out-of-hours framework. (AQO 6476/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I approved the GP out-of-hours framework in January 2014. A project board chaired by the Regional Health and Social Care Board is in place to take the work forward. Implementation of the GP out-of-hours framework is necessarily dependent on alignment with a number of health and social care projects, including the 111 telephone number and the development of a directory of service and web portal. It is therefore not possible at this stage to give a definitive timetable for the business case process and the overall implementation of the framework.

Mr Boylan: With the Minister being late, I thought that this was out-of-hours Question Time. Can the Minister clarify that GP out-of-hours activity has increased by 18% whilst activity through emergency departments has decreased by 2%?

Mr Poots: GP out-of-hours centres are busy places. In 2012-13, providers dealt with 606,000 patients. Of those, 220,000 received telephone advice; 174,000 visited an out-of-hours centre for treatment; and 31,000 received home visits. There is a considerable amount of work going on, and we understand that GPs who work in out-of-hours services feel

considerable pressure in the service that they provide. It is a challenging environment for them.

Mr G Robinson: What is the Minister's assessment of the out-of-hours service in the Limavady area? My understanding is that the out-of-hours doctors are being diverted to Altnagelvin Hospital several nights a week.

Mr Poots: I suspect that the Member could better tell me what the service is like in the Limavady area. Nonetheless, there have been occasions when out-of-hours centres have been unable to provide face-to-face consultations due to trusts being unable to secure full medical cover. Patients requiring face-to-face consultations were directed to other out-of-hours centres in the trust area, and it should be emphasised that telephone advice and home visits were provided as normal.

The issue is not unique to the Western Trust area. Over the past five years, there has been an 18% increase in demand for GP out-of-hours services, which is particularly high during bank holidays and at weekends. That places significant pressure on the system. The board, as commissioner of the service, is acutely aware of the ongoing challenges faced by trusts, including difficulties in recruiting and retaining GPs and other clinical staff, and is working with all providers, including Western Urgent Care, to address them. Measures include the new way of working with GPs and out-of-hours staff and the use of skill mix. The board remains focused on providing safe and effective GP out-of-hours services while working with staff, the public and stakeholders to develop and shape the future provision of out-of-hours services. I encourage the Member to continue discussions with senior trust representatives to secure the service that the people of Limavady expect.

Mr Rogers: Thanks to the Minister for his answers thus far. Minister, what is your assessment of the recent report citing the concerns of out-of-hours GPs in the Southern Trust area?

Mr Poots: We requested that report, and it is important that we did so that we could establish the level of job satisfaction and where the concerns and problems are. The report gives us the ability to address those issues. It was a tad unfortunate that some parts of the report were leaked in a way that sought to undermine the service. It is important that we work closely with the providers — the people on the front line — to ensure that it is a service that they want to

be involved in, one that they are delivering to the best of their ability and one of which the general public are the beneficiaries.

Welfare Reform: Block Grant Reductions

2. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what savings he plans to make in order to accommodate his Department's share of the cuts in the block grant, which will result from the failure to implement welfare reform. (AQO 6477/11-15)

Mr Poots: As I have previously outlined to the House, my Department faces a considerable challenge in 2014-15, with some £160 million of additional resources estimated to be required in order to balance the books. The deficit remains despite my commitment to deliver some £170 million of savings. I have therefore requested further resources in the June monitoring round. If they are not forthcoming, the Executive will, effectively, be agreeing to a number of serious implications, such as a pay constraint on hard-working staff, a reduction in the range or standard of services offered, the introduction of additional charges or co-payments for services and longer waiting times for scheduled care.

Let me be clear: I have not taken and will not take actions by myself that impact on front line care for patients and clients. Equally, I will not plan or make cuts in vital health and social care services to pay for the current refusal of some Members to take the necessary decisions on welfare reform. Doing nothing on welfare reform is not an option for the Executive. The failure to agree welfare reform is unforgivable, as the financial penalties being imposed by the Treasury are surely better directed at meeting the real and pressing health and social care needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Mr Wells: The Minister paints quite a bleak picture for the present financial year. If welfare reform is not settled and settled soon, what are the implications for the Department's future budgets of having to continue to pay penalties to Westminster because of our inability to deal with the issue?

Mr Poots: The pressures will increase. Every Department will feel the pinch, and the Department of Health, as the largest recipient of funding, will feel the pinch more than anyone else. The things that we have put in bids for — Members will, rightly, challenge me on them — include £13 million for safety and quality of services, and we will see whether we get that.

People are always shouting about emergency departments: we have put in a bid for £22 million for unscheduled care. If some people think that that is better spent on welfare, that is a matter for them. We have also bid for £6.2 million for family health services; £10.5 million for public health; £9 million for children's services, protecting our youngest and most vulnerable; £8.5 million for supported home, largely domiciliary care for vulnerable elderly people; £20 million for specialist services; £0.5 million for the historical institutional abuse inquiry; £10 million for clinical negligence; £30 million for elective care, dealing with hip replacements, knee replacements and all of that; £21.3 million for TYC transitional funding; and £9 million for mental health and learning disability. Perhaps other Members would like to tell me which bids I should not make.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I do not want to steal Mr Beggs's thunder by asking about budgets and the previous Health Minister, but would the Minister be better served by not wasting money on following his own ideological campaigns against delivering equality for people, as opposed to blaming every mess that he has overseen in the health service since taking office three years ago on welfare reform and fines that have not even started to be implemented by the Executive?

Mr Poots: I really despair at the lack of knowledge demonstrated by the Member who has just spoken. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Minister to answer.

Mr Poots: Members close their eyes to the fact. If you take a decision, that is fine, but stand by your decision. Come to the House and say, "We believe that we are better spending that money on welfare than on health". Stand up and say it, and do not be such a coward. People need to be very clear: money is being taken from the Northern Ireland budgets. The consequence of that money being taken from the Northern Ireland Budget is impacting on Health, Education and Justice, and the Members opposite are the people who are doing it. Let us stand up and be counted. If you are going to do it, tell the public why you are doing it and quit hiding behind the point that the money is not really being taken when we all know that it is.

Mr Beggs: The Minister has indicated that he has bid for £160 million in the June monitoring round, but such a deficit to maintain existing

services did not suddenly develop. Will he confirm the level of debt that existed in our health service in the last financial year, despite the £100 million in-year monitoring round allocation? Will he also confirm that that exists despite or even aside from the welfare reform issue?

Mr Poots: Over the last three years, we have received an increase of around 2% each year, and I suppose that demand has increased by around 6% each year. We have been able to absorb £500 million of savings whilst increasing the number of nurses, doctors and allied health professionals. We have been able to reduce waiting times for most of the scheduled care and 12-hour waits in our emergency departments. Against the backdrop of the budget that we have been given, we have been able to make savings and deliver a better service.

In all those things, we had our cycle, and we have come to the end of that. Another year has been added on, and, at this time, there is a £160 million gap. We are making £170 million of savings, but there is a further £160 million of a gap that I cannot deliver on. That is why I have come to the House over the past number of months and consistently told it that that gap exists. It remains to be seen whether we can drive another £20 million or £30 million out of it, but the reality is that the figure will not move fundamentally. I will not find £160 million of further savings without hugely negative impacts on the health service, and that is a message that needs to be got out.

If people think that they are better spending that money on welfare, that is fine; get out there and tell the public that you would rather spend the money on welfare than on health and that, consequently, people will wait longer for operations, we will not be able to deliver to the same standards of safety and we will not be able to make the changes in unscheduled care that everybody has been demanding. If you want to say that, get out there and tell the public that. I am telling the public that I want to improve the health service and I want to deliver, but, if you are going to cash-strap me in key areas, that will make it extremely difficult to carry out that delivery.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister. Would his arguments not have greater weight and credibility, not just in the House but in the wider public mind, if he was able to demonstrate some measurability in his Transforming Your Care plan against the 99 targets that he has set in place? People would understand not just that he needs the money but what the money is

being spent on. Would that not achieve a greater understanding in the public mind and maybe an understanding of his position?

Mr Poots: I do not think that I have any problem explaining the position to the public. I also do not think that I can add much weight to the argument. The trusts identified a problem and brought it to the Department. That problem was identified around the middle of last year, and consequently we overran our budget by £15 million last year. We were not able to live within our means, even last year, as a consequence of rising demand, and we anticipate that that demand will continue to increase because of the demography of our population. Mr McKinney may not have realised that our population has been getting older over the last number of years, and we have far more frail elderly people to deal with. We also have far more issues out there with childcare services and ensuring that we protect vulnerable children, particularly on the back of the BBC revelations.

In all of that, we have a pressing demand. Mr McKinney may want to ignore the pressing demand and say, "Oh yes, we support the current welfare procedures. We don't mind that someone gets £26,000 on benefits, which is the equivalent of £35,000 before tax — that cap should not be there — or that the low-paid workers in the health service, who are maybe earning half of that, are not getting a pay rise".

That is OK for the SDLP and Sinn Féin. It is not OK. It is not right. We should not be doing it, and it is time that the SDLP and Sinn Féin came into the real world, came into government and did things right and ensured that we deliver for the public, instead of delivering to agendas.

2.15 pm

Armed Forces: Healthcare Providers

4. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to recognise the people who provide healthcare to the armed forces. (AQO 6479/11-15)

Mr Poots: On Monday 16 June, I was delighted to launch in Northern Ireland the annual Military and Civilian Health Partnership Awards for 2014. These prestigious awards aim to promote and publicly recognise the efforts of health professionals in providing care to service personnel, their families and veterans throughout the United Kingdom.

This is an opportunity for us to celebrate their work, which often goes unseen but is vital to ensuring that the armed forces community receives the care and support that it deserves. Last year, we had two finalists from Northern Ireland, 204 Field Hospital and 253 Medical Regiment, who were quite rightly recognised for their exceptional work. I am sure that they are not alone, and I encourage nominations from Northern Ireland to ensure that the skill, dedication and commitment of those who work in this field is recognised.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. It is appropriate, especially today on this 1 July, that we pay tribute to those who gave their lives for our freedom and, indeed, those who have served this nation well over the past years, and respect them and the fact that many of them will have physical and health needs. Minister, will you comment on how the individual serviceman or servicewoman might access the health provision?

Mr Poots: It is very important that we do recognise that and that we also recognise that the army is moving to be more reliant on reserves and less reliant on regular soldiers and that Northern Ireland, in spite of its make-up, is contributing twice as many reserve soldiers to the army per head of population than any other part of the United Kingdom. That is a very clear recognition of the support that there is for the British Army here in Northern Ireland and the work that it is doing.

My Department has taken a number of actions to support access to healthcare services by the armed forces, such as the armed forces liaison forum. Engagement in mental health services and prosthetics is working well, and I recognise that there will be new challenges for us to address. Through the armed forces liaison forum, we are alerted to innovations elsewhere that could be of use here, and my Department is currently working with the Royal College of General Practitioners to obtain access to the e-learning package for military personnel, which is available to GPs in England, to assist in dealing with former military personnel who may access primary medical services from their local GP practice.

Accident Prevention Initiatives

5. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what initiatives his Department is taking to reduce the number of accidents in the home. (AQO 6480/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 17 June 2014, my Department launched a draft 10-year home accident prevention strategy for consultation. I expect to publish the final strategy by the end of the year. My Department also provides core funding for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, is leading a UK group to look at how we can prevent further tragic deaths in children and injuries caused by blind cord strangulation. Finally, my Department continues to work with the Health and Safety Executive to promote awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning. DHSSPS has produced a public information leaflet entitled 'Carbon monoxide: Are you at risk?' This is available online.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he advise the House of any further initiatives that his Department is taking forward in this regard?

Mr Poots: As I indicated, Dr McBride is working with ROSPA, UK health agencies and the British Blind and Shutter Association on that particular issue. Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has been working in partnership with the PSNI and a broad range of public, private, voluntary and community-based organisations on Northern Ireland's first interactive learning education centre, which is called RADAR, standing for risk avoidance danger awareness resource. When opened, the centre will provide a safety-focused learning experience for children and young people throughout Northern Ireland. Children and young people who visit the centre will develop their own personalised radar, and these radars will help them to manage everyday risk and guide them in making better decisions.

It may surprise people that, in Northern Ireland, when I left the DOE we were looking at around 50 people being killed on our roads — although that has gone up during the last couple of years — but twice as many are being killed in the home. There are two deaths a week in the home, similar to what we are finding with drug abuse. We need to be aware that our homes can be dangerous places for many people and that we need to take steps to make them safer. The more we get that message out, the better it will be for everyone.

Mrs McKeivitt: I want to pick up on the Minister's point that twice as many people die as a result of accidents in the home than in the like of driving a car or on a farm, even. Given that there has been a hard-hitting advertising campaign on TV delivering that message, has

the Minister any plans to initiate a similar campaign that would help to raise awareness of accidents in the home?

Mr Poots: Obviously, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has taken over the issue of advertising, and that is now dealt with at the centre, as opposed to individual Departments. DOE made the case that it should be able to maintain the same level of funding. I made the argument that we should actually focus on some other things, including home safety.

We have our home accident prevention strategy that was launched for consultation on 17 June, which is aimed at the entire population of Northern Ireland but focuses on the most vulnerable groups in our society — the under-fives, the over-65s and the most socially deprived. The vision of the strategy is that the population of Northern Ireland will have the best chance of living safely in the home environment. The partners in the strategy will seek to deliver the vision and aims through the following objectives: to empower people to better understand the risks and make safe choices to ensure a safe home with negligible risk of unintentional injury; to promote a safer home environment; to promote and facilitate effective training, skills and knowledge in home accident prevention across all relevant organisations and groups; and to improve the evidence base.

In all of that, we will be making bids to carry out advertising as appropriate and get the key messages out there as the more simple steps that people can take to ensure that their home is a safer place.

Early Intervention Transformation Programme

6. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the early intervention transformation programme. (AQO 6481/11-15)

Mr Poots: The early intervention transformation programme (EITP) is one of three strands being developed under the Delivering Social Change framework. The EITP, which will be launched formally in the near future, seeks to transform mainstream children's services through embedding early intervention approaches in order to deliver sustained improvements in outcomes for children that continue beyond the lifespan of the programme. With contributions from five Departments, including my own, Justice, Education, Employment and Learning,

and Social Development, the EITP represents a commitment across Government to work together to break the intergenerational cycle of poor outcomes that some children and families experience throughout Northern Ireland. The programme is being led by my Department. A programme manager is now in place, and the preparatory work to identify the first wave of projects that we intend to take forward under this initiative is under way.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the fund be targeted at areas of rural deprivation and high social need?

Mr Poots: The fund is aimed at areas of high social need. A course of work has been done across the trusts to ensure that we set up the hubs in the appropriate places. We all need to recognise that many children have poor outcomes because they do not get the right start in life and, very often, parents lack the skills to give those children the right start in life. The more support that we can provide to those parents and the more that we sustain and help them and help those children in those early years, whether it be through nurturing, nutrition, education — all of those things — the more substantial difference we will make in the very earliest years for children to progress and do well. If they start school behind the rest, they tend to fall further behind. Poor educational outcomes very often deliver poor health outcomes and poor employment outcomes and, therefore, a much higher level of people will end up in the justice system. We want to challenge and change all of those things.

Mr Weir: It is important for these sorts of programmes to get buy-in from local people. What community engagement has taken place about the programme?

Mr Poots: Considerable engagement is under way, including via the five children's outcomes groups and locality planning groups to help shape the development of the IT project proposals. Outcomes groups comprise the local community, voluntary and statutory sectors, and organisations involved in delivering services to children, young people and families. We are slightly behind in establishing the project in north and west Belfast, largely because the engagement there has not been as good as we would have liked. We will catch up and deliver on that programme, but we are absolutely certain that we need the buy-in of the community sector. Therefore, we will want to

ensure that it is on board before we move ahead.

Mr Dallat: I fully support what the Minister has said. However, does he agree with me that, in a modern western European society, the gap between the health and education of the haves and the have-nots is embarrassingly wide? Will he continue to strive for additional resources to engage with local communities and ensure that this programme really impacts on the people who need it most?

Mr Poots: I agree. That is why we need to look at the problem and the issue. I believe that the main problem is that where people have poor educational outcomes, they have poor health outcomes. So, they do not get the right start in life, they do not get the opportunities at school and they do not get delivery on health and, indeed, job opportunities. We need to give children brought into this world the best start in life. That is why we want to provide support where the capacity does not exist.

A lot of social change took place, particularly in the 1970s. Many urban villages in Belfast were broken up. Families did not have the support structure that had been in place for generations, and, consequently, we are looking at people who are second-, third- or fourth-generation unemployed. All of that has a trickle-down effect that is damaging to young people. We need to change that, and that is why I am very supportive of this programme.

Mr Agnew: I welcome the Minister's announcement that five Departments are working together on this. How is the programme funded? Has there been a pooling of budgets by the Departments involved?

Mr Poots: The programme is funded through Atlantic Philanthropies providing £15 million and the five Departments providing the other £15 million.

Cancer Drugs

7. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on access to cancer drugs in Northern Ireland. (AQO 6482/11-15)

Mr Poots: All cancer drugs approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence that are available in England are either recurrently funded or available via a cost-per-case mechanism in Northern Ireland. The Health and Social Care Board also has a clear

process by which unapproved cancer drugs can be made available to patients in Northern Ireland. The board has informed me that 98% of the applications for unapproved drugs are accepted.

I have therefore instructed my Department to evaluate whether the individual funding request (IFR) process is meeting its objectives and taking account of measures that other devolved Administrations are considering in their approach to access to specialist drugs. That evaluation will get under way shortly, and I will report the findings to the Assembly later this year.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he clarify how much is spent annually on cancer drugs? Will he also clarify how effective individual funding requests are? Certainly, during our recent visits to the cancer centre at the City Hospital, the evidence was that individual funding requests are not being honoured. May we have clarification on that, please?

Mr Poots: The 2013-14 expenditure on cancer drugs was around £26.7 million, and that does not include the cost of other cancer treatments, such as radiotherapy. Other costs related to cancer are also difficult to determine, such as voluntary and community care. From April 2013 to 31 January 2014, £1.14 million was spent on individual funding requests for cancer drugs, and 98% of those were given out. Oncologists will be circumspect in what they apply for. They will apply where they believe that it makes a real and fundamental difference. That is something that oncologists support and buy into.

So, it is very important that we recognise that, where oncologists make the case, those cases are largely found to be acceptable.

2.30 pm

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Given the debate around the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS), has there been an increase in the use of branded medicines in the last three months of this year? If so, by how much?

Mr Poots: There certainly has been a considerable increase in the use of branded medicines across Northern Ireland, not just in the last three months but in the last three years. The Assembly pressed for and endorsed that, because it means that, in terms of drugs and the health budget, we are not giving as much to

pharmaceutical companies and we are delivering more on the ground. So, moving from generic to branded drugs has the support of the Assembly.

A lot of that money has been used in various elements of the budget. For example, we are spending more on domiciliary care than we were last year, the year before and the year before that. We are also spending more on protecting children than last year, the year before and the year before that. There is a series of things that we are spending more money on. We are spending considerably more on cancer drugs than we were three years ago.

Individuals may think that it is as easy as saying, "We will take money from this bit of health and apply it there, but we will ignore the fact that there are more older people and they need more domiciliary care, and there are more children who are vulnerable, so we will not bother doing that bit this year." We cannot do that. We have to look at it in a holistic way. We have £160 million of a gap, and we do not have the money to buy the additional drugs.

PPRS has been around for some 50 years; it is not something new. We anticipated the savings that would be coming in from it: they will not buy the cancer drugs that England's cancer fund is paying for. Let us get those facts out into the domain and debate them rationally.

Mr Speaker: We now move on to topical questions. Question 2 has been withdrawn.

ITH Pharma: Contaminated Products

1. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail which health trust has purchased paediatric parental nutritional products from ITH Pharma. (AQT 1361/11-15)

Mr Poots: I did not pick up the question right. I am not aware of what we have purchased from ITH Pharma. I can endeavour to find the answer for the Member, although I suspect that he already knows it. I will see what I can find out on his behalf.

Mr Elliott: I do not know the answer; that is why I asked. There was a contaminated batch of one of that company's products. I was just looking for assurances that none of the contaminated batch, which had significant consequences and resulted in deaths in England, has come to Northern Ireland.

Mr Poots: I usually tried to ask questions that I knew the answers to, because that was an easier way to catch the Minister out when I was a Back-Bencher. Nonetheless, it is a good question. We will identify what we have been sourcing from that organisation, and, if there has been any risk posed, we will make that clear to the Member in due course.

Legal Highs

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what contact he has had with the Westminster Government about so-called legal highs. (AQT 1363/11-15)

Mr Poots: The issue of legal highs is one that we have been challenging on. The British-Irish Council met in Dublin, at which Norman Baker represented the Westminster Government. Again, the issue was high on the agenda.

Legal highs have contributed to many deaths across Northern Ireland. Many of the psychoactive substances in them are not legal, so the definition probably needs to be changed, because these are not things that people should be taking.

Westminster have almost completed the course of work that I had asked them to do about six months ago. That is being brought forward over the next two to three weeks, and recommendations will flow from it. They have been looking at what is being done in the United States of America, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand, where stronger actions have been taken. It will be very difficult to stay ahead of the curve on legal highs. I very much want to do so, but, if we cannot stay ahead of it, we need to be right up there in ensuring that we stop people who peddle these legal highs and get in quickly to ensure that they are banned straightaway.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome the Minister's comments. Minister, what was your assessment of last week's British-Irish Council meeting?

Mr Poots: I thought that it was very useful. Everybody was very impressed by the actions that Belfast City Council took against legal high shops on the back of a proposal by Councillor Gavin Robinson. The council has been able to close down a number of facilities as a result of its actions. Other countries are looking at doing the same thing, so they were very interested in that.

There has to be a UK-wide response. We need actions from Westminster, which has the legislative powers to move this forward. It must be legislation that enables us to respond very swiftly, within hours or a few days of discovering something, to close down these shops. The pharmacists producing these drugs in many parts of the world need make only a slight alteration, and, all of a sudden, something that had been deemed illegal could be legal. We need to be very quick to respond to that.

Prescription Charges

4. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the administration costs of reintroducing prescription charges. (AQT 1364/11-15)

Mr Poots: It all depends on how they were introduced. Under the previous system, the costs would be higher because you would have to identify the 11% who would pay and the 89% who would not. Let us be very clear that, under the old system, 89% of prescriptions were free in any event; only 11% of prescriptions were paid for. One consequence, perhaps unenvisaged, of introducing free prescriptions was that it drove up the number of people who went to their doctor requesting prescriptions for things such as paracetamol, which costs 40p in a local supermarket. That was an unintended consequence.

If you introduced a very small charge for every prescription with a maximum yearly payment for each person — I suggested a maximum yearly payment of £25, which is less than 50p a week — the administration costs for that type of system would be very modest indeed.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline the extent of prescription charge fraud in the past? Who was the most likely to partake and what was the most common source?

Mr Poots: There were greater levels of fraud in particular areas. I will not name areas today; nonetheless, it was higher in particular areas. Many people were quite happy to pay for their prescription. In fact, many people, including me, feel quite guilty about getting a free prescription when we know that others could be receiving and benefiting from drugs that are currently unaffordable. They may not be life-saving drugs, but they could prolong your life for two or three months, and there may be special family events coming up. You want to see your child's birthday or a particular wedding, yet someone like me does not have to

pay for a prescription. Everybody in here can well afford to pay, but we do not have to, while others who need the drugs cannot get them.

I think that a good socialist would support what I am doing. A good socialist would not say, "Give the rich and everybody else free prescriptions and deny people who have cancer the opportunity of living a little longer." I do not think that that is right.

Public Health Framework

5. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact he anticipates the new public health framework will have. (AQT 1365/11-15)

Mr Poots: With the public health framework, it is critical that we respond to the needs of the public, and unless we actually challenge and get people into a better place — because public health has been declining — we are going to have to live with the difficult consequence. The generation that we are currently bringing up in Northern Ireland is likely not to live as long as the people who are around now. This is the first time for years that that is going to happen. For years, life expectancy has been increasing, but for those born now, life expectancy will be shorter. So, it is vital that the public health framework is out there and that we support it financially and get the messages out to the public of what is beneficial to them.

Mr Douglas: What is the Minister's assessment of the potential benefits of new technology for diabetes care, such as the d-Nav?

Mr Poots: This is a fantastic opportunity. I am delighted that the South Eastern Trust is doing that work. Incidence of type 2 diabetes is growing. We can be at the forefront of the world with this d-Nav technology. The device allows people with diabetes to easily regulate their own insulin dosage by using a small device around the size of a mobile phone. I have called it "the doc in the poc", because it is the equivalent of going to a consultant and getting a check-up. By having this in your pocket, you can get a check-up every day. Consequently, your dosage can be adjusted upwards or downwards to meet your true needs. Generally, we are finding that people's dosages are coming down. So, this is very positive. I believe that it will become commonplace over the course of the next decade, and Northern Ireland will have led the way in delivering that.

Mr Speaker: Robin Newton is not in his place for question 6.

Cancer Drugs: Trials

7. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he sees the Connected Health initiative being a driver for improving drugs trials at the Belfast cancer centre. (AQT 1367/11-15)

Mr Poots: We have been hugely successful with drugs trials. Most people will not know that around one fifth of people in Northern Ireland who have cancer are engaging in trials. The opportunity for many hundreds of people to avail themselves of the most modern drugs has been created because we are engaged in that way. We have been developing a Connected Health integration platform, which will help us to optimise our delivery of Connected Health in the establishment of an international analytics centre in Northern Ireland. That will ensure that we have a network that is amongst the smartest and most capable of linking people who have illnesses with the potential opportunities to cure those illnesses. Stratified medicine and all those things create for us wonderful opportunities to identify the right resources for individuals, so that we can provide the right courses of treatment to them.

Mr Dunne: Does the Minister recognise that the Queen's University Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology has the potential to become a world leader in drugs trials and research?

Mr Poots: Absolutely. I met the new vice chancellor of Queen's recently about what the opportunities are. At the moment, significant elements of Queen's University are world-class in clinical and medical research. We can make that university's clinical research truly world class throughout. I think that we should. It is something that Minister Farry, Minister Foster and I need to take to the Executive. Northern Ireland can be up there as a place that is of the highest standards anywhere in the world in the medical research that it is carrying out in cancer and a number of other fields. That is something that I am totally up for, and I am sure that my ministerial colleagues will want to do that as well. It will deliver huge health benefits. It will also deliver benefits for jobs, and it will advance the academic institutions in Northern Ireland.

RQIA: Unscheduled Care Review

Dr McDonnell: I thought that the Minister was going to talk me out there.

8. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) review of unscheduled care, which was published today. (AQT 1368/11-15)

2.45 pm

Mr Poots: Yes. I think that the Member would have a great interest in what I was previously talking about, I might add.

I can talk a little more about the RQIA review now. It is saying that the trusts need to have stronger escalation plans in place. It is looking at the Belfast Trust and using the City Hospital as a route for the frail elderly to go there directly instead of going to the emergency department. I embrace that because I do not believe that our frail elderly people belong in emergency departments, with all the other mayhem that goes with that. We are looking at using the City Hospital as a route for most respiratory patients and at enhancing the services provided for emergency care at the Mater Hospital. So, there are a lot of very useful recommendations there. I spoke to the chair of the Belfast Trust, and we will work on delivering those in the near future, including elements this autumn.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Minister believe that there is any benefit in going further up the demand chain and looking into unscheduled care and perhaps looking at what is leading to the pressures that are causing the problems?

Mr Poots: Things are fundamentally different than they were years ago, and far more people are being admitted to hospitals through emergency departments than was previously the case. A better relationship needs to be developed between general practitioners and hospitals on the admissions process. Flows are a big problem, and that is one of the areas that is recommended there. It will be very challenging for us, but we need to get the flows right so that when people are leaving the hospital we are getting them out more quickly, that we do not have delayed discharges, and that those beds become available for more people who are in emergency departments. So, there is a considerable amount of work to be done there.

In my opinion, the recommendations from the RQIA are sound, and I will press the Belfast Trust and all trusts to implement them as early as possible. I indicated that we had bid for £22 million or £26 million to deliver that and said that it will better spent on emergency

departments than on welfare. I would welcome the support of others to ensure that we spend that money on emergency departments as opposed to complaining about the outcomes but not giving us the resource to do the job.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions to the Health Minister.

Justice

Magilligan: Newbuild Prison

1. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice when work will begin on the new prison at Magilligan. (AQO 6491/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): As I announced to the House on 19 March last year and in a further statement on 21 October, I am committed to the redevelopment of Magilligan prison. I noted in my response at Question Time on 10 June that Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) officials are nearing completion of the outline business case (OBC) for the redevelopment, which will be submitted for approval within the next month. I said at that time that the completed outline business case will be submitted to DFP and it will be DFP's decision as to whether the business case will be approved for the rebuild. Any approval will advise the availability of capital funding for the project. The prison must remain operational during the redevelopment, and a combination of operational need and capital availability will determine the timeline for the work. If approval is given and funding is made available, NIPS would plan to commence work at Magilligan in 2016.

Mr Campbell: I welcome the Minister's recommitment to the Magilligan project. Given that the outline estate strategy was released in June 2012 and that the strategic outline case was released in June 2013, does the Minister think that the outline business case should be with the Department of Finance and Personnel immediately in order for it to respond to it, rather than him saying that he could not guarantee anything without the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel?

Mr Ford: I am sure that Mr Campbell's colleague Mr Hamilton would take it ill if I were to suggest that it should be entirely up to the DOJ to approve its own outline business cases. The reality is that procedures have to be gone through. As I said, the OBC will be with DFP within the next month, and the challenge will be to ensure that we have the kind of funding that

has just been spoken about by the Minister of Health to deal with some very urgent priorities in justice as well as in health.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer suas go dtí an pointe seo to this point. Can he give us an update on the work of the stakeholder group aimed at bringing Magilligan closer to the local community and on greater opportunities for prisoners on release schemes?

Mr Ford: While I appreciate Mr Ó hOisín's question about what was, of course, one of the key factors that led to the decision to redevelop Magilligan on-site, I have not been directly involved with the stakeholder group recently and am not quite sure what the state of meetings is. However, there is absolutely no doubt that the commitment from local businesses and councils will be a continuing necessity to ensure that we make the most of the opportunity to redevelop Magilligan on-site and provide the opportunities that we need, particularly for things like work placements, over the coming months. I will certainly check the record and see whether there is anything that I am not aware of, and will report to the Member if that is the case.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer, but question every word that he said. He will understand why. Will the Minister put on record, once and for all, that he acknowledges that Magilligan prison is not just a place that creates employment but a place that gives prisoners a special chance of repatriating? Will he ensure that that is not lost by some centralisation programme worked out by economists?

Mr Ford: I am not sure whether Mr Dallat has ever accused me of misleading the House before, but he appeared to come perilously close to it just then. I am very happy to give the commitment of the Prison Service and the Department of Justice, working with the partners that I have just identified to Mr Ó hOisín, to follow through on the commitments that I have just given to Mr Campbell. I do not know whether that is enough to satisfy people, but the reality is that decisions on capital funding are not decisions for my Department alone. They are decisions that require funding to be committed by DFP, which is why I stated specifically that that issue has to be followed through.

The commitment is absolute from my Department that Magilligan is where the redevelopment will be, which is contrary to the original recommendations from the prison review team. However, I cannot give a commitment to capital. I am very happy to recommend that Mr Dallat ask the same question of Mr Hamilton in September.

Parading

2. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Justice how he plans to engage with the Parades Commission in advance of the parading season. (AQO 6492/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Parades Commission is an independent body appointed by the Secretary of State and therefore not accountable to me. I have said before, however, that I will engage with the commission on general issues but not individual cases, and have already done so this year. Parading remains a contentious issue and I am ready to engage with any renewed political talks, which I trust will achieve success, this week and next, on the issue.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. I certainly would be the last person to try to deflect him towards any specific case. However, the Minister will be aware that, among the inhabitants of these Benches, the Parades Commission has never received full applause, if I can put it that way. The Parades Commission that we are currently working under, more than any — given that its members say one thing in private and then do something different in public — is causing huge frustration in the Protestant/unionist community. Bearing in mind that it is police officers, prison officers —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to a question.

Mr D McIlveen: — and obviously the constituents of each and every one of us who are affected by poor decisions on the part of the Parades Commission, will the Minister be suggesting that, in the absence of there being another show in town, we have to make sure that this Parades Commission is dealt with effectively in the way that it makes its decisions?

Mr Ford: There are clearly two points in what Mr McIlveen said. One is that, at the moment, the Parades Commission is the only show in town, and the other is that it might become not the only show in town, if the five-party talks

achieve something over the next couple of weeks, looking to the future. However, while it is the only show in town, there is no alternative but for those of us who support the rule of law to accept that the determinations of the commission, whether appreciated or not, have the force of the rule of law. Those who parade and those who protest should do so lawfully and peacefully in all circumstances.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. Has the Minister taken any proactive measures to remind those who might engage in violent or disruptive actions that such behaviour will not be tolerated, so that we can avoid the scenes — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms McCorley: — that we witnessed last year, when great damage and great cost were involved?

Mr Ford: Whilst I appreciate Ms McCorley's question, I am not sure that many of those who engage in that violent and disruptive behaviour listen to me. I thought, in the comments I made in the Great Hall a few moments ago alongside the Chief Constable and in the comments I just made in the Chamber, I made absolutely clear my belief that everybody has a duty to act lawfully and peacefully, and all those in a position of leadership should see that they use their influence as best they can.

Mr Attwood: I want to touch on something the Minister said. Whether we like or do not like the Parades Commission, or whether we agree or do not agree with its determinations, do you accept that the only sure path over the next couple of weeks is that all parties, organisations and communities should accept Parades Commission determinations and that if anybody errs from that pathway and that approach, they will be on the wrong side of democracy in Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: I entirely agree with the points that Mr Attwood has just made. Not only would anybody in those circumstances be on the wrong side of democracy, they would be on the wrong side of the law as well.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for those answers. I appreciate that the Parades Commission does not come under his jurisdiction, but we have gone into some detail here today. Would he support having the Parades Commission attend the multiparty talks

that he has just mentioned to try to resolve the parading issues in those specific difficult areas?

Mr Ford: Mr Elliott is inventive, as ever. I am not sure that the Minister of Justice has any opinion on who should attend particular talks, but it seems to me that the Parades Commission is willing to meet anybody and everybody. The key issue, frankly, is whether those who have responsibility in those talks are prepared to engage in finding a better way, without reservation and without some of the qualifications we have seen so far.

Mr Allister: If the Parades Commission, in respect of Ardoyne, again rewards violence, does the Minister, as Minister of Justice, not think he might have a role in encouraging it to review such a rewarding of violence?

Mr Ford: Mr Allister's question is based on what I regard as a false premise of rewarding violence.

Victims of Crime

3. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact that the Justice Bill (NIA 37/11-15) will have on the experience of the victims of crime. (AQO 6493/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Justice Bill, which was introduced in the Assembly on 16 June, marks an important new stage in an ambitious programme of work to create a faster, fairer justice system. The main purpose of the Bill is to reshape the system to improve victims' experiences and the general effectiveness of the justice process. The Bill responds directly to a number of key recommendations in the Justice Committee's report of its inquiry into the criminal justice services available to victims and witnesses of crime.

Some of the key provisions in the Bill include statutory victim and witness charters, setting out clearly the standards of service victims and witnesses can expect to receive and how they can expect to be treated by criminal justice agencies; a legal entitlement for a victim to make a statement about the impact that a crime has had on them; reform of the committal process to avoid victims having to undergo the ordeal of giving evidence twice; and the introduction of statutory case management and a number of other measures to speed up the progress of cases.

I believe that these provisions, combined with other measures in the Bill to enhance public protection and safeguard vulnerable groups,

should lead to a measurable difference in victims and witnesses' experience of the criminal justice system.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer and for his acknowledgement of the Justice Committee's inquiry into victims and witnesses. Is he satisfied that, given, perhaps, that demands will be made on resources, he has enough resources to ensure that, when the Bill is passed by the Assembly, we will have the proper structures for a victims' charter in place?

Mr Ford: In current circumstances, there is a very real question there from Mr McCartney about resources. I believe that, in line with our commitments under the new European directive, we are well on the way to having the necessary measures in place. Clearly, all these things cost a degree of money, but some of the proposals that we have had recently, such as the registered intermediary scheme, are in a position to be expanded because they are proving so successful, and the costs of that are being absorbed in the Department's budget. We will continue to make progress, but we cannot give guarantees as to what the finances will be over the next few years.

3.00 pm

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Bill and congratulate the Minister and his staff. I commend him for his ongoing commitment to improving the experience of victims and witnesses during their contact with the criminal justice system. Can he outline any steps that he has taken, or further steps that he will take, to improve the lot for victims?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCarthy for that question. The two key things that immediately come to mind are the work that is being done to inform victims post-crime of the work that is being done by the single point of contact through the joined-up information scheme, which is having significantly positive effects, and the work that is being done to provide alternatives to appearing in court for vulnerable victims and witnesses. Just this morning, I visited a new arrangement in Lisburn that will allow children and vulnerable adults to give evidence by video link from outside the court building, as is already in place for Laganside courts and Londonderry courthouse and is in the process of being provided for Ballymena courthouse. Those are key issues that show that a relatively modest investment is significantly enhancing

the opportunities for vulnerable victims and witnesses in both those cases.

Juvenile Justice: Education

4. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Justice how his Department records the educational status of young people entering Youth Justice Agency services in the community and in the juvenile justice system. (AQO 6494/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Youth Justice Agency undertakes a full assessment of all young people on referral, and their education, training and employment status is recorded and assessed as part of that process.

For those who are remanded or sentenced to custody, education staff in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre carry out a detailed assessment during the first three days following admission to assess levels of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Throughout the young person's time in custody, the centre will record levels of attainment in those subjects, as well as vocational studies and programmes.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his answer. What proportion of young people who are engaged with youth justice services is regarded as being not in education, employment or training? How does his Department support those vulnerable young people?

Mr Ford: Mr Douglas has asked a very pertinent supplementary question. I understand that, at the moment, something like 45% of young people in the juvenile justice centre would be regarded as coming under not in education, employment or training status. A key part of the work that is being done to address that is looking at the provision of learning and skills in Woodlands. Obviously, a number of those in Woodlands will move on to Hydebank Wood at the age of 18, or shortly thereafter, where the proposals for a secure college are premised on running courses through providers from the general further education sector, which can be continued when people are discharged. I note, for example, that, of the relatively small sample of the first five who went through the social enterprise scheme Mugshots in Hydebank Wood, four found either employment or training when they left. That is a significantly higher proportion than we expected. So, good work is being done. However, I acknowledge, as Mr Douglas hinted, that a lot more needs to be done.

Mr Eastwood: Given the fact that the oversight body talked about progress on Hydebank Wood

being limited, what work are he and his Department doing to ensure that progress is no longer limited but real and substantive?

Mr Ford: We are now expanding slightly beyond the subject of the Youth Justice Agency. However, since Mr Eastwood is in more or less the same area, I will happily give some indications on that.

A lot of work has been done to join up the provision of education services in Hydebank Wood. Belfast Metropolitan College is providing the courses, which, and this is the point that I made to Mr Douglas, enables them to continue them afterwards. Work is also being done around the social enterprise area, where we will shortly see a full-scale operation in catering services alongside the Mugshots enterprise. I have recently approved a further proposal that will see an ongoing social enterprise for young men as they leave Hydebank Wood. They will be engaged in continuing activity as they go out into the community. All those are steps in the right direction, but, given the numbers that we have in custody and their previous status, as I have just said to Mr Douglas, there is a lot more still to be done.

PSNI: Complaints

5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the protocol between the PSNI and the Police Ombudsman to facilitate the ombudsman's office in carrying out its duties in relation to complaints against the PSNI. (AQO 6495/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI and the Police Ombudsman have a number of protocols in place to facilitate the conduct of investigations by the ombudsman's office. The development and outworkings of such protocols are for the bodies concerned, as each has operational independence.

If the Member is referring to the protocol on the sharing of sensitive information, that was shared with the Committee for Justice and noted without comment in January 2014. The issue is the subject of legal proceedings, and it would not be appropriate, for me to comment, except to say that I understand that discussions are ongoing and hope that an agreement can be reached as soon as possible.

Mrs D Kelly: Minister, I am sure that you will join me in wishing the new Chief Constable, George Hamilton, the wisdom of Solomon and

the patience of Job in his new role; he will certainly need it. I welcome the fact that he has already met the ombudsman to try to avert legal action. Minister, hopefully you are of the view that the ombudsman's office should have full accountability mechanisms in place for the PSNI for all actions of the police, past or present.

Mr Ford: Mrs Kelly is very inventive, but having just said that it would not be appropriate for me to comment, I will repeat the point. I certainly will endorse her good wishes for George Hamilton as Chief Constable, which I conveyed a short while ago, as I have previously done informally and by telephone on the day that he was appointed. I certainly believe, from the reports that I am getting from officials and, indeed, from a brief part of a meeting with George Hamilton this afternoon, that there is a strong chance that an agreement will be reached before the issue comes back to court in September. I hope that we all see that as a sign of good progress and a better relationship, which dealt with the very difficult issues that both agencies have to resolve.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that, when the ombudsman states publicly that he is being prevented from carrying out his duties, confidence in justice and policing and their relationship with the rule of law is being undermined?

Mr Ford: I agree that there was a danger of that some weeks ago. The fact that significant progress has been made recently suggests that that need not be the case.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister indicate whether he has any intention of putting in place an appeal mechanism for any of the Police Ombudsman's reports?

Mr Ford: I must say that that is a long way from the original question. The simple position is that ombudsmen in the United Kingdom are largely seen as the final point of referral. The logic of what is suggested by that question is that we would have an ombudsman of ombudsmen, but then we would also have to have an appeal mechanism against the ombudsman of ombudsmen's decisions. I do not think that it is possible to work in our current system beyond the point that an ombudsman's decision is final.

PSNI: Districts

6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has spoken to the Chief Constable with regard to introducing more coterminous boundaries between PSNI districts and the new council areas. (AQO 6496/11-15)

Mr Ford: My officials continue to discuss the implications of local government reform with the PSNI, the Policing Board, the Department of the Environment, the shadow councils and other stakeholders. From a very recent informal discussion with the Chief Constable, I am aware that the PSNI is considering options for restructuring, and it will continue to brief the Policing Board on the matter.

Mr Beggs: Does the Minister acknowledge that a level of accountability, which was designed in our system, will be difficult under the current arrangements? I think specifically of the Carrickfergus area, which will join the new Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus super-council, yet its response officers are tasked from the Newtownabbey area. Does he agree that it would be much more beneficial if response officers did not have to be tasked from Ballymena but were perhaps based locally in Carrickfergus police station?

Mr Ford: Though Mr Beggs may tempt me into those operational issues, I cannot give a response to the latter part of his question about what would be appropriate. I can, however, indicate — I am sure that he will be pleased to know this — that the specific issue of Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus as one current police area being split between two councils was one of the issues mentioned about an hour or so ago when I spoke to the Chief Constable.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. If new boundaries were to be established, when might we expect that to happen?

Mr Ford: That is a very good question, and the answer is this: ask the Chief Constable. We are living with eight police districts, which are based on a split Belfast area and seven other council areas, as originally designed in a plan shortly after Noah came out of the ark. That is the reality of where the police are. Now that they know what the council pattern will be from 1 April 2015, they are fully aware of the composition of districts and of some of the immediate border issues that will affect, for example, Magherafelt and Limavady, which have a shared area command, as well as Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus. The answer

to the timing question is this: ask the Chief Constable.

RUC GC Widows' Association

7. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on funding for the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Widows' Association. (AQO 6497/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department stands ready to consider grant funding of the RUC GC Widows' Association on receipt of an appropriate application from the association. My officials have sought to engage with the association on a number of occasions to assist in the development of their application and remain willing and available to continue to offer such support. The application for funding must, however, come from the association.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he give us an assurance that all reasonable efforts will be made to facilitate such funding for what is a very worthy cause — the RUC widows.

Mr Ford: I can give Mr Dunne and everybody else an assurance that all reasonable efforts have been made to make that position clear. However, because of a reclassification exercise carried out on devolution by DFP, the RUC GC Widows' Association is regarded as being in the private sector. The only way the association can be funded is by grant application rather than by the previous method where it was simply regarded as if it had been an arm's-length body of the Department. Frankly, it would be more beneficial if the widows' association would fill in the form rather than merely lobby MLAs because nothing can be done if the association does not fill in an application form.

Mr Cree: Minister, do you recognise that the decision to change the status of the widows' association was discriminatory and unnecessary?

Mr Ford: No, I do not regard it as discriminatory. It was clearly necessary because it was a DFP decision on how policies are formulated. Moreover, it was not discriminatory since the Department has offered to continue funding on the basis of a grant application just as is the case for every other body outside the justice system.

Mr Allister: How many times have the Department's officials knocked back an

application from the widows' association? How many times have they sat down with them to explain what the officials say is wrong with the applications that they have made?

Mr Ford: I am not aware that officials have knocked back an application, but officials have referred back applications that were not complete and which did not convey all the necessary information. I am aware that, on a significant number of times, there has been contact in person or by phone between my officials and officers of the association. I repeat the point that it has been offered. It is not a matter of its being offered in the future; it has been offered on a large number of occasions but has not been taken up by the widows' association.

Prison Service: Chaplaincy

8. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the provision of chaplaincy services within the Northern Ireland Prison Service. (AQO 6498/11-15)

Mr Ford: Discussions between the Prison Service and senior Church representatives are ongoing in relation to implementing a review of chaplaincy services. On 7 April 2014, in response to concerns raised, NIPS identified an alternative model to the one originally proposed. It was circulated for discussion, and responses have now been received from all the Church bodies. It is anticipated that the new model will be implemented this summer. I fully appreciate the contribution that chaplains make to supporting prisoners in custody. Any changes brought about by the review of chaplaincy will aim to deliver the maximum benefit to prisoners within the resources available.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for that very helpful reply. It is very helpful for resolving this problem. I hope that the new model, which has been agreed, will be up and running soon. Will the Minister assure the House that there will be sufficient funding to maintain the new model?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for his compliments. I assure him that the funding proposed for this financial year is exactly the same as in the last financial year. Given the number of cuts that have had to be made elsewhere, I think that it is a fair commitment to chaplaincy services.

Firearms: Certificate Renewal

9. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the average cost of processing an individual application for a new or renewal firearms certificate. (AQO 6499/11-15)

Mr Ford: This issue has been the subject of a lean efficiency review of the firearms licensing branch by a DFP consultant and a different DFP consultant regarding the fee itself. It was then subject to a public consultation exercise. That work identified the cost of processing a firearms certificate or regranting a firearms certificate as £121 for five years. That figure of £24 per annum is based on the process time for applications and the hourly staff costs. I have proposed an interim fee, agreed with the PSNI and DFP, of £100.

3.15 pm

Therefore, the PSNI has a shortfall of some £1.8 million per annum at the present fee of £50, which was set over 10 years ago, before the concept of full-cost recovery was introduced. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) said that £196 would achieve full-cost recovery in England and Wales, where the cost is being reviewed. The figure in the Republic of Ireland is €80 per firearm for a three-year certificate.

Mr Wells: Apologies to the Minister that, for the first time in my life, he could not hear what I had to say. He will certainly get my supplementary, loud and clear. He gave us the price based on the cost to the police, but what would the price be if it were done in the private sector, for instance? Are those who use firearms paying for the bloated bureaucracy of Lisnasharragh? Could it not be done an awful lot more cheaply and with more efficiency?

Mr Ford: I know that the review was done on the basis of ensuring the most efficient process but with necessary procedures. Is Mr Wells seriously suggesting that an issue such as firearms licensing — the control of lethal weapons — be handed over to the private sector? That is what I heard. I cannot understand the concept that something so vital to maintaining the safety of the people of Northern Ireland would be privatised.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the listed questions to the Justice Minister. We move now to topical questions.

Prison Service: Staff Entitlements

1. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Justice whether all Prison Service staff who left under the voluntary early retirement scheme have received their excess holiday entitlement and will receive the same payment for excess leave as those who have remained in service, given that he may well be aware that some of those former staff are experiencing some difficulties in relation to their holiday entitlement. (AQT 1371/11-15)

Mr Ford: I cannot give Mrs Hale the detail of that personnel issue. I am aware that matters were being addressed, but I am not sure that I can confirm that everything is entirely clarified at the moment. If she has specific issues that she wants to highlight now, or later by letter, I will certainly follow them up.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. I have specific issues, and I will probably speak to you outside the Chamber about them. I am looking for confirmation that you will ensure that any staff member who took early retirement will not be unjustly penalised in the payment of holiday entitlement.

Mr Ford: I can give a commitment. It is my understanding that a number of people left with some holiday entitlement. Whatever the Civil Service handbook prescribes for staff should be provided to them. If it has not been, I will do my best to ensure that it is done rapidly. I will take the details later.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

2. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the new policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) for the 11 new councils. (AQT 1372/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legislation provides that there will be a PCSP for each district council. It does not prescribe that there will be 26 PCSPs; it prescribes one per council and four subgroups for Belfast. The legislation also prescribes that PCSPs have the opportunity to set up subgroups to which they may co-opt others, be they councillors who are not members of the principal partnership or members of the public. If there are issues on which people feel that there is a need for local representation, I trust that, after 1 April next year, the new PCSPs will address them by using the legislation that exists for that purpose.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister talked about subgroups, but, given that we are going into larger council areas, has he considered changing the legislation to increase the number of people who sit on the PCSPs, which is 19 for the existing councils?

Mr Ford: No, at this stage, consideration has not been given to that point, given that there is an issue about ensuring that bodies do not become excessively large, and especially when you think that the number is not actually 19. By the time that you add the other members — up to 10 or 12 in some cases — there is the potential for the overall membership of a new district partnership to be in the region of 30. If Members wish to suggest that as part of the review, we can certainly look at that, but, at this stage, I believe that the numbers are probably right. If we had looked at this, we might have had slightly bigger numbers, but I doubt whether we would have wanted them to be significantly so.

Another issue being raised, with some concerns, is the local subgroups, but that can be addressed in the existing legislation.

Joe Campbell

3. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice, in regard to the Police Ombudsman's report into the murder of RUC Sergeant Joe Campbell, whether he is concerned about attempts to frustrate that office's investigation through the systematic destruction of evidence. (AQT 1373/11-15)

Mr Ford: I need to be very careful, especially as Sergeant Campbell was murdered long before I came into office and in very different circumstances, about exactly what I say. I record my sympathy with Sergeant Campbell's family for what they are currently having to go through because of the re-publicity. It would be a matter of concern if, in any circumstances, evidence was being destroyed that could lead to an investigation. However, there is a division in the House about other factors, such as the compellability of witnesses. The possibility of making progress in that area would be an issue of concern for some people.

Mr D Bradley: Just on that point, does the Minister agree that there is a need for legislation to ensure that retired members of the RUC cooperate with the ombudsman's investigations?

Mr Ford: I have a paper before the Executive looking at a number of matters relating to the ombudsman's work, including the issue of the compellability of retired police officers. It is fairly clear that, as yet, there is no political consensus. Therefore, it is unlikely that any such legislation would pass the House. I certainly see why Members or families like the Campbell family would wish to see full compellability. We also have to acknowledge that, when we are going back so far, there might be no valid evidence forthcoming in many cases, but it is entirely understandable why people would wish to explore that.

Police Ombudsman: Funding Request

4. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice to explain why, as reported recently in the newspapers, he turned down a request from the Police Ombudsman for £1.1 million to deal with conflict-related complaints, especially given that the Minister and others are going into talks to try to deal with the legacy issue in a comprehensive way. (AQT 1374/11-15)

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Kelly that there is a need to look at those issues in a comprehensive way, but the reality is that we also have to look at the budget available. There is no point in promising money that cannot be delivered. Part of the issue needs to be to see whether we can get a coherent, joined-up way of dealing with all the issues of the past. It is quite clear that there are issues that could be better done by something like a legacy unit than by the historical enquiries of the ombudsman's office, some elements of the legacy inquests and the work of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET). Let us see what we can get from those five-party talks in the first place.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Alongside that, with respect, he is the Minister. The requests have been done before we have come to the conclusion of the talks. He mentioned the inquests; is he happy that resources are available? There are also reports in the papers that not enough resources are being given for proper disclosure to a number of the inquests.

Mr Ford: Again, Mr Kelly highlights significant issues relating to resources. The Department of Justice has a budget for dealing with the present and has responsibilities for dealing with the past. No other Department is in that position. That is the challenge we face.

Particularly in the difficult financial circumstances that are looming because of the inability to agree welfare reform, it is impossible to make commitments to fund some of the services from the past.

Parades: Criminal Justice Issues

5. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice whether he agrees that the only way to avoid some of the criminal justice issues around controversial parades is to bring people round a table, as happened in Derry, to talk the issue out and to ensure respect and tolerance across the board. (AQT 1375/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am certainly very happy, with an MLA for Foyle asking the question and an MLA for Foyle sitting in the Speaker's Chair, to agree that there are clearly positive examples that have come from people from Derry/Londonderry getting together and discussing those issues. The challenge is to get that kind of mood into areas like north Belfast, where it is sadly lacking. I certainly hope that the leadership available in the House will provide some of that joining up.

Mr Eastwood: Further to that, was the Minister glad today to see that the House unanimously supported a motion calling for unambiguous adherence to the rule of law around these issues?

Mr Ford: Yes, indeed. I am not sure whether Mr Eastwood was in the Chamber at an earlier stage of Question Time when I repeated the point that I have made on a number of occasions: it is absolutely necessary that everybody in the community accepts the determinations of the Parades Commission as having the force of the rule of law, which they do. It is important that those who wish to parade and those who wish to protest both do so entirely lawfully and peacefully.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Ian McCrea is not in his place to ask a question.

Capital Works: Business Cases

7. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice how long would it normally take for an outline business case to be transferred to the Department of Finance and Personnel when progressing a major capital works scheme, such as for a prison. (AQT 1377/11-15)

Mr Ford: That depends on the complexity of the capital scheme in question.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for the vagueness of that reply. Maybe we could get it down to a more precise nature now. The Minister caused some uncertainty three weeks ago when he answered a question from my honourable friend by saying that there was no guarantee that the prison at Magilligan would proceed. At that point, he did not mention that his Department had not put an outline business case to the Department of Finance and Personnel. Thankfully, he has done so today, but can he explain why he did not mention it three weeks ago?

Mr Ford: Maybe it was easier to get the full detail in the context of a prepared answer to a question. Mr Campbell seems to suggest that I have somehow been covering up what is happening. There is a lengthy and complex process, which he outlined in a non-topical question a few moments ago, around strategic business cases, outline business cases and all the details that have to be worked through. I did not think that that was any secret to Members in the House, especially not to those who have themselves been a Minister.

Legal Criticism: DOJ

8. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Justice how he responds to criticism levelled against his Department by solicitors for the most senior coroner, who have said that the lack of resources allocated to legacy issues is an enormous embarrassment to the state. (AQT 1378/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I have said to other Members of the House, it is absolutely clear that there are fundamental issues of resources. Issues such as obtaining all the necessary information for inquests are enormously complex and demanding of time and skilled personnel, of whom there are a limited number. The reality is that there have been difficulties encountered in doing that. That has never been denied. What is an issue is to ensure that we provide the system in as joined-up a way as possible. That would best be done if we could agree on some of the outstanding issues of the past and find some ways that we could deal with them collectively without using the existing inquest system. Those legacy matters are more complex and are not easily carried through by implementing the standard system of today.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat. Minister, to ensure that families get to the truth, how do you explain the shocking lack of resources to families such as that of Roseann Mallon, an

elderly lady from my county who was shot dead 20 years ago and whose family is still waiting for answers around her death?

Mr Ford: I do not accept that there is a "shocking lack of resources". Significant resources are being put into dealing with legacy inquests, but, given the complexity, the work required and the limited number of people with the capacity to do it, these things are taking time at the moment. Unless we find some better way of dealing with this or find experts to whom we do not currently have access, it will continue to be a major issue. We are well aware of the difficulties that arise from that.

I am aware of the recent court decisions in the context of those who believe that they suffered as a result of delays. We are doing what we can to address that, but I would be foolish to stand here and promise that things could be done when we simply do not have the resources and the expertise in the numbers that we need to deal with everything as fast as we would wish.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr David McIlveen is not in his place.

3.30 pm

Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill

10. **Mr McKinney** asked the Minister of Justice whether, given recent public concerns over the SAI process and health service investigations, he feels that an amendment to the Legal Aid and Coroners' Courts Bill, to allow for independent investigation, would be within the scope of the Bill. (AQT 1380/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am not sure whether it would be within the scope of the Bill. Mr McKinney makes an interesting point, but the reality is that the scope of that Bill is extremely narrow. There is certainly an issue of the wider reform of coronial law, which is being looked at in the Department, and I believe that that is where it would best sit.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for his answer. By what mechanism could that be introduced?

Mr Ford: That would be on the basis of a wider Bill looking at coronial law in general. There are a number of factors that need to be taken into account. I know it has been suggested by the Attorney General that we should look at that particular point, but the difficulty is in dealing with matters piecemeal rather than looking at a

single piece of legislation that would deal with a number of outstanding issues around coronial law. However, it is an issue that is being actively explored in the Department at present.

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

Ministerial Statement

Tourism: Public Consultation

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement to update Members regarding the review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and wider tourism structures.

On 14 November last year, I announced that an independent review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and wider tourism structures was to be undertaken. The overall aim of the review is to ensure that current organisational structures are the optimum necessary to deliver the targets and actions set out in the Programme for Government and the economic strategy and that they are effectively aligned with the work of Invest Northern Ireland. Mr John Hunter CB was appointed to undertake the review, and, following extensive stakeholder engagement with 90 representatives from some 54 organisations, a final draft report is now available.

The executive summary of the report highlights 10 key recommendations, which are as follows: the Northern Ireland Executive should publish an updated strategy for tourism; the Northern Ireland Tourist Board should continue its work with Invest Northern Ireland to develop an economic development brand for Northern Ireland; the Northern Ireland Tourist Board should clarify roles and responsibilities with key partner organisations, including the new district councils, through memoranda of understanding; the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland should deepen their relationship through improved communication and enhanced collaboration, with robust targets for increasing tourism numbers based on the updated strategy for tourism; the Northern Ireland Tourist Board should appoint pillar managers for each of its five experience pillars, working alongside destination managers; Invest Northern Ireland and DEL/People 1st should continue to provide business support services and training services respectively to the tourism industry; DEL should initiate a review of the skills needs of the tourism sector; NITB's organisational structure should be built around support for its new destination managers and proposed pillar managers in a new directorate for destination areas and experiential pillars; NITB should engage in an organisation development and culture change programme to embed a renewed focus on the client; and, finally, NITB's

name should be changed in order to signal the scale of its envisaged transformation.

In the main body of the report there are a total of 33 recommendations, which include the 10 key recommendations I have mentioned. It will be important that all the recommendations contained in the report are given full consideration. Given the importance of tourism to the local economy, my priority is to ensure that we have the right structures in place to maximise the benefits that this crucial sector can bring right across Northern Ireland. I have therefore decided that the review report will go out for public consultation to provide the many stakeholders involved in the tourism sector with an opportunity to comment on the report's recommendations. The public consultation exercise will commence later this month and will run until late September to allow plenty of time for responses, given that the summer period is very busy for the tourism industry. I will update the Assembly again in the autumn when the consultation period has ended and my officials have analysed the responses received.

I am certain that all Members will join me in thanking Mr Hunter for his work in carrying out the review, which will help to inform and underpin any future changes required to ensure that organisational structures in DETI are the optimum necessary to achieve our long-term goal of making tourism in Northern Ireland a £1 billion industry by 2020. I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas ar an phróiseas comhairliúcháin. I thank the Minister for her statement on the consultation process.

I want to raise a couple of points. One of the bullet points in the statement states:

"DEL should initiate a review of the skills needs of the tourism sector".

Obviously, that is an ongoing requirement. Will the Minister outline what skills she or her Department see as being necessary as part of that review? Secondly, I note that, on the draft tourism strategy, the consultation document says:

"The NI Executive should publish an updated Strategy for Tourism".

Given that the draft strategy for tourism came before the Assembly in 2010 and then disappeared into the black hole of the Executive, does the Minister rate the chances of success of a fresh strategy for tourism any higher than the previous one?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for those two points. He is right about the last strategy, which came about after an industry-led panel brought forward recommendations. We then brought it to the Executive. Unfortunately, that was just before the last Assembly elections, and it never came out again. Therefore, the reviewer, John Hunter, has indicated that we need an updated tourism strategy.

I have to say that the fact that we have not had an officially endorsed tourism strategy has certainly not prevented the tourism industry from growing, and I pay tribute to the industry for the way in which it has continued to grow, particularly during that very important year of 2012. When Members have a chance to look at the review report, they will see that 2012 was pointed out by Mr Hunter as a hugely important year for the industry. Indeed, he has suggested that we should perhaps look at another year of a similar type so that we can again coalesce around that branding for Northern Ireland.

It will be an updated strategy. It will take into account the fact that business tourism here has grown, particularly in and around Belfast. Mr Hunter pointed to the success of Visit Belfast in that regard. It will also take into account the experience brand and the five pillars that he has pointed to, and, again, those need to be reflected in the updated strategy. Finally, the review of public administration will also have to be factored in to any new tourism strategy because roles and responsibilities have changed in that regard.

We have been working very well with DEL on skills throughout a number of sectors. The hospitality sector has been important in that regard, and People 1st has provided a lot of training for the sector. Londonderry was also very recently named as the first city to have WorldHost city status.

This means sitting down with the industry and finding out what its needs are in particular destinations. It could be welcoming skills, skills in the kitchen or skills at front of house. It is really what the industry needs to move forward. Mr Hunter has suggested that DEL needs to have a close look at the skills required by the industry and have that sectoral review. I know that my officials have been speaking to officials in DEL, and I hope that the Minister will also

recognise that there is a need to do that. We will discuss that during the consultation period.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her statement, and I trust that we will see progress made on the development of tourism. Can the Minister advise on what plans there are to replace the chief executive, Alan Clarke, who, I understand, is retiring later this year?

Mrs Foster: Indeed, Mr Clarke has indicated that he wishes to retire. He has been in post whilst tourism has grown in Northern Ireland, and we thank Alan for all that he has done for the tourism industry here. I hope that the consultation responses will be looked at by the end of September or the beginning of October. I do not think that we are in a position to appoint a new chief executive until that consultation is finished and we decide once and for all on the way forward for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. So, I will be speaking to the chair of the Tourist Board, Dr Howard Hastings, to make sure that we have the appropriate cover in place. Once the decisions are taken, we will, of course, move very swiftly to appoint a new chief executive.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. I thank the Minister for her statement and look forward to reading the detailed report over the summer months.

Will she accept that a single body charged with promoting tourism across all of Ireland, which could promote attractions such as the Ring of Kerry, the Marble Arch Caves and the Cliffs of Moher as a single and more enhanced product, as opposed to two separate products, would encourage more holidaymakers to visit this part of Ireland and that that has been a problem for the Tourist Board in recent times?

Mrs Foster: No, I do not accept that. I accept that the Member has not had an opportunity to look at the report, which will be up on the website after I leave the Chamber. In his report, Mr Hunter talks about the fact that:

"A homogenised approach fails to capture the diversity that is on offer across the island"

— he is talking not just about Northern Ireland but about parts of the Republic of Ireland —

"as a whole and its attractiveness to a wide range of tourist audiences as illustrated by the market segmentation in GB proposed by the Tourism Recovery Task Force."

The Tourism Recovery Task Force was something that a number of the industry bodies and NITB and Tourism Ireland brought together to look at the fact that they were concerned about the GB market. One of the recommendations that came back was the fact that, because that is our closest and nearest market, we need to have a standout approach for the different destinations. That is true for the Republic of Ireland, and it is certainly true for Northern Ireland. We need to have that standout and consider how we best achieve it. The review report is saying that we must work together in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, or whatever its name will be in the future, along with Tourism Ireland to make sure that Northern Ireland gets that standout, particularly in the GB market, because that is where we feel that the biggest market is for us. That has been the case historically, and it will be the case in the future as well.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her statement. From my time in the Assembly, it seems to me that we are not particularly good at how we do consultations. Will the Minister ensure that, when the actual wording to the consultation is built on, it will be done in such a way that the tourism industry has a say. We need to get the right answers, and the right questions into it, and then get everything in place to have a strategy for tourism that we can all work on together and that is in place in a year or two.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The whole point of the consultation is that we have stakeholder involvement in the answers. Regardless of what the questions are, knowing the tourism industry, it will tell me what it thinks. It will come forward and make sure that I am aware of what it believes is the best way forward for what is currently the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

We are having quite a long consultation period to allow the tourism industry to respond. We recognise that the summer months are very busy, so we have left the closing date to 22 September, which gives a lot of time for people to have a look at this. Hopefully, they will come forward. Indeed, I know that they will come forward with their suggestions on and responses to the report.

Mr Lunn: I note the long-term goal to make Northern Ireland tourism a £1 billion industry by 2020. I do not know what the current figure is, but I am sure that that goal is quite challenging. Can the Minister tell us whether there has been, or will be, any further discussion about the VAT

rate on the hospitality industry in Northern Ireland compared with that in the Republic?

3.45 pm

Mrs Foster: The tourism industry in Northern Ireland feels very strongly about VAT rates. Of course, it is a UK issue as a whole, and the industry has made representation to the Treasury. We do not have the power to vary VAT rates here in the Assembly, and I support the tourism industry on that because I believe that it leaves us in an uncompetitive situation.

The £1 billion figure is taken from the Programme for Government. I am delighted to say that our key Programme for Government targets for visitor numbers and tourism revenue have been achieved for 2013, and we are well on our way to achieving the 2014 targets and have, in fact, already exceeded our 2014 visitor spend targets. Therefore, we are very much on track to make this a £1 billion industry by 2020. I pay tribute to the Tourist Board, to Tourism Ireland and to everybody in the tourism industry for really driving the industry forward. It has been a very bright part of the new Northern Ireland, and I am very proud of the way in which they drive forward the industry.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for her statement. She revealed today that the consultation exercise will start next month, so will she ensure that local community organisations that are involved in tourism, such as the East Belfast Partnership, which is organising another C S Lewis event later this year, will also be consulted?

Mrs Foster: I very much hope that it will take part in the consultation. It is an opt-in process as opposed to my having to go out to people; they should opt in to the consultation, and I hope that community groups do that. An interesting point about engagement during the Giro d'Italia was the fact that so many community organisations got involved with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Some 800 organisations from across Northern Ireland went along to hear about the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's toolkit for getting involved in the Giro d'Italia.

The success of the Giro d'Italia was down to community organisations coming out and getting involved and, of course, embracing the pink. I hope that it is a good model and that other community organisations will do the same in the future, because tourism is everybody's business, from the taxi driver, to the person who meets you at your hotel or B&B, to the

person who cleans your room: everybody has a stake in the tourism industry in Northern Ireland. I hope that community organisations will see this as important and respond accordingly.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to touch on the relationship between Tourism Ireland and the NITB and what appears to be a criticism of diminished communication and collaboration. I noted her earlier answer on the UK market. Would enhanced collaboration and communication lead to the North being sold as part of an island-wide package to avoid confusion among overseas visitors?

Mrs Foster: That is exactly what happens in our faraway destinations at the moment. Tourism Ireland has a remit to promote the whole of the island of Ireland across the world, but its terms of reference state that it has to give Northern Ireland standout, so Tourism Ireland does that at present. My difficulty is that the standout piece does not seem to be working as well for us as it is for the rest of the island because the Republic of Ireland is moving ahead on visitor numbers, which is, of course, to do with direct access. I am encouraging Tourism Ireland to work with the Northern Ireland airports to improve our direct access with the rest of the world. The Member will know about the importance of that access to North America, having been there just last week. It is vital that we continue not only to have direct access there but to look at new markets.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for her statement. I also express our appreciation to Mr Hunter for the way in which he engaged and the opportunity that we had to put our views to him. As someone who represents the North Antrim constituency, which has many of the premier tourist attractions in Northern Ireland, you will not be surprised that I want to ask the Minister about the engagement that she has had with key partners such as the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Partnership to ensure that it plays a part in getting the maximum benefit from a new policy and a new focus on tourism.

Mrs Foster: With the updated strategy, it is important that the nine destination areas that have been identified are taken forward. Under RPA, we have 11 new local government structures. There are nine new destinations. Therefore, there will be some overlap. That is why Mr Hunter states in his report that there is a need for clarity and certainly about the

different roles that each of the organisations will have, and to make sure that we do not have duplication. In other words, that a council or partnership does not decide to do marketing that is the responsibility of Tourism Ireland or the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Some work is to be carried out on that over the summer. It will be interesting to hear from the different organisations how they view those relationships because decisions will have to be taken about that in September/October.

Private Members' Business

Cancer Research and Treatment

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

Mr McKinney: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the prevalence of cancer in Northern Ireland and the efforts made by front line staff and professionals to counteract the disease; notes the advances in cancer treatment being made here and the achievements of the cancer centre in South Belfast, which, in collaboration with the pharmaceutical sector, has made significant and unique strides in biomedical diagnostic research; applauds the global and local economic and health benefits of such research; acknowledges that the predicted increased rates of cancer dictate that more needs to be done in terms of furthering research and treatment; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to support this work to develop Northern Ireland as a world-class centre for cancer research and treatment.

I welcome the opportunity to bring this debate to the House, and I support the motion, as amended. The amendment is welcome, but it must be followed by action. The encouragement towards a biomedical research centre is a step on the road to fully capturing the health and economic benefits, but it is only that: we really need to be looking at an innovative, academic-led hospital to drive innovation. Invest NI will have learned that during its recent trip to San Diego where it was illustrated that countries such as Austria are making strides in that regard.

This issue is very important, and I first wish to highlight the positive work in cancer treatment and research that is going on across the North. I brought a similar motion to the House as the topic of an Adjournment debate, and it is worth re-noting the strides in cancer treatment advances that I outlined then.

One of the seminal reports dictating the nature of cancer services here was the Campbell report of 1996. It made a number of key recommendations, including the establishment of a cancer centre, as noted in the motion today. The advances made in cancer treatment and research here in the last 15 years are huge. Staff in our hospitals and universities have played their role in that and continue to deliver high-quality care to cancer patients. Let us look again at some of the strides that have been made. In 1993, breast cancer screening was established throughout Northern Ireland. In 1994, the first cancer registry was established. In 1999, the first cancer incidence data was compiled. In 2004, the Northern Ireland Cancer Network was established. In 2006, the cancer centre was opened. On top of that, in 2011, we created a cancer services framework.

The progression has taken us an enormous distance, but that is, unfortunately, tainted by current health policies. The cancer drugs issue has been brought up by the SDLP on numerous occasions. The current system for access — the individual funding request (IFR) — is unjustly prohibitive. The Minister has previously come to the House and cited a 95% uptake for non-National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) approved drugs. What he did not say, though, was that only 5% apply in the first place. So if, for example, we have 100 people in need of a drug, the Minister's 95% uptake figure equates to only four or five of those 100.

The Minister's response to the public outcry over this inequality was to instantly tout as an answer prescription charges and welfare reform. However, the SDLP has found an answer that the Minister has not told us about: the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS). The pharmaceutical industry said that the Minister could use that to open access at the stroke of a pen. Why has he not done that? Why has he sought to waste time by reviewing an IFR process that almost everyone in the healthcare sphere agrees is defunct? Why has he dragged welfare reform and prescription charges into the debate when the arguments for a cancer drugs fund model have already been won? The money is there.

In Scotland, the peer-approved clinical system (PACS) has replaced the individual patient treatment request. It is estimated that the new system, which incorporates increased patient-clinician engagement, will help up to 1,500 people in the first year. The Minister has said that he is taken by that model, but what is he doing to replicate it?

Cancer is the leading cause of premature death in 28 of 53 European countries, and it is projected that, by 2035, someone will die from cancer every 10 seconds in Europe. That is a startling forecast. The European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights has sought to bring equal access, and the work done by Queen's — Paddy Johnston and Mark Lawler in particular — has been integral to that progression.

Here, nearly 13,000 people are diagnosed with cancer every year, and just over 4,000 lose their battle with the illness. At this point, I acknowledge the death of Noleen Adair, who was buried yesterday. She led a charity that did enormously good work.

It is against that backdrop that the improvements in research and innovative treatment in the North are heartily welcomed. From a clinical perspective, the cancer centre, which is located in the City Hospital and opened in 2006, has made a huge difference to cancer provision here. It offers an extensive range of specialist treatment, including radiotherapy, in a modern and professional setting. The centre for cancer research at Queen's University has also played a pivotal role. The centre has an array of core competencies and is filled with the expertise of over 300 cancer, clinical and basic researchers. We saw recently how the research taking place here can have a very positive effect: the work of Almac has produced information that will improve ovarian cancer diagnosis, and I commend the role of Invest NI in providing capital for that work.

All of that is inconsistent with the current cancer drugs access policy and the red herring that prescription charges are needed to pay for greater access. That is a more significant red herring when we consider the amount given yesterday to the whole of the UK through the PPRS: £74 million per quarter. We get around 3% of that, which could translate into something like £9 a million year. The money is there. Furthermore, it is projected that we will get 9% next year, which equates to £27 million. Prescription charges are simply not needed to fund cancer drugs.

I would like to talk about the work of clinicians. I know, through discussions with them and cancer patients, that doctors are being placed in an invidious position — a moral conundrum, if you like — when it comes to prescribing treatment for cancer. They know the gravity of any potential diagnosis, the chances of survival and, most importantly, that treatment available elsewhere is not available here. That means that, often, the treatment path recommended may not be the most effective one.

Clinicians here know that, due to the flawed nature of the IFR system currently in operation, most patients will not qualify for the latest and most effective drugs. That is unacceptable: it is unacceptable for the patients and unacceptable to put clinicians in that position. I have written to the Royal College of Physicians to ask whether knowing that presents its members with any moral or ethical dilemmas. Without breaching the private nature of any correspondence, I can tell you that the college is treating the matter very seriously and will debate it thoroughly.

The Minister may wish to use the welfare reform argument, as he has done, and he echoed it today on several occasions, but let us look at welfare reform in relation to this topic. There has been substantial work done by Macmillan Cancer and others, and research has shown the financial impact of receiving a cancer diagnosis, with some almost £300 a month worse off on average. What will welfare reform do to them? The reforms to our welfare system will only hurt those people further.

4.00 pm

The role of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the attempt to make Northern Ireland a world leader in cancer research and treatment should not be underestimated. Last week, I accompanied Minister Foster and other members of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the United States and talked at length about cancer research and drugs development. We have to put cancer drugs into perspective. In reality, they are the conclusion of a process that is often started here through research and medical trials. For that reason, it is almost logical that those patients should get the drugs. Many are developed and trialled here but, in a cruel irony, not available here.

My experience in America tells me that there are significant jobs and many other economic benefits in the development of drugs infrastructure. We have one here, but, if the experience of San Diego is anything to go by, it could grow far more. Here, too, was a city that was facing potential economic downturn. Here, too, was a city that had the beginning of a biotech future and decided that it wanted to build on it. It is now sitting on a multibillion-pound industry that employs thousands and brings wealth, prosperity and improvements, not just to the people of San Diego but globally. This should be the vision for here, too.

What are our barriers to this? We are taking a very narrow focus on cancer drugs, seeing

them as a cost and not a benefit. We are not seizing the day in promoting our drugs industry. That is why our motion calls not just on the Health Minister to do something but for joined-up government, in this case linking with the Enterprise Minister in developing this place as a global centre of excellence. Good work has already been completed. As I have noted, the role of Invest NI in helping with R&D moneys has resulted, for example, in the good work of Almac on breakthrough treatment, but that is only the tip of the iceberg.

We can approach this argument from a number of different angles, whether cancer, drugs development or jobs. However, we will not achieve the full ambition and vision unless we see this as a journey that will develop all of them equally, with cancer patients benefiting from the latest diagnostic treatment and drugs, and drugs that are developed and trialled here through well-paid jobs that are based here, bringing income that stays here —

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

Mr McKinney: — as part of Northern Ireland plc, a global centre of excellence.

Mr Dunne: I beg to move the following amendment: After first "research and treatment;" insert

"supports efforts to broaden access for local patients to innovative treatments and clinical trials; encourages the establishment of a university-linked biomedical research centre;".

I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on what remains a terrible disease in our society that affects virtually every family in Northern Ireland. I thank Mr Fearghal McKinney for bringing the motion. I commend the amendment to the House and trust that Members will see fit to support it as it complements the original motion.

Cancer continues to be a serious health risk to all our population, with 13,000 patients affected in Northern Ireland every year. The treatment of cancer is carried out through our hospital services, with multi-professional hospital teams, and support from a number of charities, including Marie Curie and NI Hospice, which all do an excellent job and to which we must pay tribute. During a recent visit to the Marie Curie Hospice at Beaconsfield, a number of us saw at first hand the excellent work that is being carried out for patients and their families at an extremely challenging time in their lives.

In relation to cancer research, the Health Committee recently visited the Northern Ireland Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology to see the excellent work led by Professor David Waugh and Professor Manuel Salto-Tellez. Professor Waugh is a very committed and enthusiastic professional who is very keen to promote the development of cancer treatment and research through locally based research and trials. Last week, he spoke at an event in San Diego prior to the large bio-conference, highlighting the opportunities that exist for the development of cancer drugs and treatments in Northern Ireland.

At the international bio-conference, which was supported by Invest NI, we had on display the work of our two largest universities, Queen's and the University of Ulster, highlighting that skills are available to do such research involving partnership working between industry and academia. We also had on display local firms like Almac, which is involved in extensive research and development of new drugs with financial support from Invest NI. It is important that we showcase our skills to the world as we seek to attract new investors to work alongside our top medical researchers. Some of the best in the world are here as they seek to find solutions through bio-research into cancer. Bio-research includes work on biological molecules, cell tissues and processes to turn research knowledge into new diagnostics. The real focus for the future treatment of patients is in the need for a focus on the individual needs of such patients. One treatment — such as is carried out at the moment — does not suit all. There are many patients out there, getting standard treatments that are having a negative effect on them.

There is a clear need for more focus-specific treatments in relation to cancer, and we have the professional skills and enthusiasm to make it happen. The recent Connected Health initiative, which involves a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Health and DETI for developing new methods of working, could lead to support for such initiatives and help gain commercial support for further clinical trials and drug development. We need to do more to see the development of a world-class centre of excellence in cancer research and the development of drugs here in Northern Ireland.

In relation to cancer drugs, there is a real need for access to the 38 drugs that are available in the rest of the UK. There is a strong lobby for such treatments, and I know that the Minister has a lot of sympathy for the provision of such drugs. I think we all recognise the strong lobby

that has come from our local charities. As MLAs, we have all received the emails, and we appreciate the concern out there.

Again, during our recent visit to the Belfast cancer centre, the consultants there were very clear that it was virtually impossible to get access to the rare cancer drugs under the existing individual funding request (IFR) system. We are advised that the system is so difficult that the professionals are not putting in such applications as it is virtually impossible to get approval.

I look forward to the Minister's response in relation to how successful the IFR system is in getting patients access to the rare cancer drugs that are available in the rest of the UK. I commend the amendment to the House.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the proposer of the motion. I support the motion and the amendment. I believe that cancer, its treatment and research, must be of concern to us all. It is very clear that cancer does not recognise age, gender or borders and, therefore, it is proper that we strive to position, if you like, the North of Ireland as a world-class centre for cancer research and development.

As the proposer of the motion outlined, much has been done and much achieved. I acknowledge and pay tribute to all professional front line staff who commit their daily lives to those endeavours. Our recent visit to the centre for cancer research very clearly showed the professionalism and, indeed, the developments that have been taking place, even over a short number of years. It is certainly very impressive to be a part of that.

The reality is that more than one in three of us will develop some form of cancer during our lifetime. Around 7,000 cases are diagnosed each year. I have referred to the significant developments in research and treatments but, as the proposer of the motion quite rightly stated, we have equality issues when it comes to accessing the type of drugs that are required. It should be very clear to us all that access to drugs and treatment should not be by dint of postcode.

It is worth noting that the recent Active Citizenship Network conference in Brussels heard calls for a review of access to cancer drugs. I look forward to the Minister's response to that, and further, to his actions on it. It is also very clear that empowering patients has a clear resonance with the 'European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights', and that is something that the

Assembly should support and endeavour to develop.

Cancer research over the last number of years has led to a significant increase in cancer survival rates in the North, and that is very much to be welcomed, but, as the proposer of the motion said, much more needs to be done. In this debate today, people need to get a sense of actions and outcomes flowing from the discussion. Cancer is the leading cause of premature death in 28 out of 53 European countries, and it is projected that, by 2035, someone will die from cancer every 10 seconds in Europe. It is also worth acknowledging that cancer is the single largest cause of death from disease in children and young people. Treatment normally starts immediately, but it is quite often given many miles from home and lasts up to a number of years.

In welcoming developments, I want to single out the progress on the radiotherapy unit in my constituency in Altnagelvin, and I hope that that will allow for further improvement of capacity in the regional cancer centre in Belfast. In welcoming today's motion and supporting the motion and the amendment, I believe that the real ambition for a centre for global health innovation can be supported and developed and is very much welcome.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for bringing the motion forward and indicate the support of the Ulster Unionist Party for it.

The prevalence of cancer has been increasing, with some 8,700 patients a year being diagnosed locally and, sadly, some 4,000 passing away, with cancer attributed as contributing to the cause of death. A third of us can expect to suffer from some form of cancer in our lives. Life expectancy is increasing and, with an older population, the prevalence of cancer also increases, so this will be an increasing problem.

In 1997, Northern Ireland was at the bottom of the survival tables. Thankfully, as a result of a number of developments, we are nearer the top today. We are fortunate to have benefited from a number of developments at the Belfast City Hospital site in south Belfast that are collectively contributing to that improved outcome for patients. We have the new cancer treatment centre, where modern treatment facilities are provided at Belfast City Hospital, and I pay tribute to the doctors, the specialist nurses and the support staff who are enabling those better outcomes.

We also have the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology, and I acknowledge that, in particular, the work of Professor Paddy Johnston over many years has allowed the development of research here in Belfast. Cutting-edge research has occurred, along with state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment being provided and collaboration between the private sector and the public sector, and that has enabled direction towards appropriate treatment to suit the needs of individuals and close monitoring of progress of any particular cancer and its treatment.

The close working and support of Cancer Research UK has also enabled significant research in Belfast; that must be acknowledged. I also wish to indicate our thanks to Professor Manuel Salto-Tellez and his colleagues. The close working and integration between our health service and the cancer centre is a significant advantage that we have here and enables us to link the treatment and the testing and, ultimately, the trials. That has not been able to be replicated in many other parts of the world and is a significant advantage that we have, and I believe that that integrated working has been a significant factor in driving up our outcomes.

The other significant feature is the Northern Ireland Cancer Trials Centre. I recently met the clinical director, Dr Richard Wilson, along with the Health Committee, and he highlighted the fact that clinical trials allow the development of personalised medicines that are specifically targeted to each individual and their cancer.

No longer does one treatment suit all. Scientific research and development has enabled particular treatment for particular people to be identified and developed.

4.15 pm

The support of a number of charities in allowing the development of cancer treatment in Belfast must be recognised. So, too, must the support of companies such as Almac, as has been mentioned, which carried out clinical trials for ovarian cancer patients following a local discovery in collaboration with Queen's University. Again, we must recognise that the close working of the Department of Health with DETI, the charities and the private sector — the pharmaceutical industry — has been to the benefit of local patients. A virtuous circle has been created between the cancer treatment centre, the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology and the Cancer Trials Centre. However, the question I have, Minister, is this:

why are the 38 specialist cancer drugs available in England not able to be used and trialled in Belfast, as that is inhibiting the progress that can be made? Clearly, we need to move forward.

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he acknowledge that there is considerable appetite in the public mind for this, as reflected through the online petition organised by Cancer Focus NI, which has now cleared its 10,000 signature target and doubled it to 20,000?

Mr Beggs: Clearly, the public are questioning why the drugs that are available in England are not available in Northern Ireland, particularly, as I understand it, when all 38 drugs — the Minister can confirm this — would be covered by the UK-wide PPRS and could be provided in Northern Ireland without any significant additional costs. Indeed, I understand that the scheme would guarantee no increases in the provision of branded and specialist medicines until 2015 and limits the potential increase for a number of years thereafter. Given that, why are those drugs not available in Belfast? Why are we putting the trials that could be available at risk? Why are we not allowing the Northern Ireland public to benefit from those specialist drugs —

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

Mr Beggs: — which have been proven to enhance life and the quality of life for those who suffer from cancer?

Mr McCarthy: I thank Mr Fearghal McKinney and Mr Seán Rogers for bringing to the Assembly such an important motion on an issue that affects every family in Northern Ireland.

On behalf of the Alliance Party, I wish to put on record our total support for all our front line staff and professional people who work tirelessly to counteract and overcome this terrible scourge on the life of far too many of our friends and neighbours. A few days ago, as a member of the Health Committee, I had the pleasure, along with others, of visiting the biomedical diagnostic research unit sited on the City hospital complex. I want to sincerely thank our hosts on that day for their hospitality and the important information we received on the work that they are engaged in. I pay tribute to them and the passionate and dedicated manner in which they go about that work on our behalf. Indeed, it is such a shame that, with all the innovation and new medicine, cancer patients here cannot

benefit from that success, as other Members have indicated, simply because our Health Department, to date, has not funded those vital cancer drugs. I understand that there are some 38 or 39 such drugs. If you reside in England, you can access those life-saving drugs. Surely, that cannot be right.

On 24 June — only last week — in the Assembly, in answer to a question from me on cancer drug funding, the Minister, who is with us today in the Chamber, replied:

"I am firmly of that view. I need the support of the House to deliver cancer drugs, and I implore the House to give me that support to buy the cancer drugs instead of putting me in some sort of chained-up position where I cannot do it and then condemning me for not doing it. Give me the support to do it, and I will certainly buy the cancer drugs. I will buy them straight away if the House gives me the support to do it." [Official Report, Vol 96, No 6, p30, col 2].

Today, I am certain that the House will, by voting to support the motion and the amendment, give our Health Minister the OK to go out and buy those drugs without delay.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: Wait until I am finished if you will, please, Jim.

The First Minister said clearly and openly recently that, if Edwin needs more money for our health service, he will get it. To all Ministers in the Executive I say this: do the decent thing now, and put your money where your mouth is. There should be no more excuses or pontificating and no more unnecessary suffering for many of our constituents. Give the Health Minister your approval today for him to carry out his commitment to purchase these cancer drugs straight away. Too much time has already been wasted.

On further research and treatment, I have no doubt that, given all that is going on in the centre that we visited last week, we have the ability to innovate further and produce world-class medicines and drugs. We can be world leaders; in fact, I believe that we already are. At present, as Fearghal said, Cancer Focus is rightly engaged in a massive publicity campaign to get equality in Northern Ireland for all cancer patients. We must give 100% support to that campaign. It is also supported by the local press, and the stories in recent times — certainly in the 'Belfast Telegraph' — have been

heart-rending. So many good people have been cut down by this disease that it must surely make us all totally determined to provide medicines to ease pain and prolong life for every sufferer.

The Minister recently suggested the reintroduction of prescription charges to fund cancer drugs. That is something that the Alliance Party is prepared to consider, provided that safeguards for vulnerable patients are put in place.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: No, not at the moment, Roy.

Devolution gives the Assembly the power to provide for our own people. Surely being able to access life-saving drugs must be paramount to every Member of the Assembly. We do not want to see headlines such as these I have in my hand:

"I may have to leave my family for England to get cancer drug that I need".

There is a story about Una Crudden with the headline:

"Terminally ill Una Crudden fights on: I'm now in palliative care, no chemotherapy left".

We are all ashamed that that has to be the case for so many people. Can we give Mr Poots the support he needs to buy the life-saving drugs?

I will give way to Jim Wells first.

Mr Wells: The honourable Member suggested that we as an Assembly can wave a magic wand, and, by giving our support to him, the Minister could introduce the cancer drugs. It is a wee bit more fundamental than that. It is about finding the cash to do so, not the political will. It is about finding the money to meet all the competing demands on the health budget.

Mr McCarthy: I fully appreciate what Mr Wells says, but the Minister made an impassioned plea in the Assembly last week for Members to give him support. We give him that support today by supporting the motion and the amendment, and Mr Poots can go out and buy the drugs straight away.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: Go ahead.

Mr Beggs: I understand that the 38 specialist drugs available through English cancer drugs funds are included in the PPRS. Therefore, their inclusion and availability in a specialist scheme in Northern Ireland would be at no extra cost. Does the Member not think that it is rather strange that they are not available in Northern Ireland, given that background?

Mr McCarthy: I totally agree with Mr Beggs.

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

Mr McCarthy: I plead with the Assembly to support the motion and the amendment. It is over to the Minister to go and do what he told us last week he would do: buy them immediately.

Mrs Cameron: I am happy to support the motion and the amendment. It is well documented that one in three of us will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in our life, which, to put it in perspective, is a staggering 36 out of the Assembly's 108 MLAs. With an increasingly ageing population, the need to do everything possible to raise awareness, provide effective treatments and provide long-term outcomes has never been greater.

Around 10,000 people will be diagnosed with cancer in Northern Ireland each year, a figure that has increased by approximately 3.2% year on year, putting an even greater pressure on our healthcare system and the professionals employed in it. Northern Ireland is at the forefront of advances in cancer management, with academics such as Professor Patrick Johnston and Professor Mark Lawler from Queen's University leading the way in the development and innovation of new drugs and treatment methods. Working in an interdisciplinary manner, scientists, doctors and nurses at the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology are aiming to provide an internationally competitive centre of the highest quality to improve patient care and develop new treatments.

Having recently visited the centre and seen at first hand the work that is being carried out, I take this opportunity to thank the staff and Cancer Research UK for the groundbreaking achievements at the facility.

Since the publication of the Campbell report, the establishment of five cancer units and a regional cancer centre has greatly changed the way in which patients are looked after in the healthcare system. In my constituency, the unit

at Antrim Area Hospital provides excellent care for people with more common cancers such as lung, breast and colorectal cancer. It also provides chemotherapy services, which enables patients to be treated closer to home. The health service, working closely with charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Action Cancer and Cancer Focus Northern Ireland, is able to provide a holistic approach to cancer services, including screening, prevention, support and palliative care.

A recent announcement by Almac highlighted the importance of capital investment and research, and its £8 million project resulted in information that will significantly benefit the treatment of ovarian cancer. The scheme, which was part-funded by Invest NI, will provide vast improvements to cancer treatment and will also make significant financial savings to the health service.

The advances in the treatment of cancer are evident in the increasing survival rates, but we cannot rest on our laurels. Prevention and education must remain at the heart of those advances in the future. With around half of all cancers being attributable to lifestyle choices, we need to encourage people to give up smoking, reduce their alcohol intake, eat a balanced diet, exercise more and protect their skin in the sun. A multi-agency approach must be adopted to reduce the ever-increasing trend of cancer diagnosis. Of course, there are many cases of fit, seemingly healthy individuals who will also be diagnosed with some form of cancer.

We must ensure that the specialist drugs that can enhance or extend life are made available. It is unfair that some drugs are available in other parts of the UK but not in Northern Ireland. I encourage the Health Minister to continue to work towards finding the funding solution to make that happen. We owe it to cancer sufferers and campaigners such as Una Crudden, who have given selflessly of their own limited time and displayed incredible courage to fight for awareness and equality of treatment for those who will come after them. We must do all in our power in the Assembly, leaving political posturing aside, to do the right thing and find solutions that will be a fitting legacy to those who have campaigned so passionately.

In Northern Ireland, we are extremely fortunate to have a fantastic health service that is free at the point of use. We must channel our efforts into ensuring that we continue to provide that world-class service to all through investment and in research and development. We have

made enormous inroads into the treatment and prevention of cancer. I look forward to that continuing for future generations.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the motion and the amendment. The motion is a positive endorsement of those who deal with patients and those who further research. The amendment refers to the encouragement of a university-linked research centre, and that should also be supported.

We have dealt with the statistics relating to cancer. It is the main cause of death of one in three people here. Obviously, incidence is likely to increase alongside the ageing population. It continues to put increasing demands on the services provided. The costs associated with the treatment of cancer are substantial.

Cancer results in costs not only to patients but to their families. As someone who lost my spouse to cancer a number of years ago, I am well aware of the situation that it puts families in. It can place families in financial difficulty. Treatment often means that patients have to take sick leave and, in some cases, give up their jobs. There are other financial costs such as those associated with childcare etc. After treatment, people need more heat in their homes. There are travel costs associated with medical appointments, and patients often have to be accompanied by relatives, who also have to take time off work.

Specialist cancer drugs are expensive. Trusts tend to work on the principle that, if NICE recommends that a drug should not be used in the NHS, it is unlikely to be used or funded here. In England, as was stated, 38 life-extending cancer drugs are available to patients through the cancer drugs fund. Certainly, here in the North, we have contributed significantly to the field of cancer research, clinical trials and new treatments. Ironically, some of the medicines available on the cancer drug fund list were developed and trialled here but are still not available to patients living here. That simply means that, in some cases, our cancer patients are unable to access treatments with proven clinical benefits.

4.30 pm

It is important to recognise the imperative driving patients and their families to seek and secure access to treatment that may extend life. We have to understand that patients whose prognosis for recovery through conventional

treatments is poor may wish to participate in trials, and those trials should be made available.

As for the provision of treatment and the availability of drugs, the PPRS can be looked at by the Minister, and I am sure that he is already doing that.

I support the motion, and I thank the Members who proposed the motion and the amendment. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, support the motion and the amendment. First, it is worth mentioning the problem that we have in Northern Ireland with diagnosing cancer. Mr McKinney made the point that, in a very short space of time, over 10,000 people signed a petition asking for a cancer drugs fund to be implemented in Northern Ireland. Those figures are hardly surprising, given that, on average, 13,000 people every year are diagnosed with cancer in Northern Ireland. That is 13,000 people — our constituents — who go to their doctor and get that news. I think that all of us would dread the thought of ever having to have that conversation with our doctor. We are, therefore, constantly reminded by family, constituents and friends just how serious an issue this is. I believe that we should spend our time on it and put our shoulder to the wheel to try to ensure that the provision of diagnoses and the search for a cure continue to be funded. I know that the Minister is committed to doing that.

One group of people omitted from today's debate are those who help and are crucial in the development of new cancer treatments and new treatments in general by taking part in clinical trials. We have to commend those who volunteer to take part in such trials. I know that there have been campaigns about that even in this Building. In May, we had the OK To Ask campaign, which encouraged patients to ask their doctors about which trials are available at any given time, because those could be used to help to find a cure and to develop drugs that are coming to market.

Cancer research is a major driver for investment as well. Mr Dunne mentioned that in his opening remarks. Of course the investment side in this context is secondary, and quite rightly so. However, if we were to develop a world-leading product here, we would be very proud of it.

The argument about England and —

Mr McKinney: I thank the Member for giving way. I would like to extend the thought on that. If we were to develop that in a holistic way, either for tertiary or secondary, would it not be possible to attract more trials and even more innovative drugs, which our cancer patients could avail themselves of?

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for his intervention. When we deal with something that is for many people a ticking time bomb once they get a diagnosis, we have to deal with people for whom things can never happen fast enough, and I take the point that there will always be a time pressure. However, with the memorandum of understanding that has been signed between DETI and the Department of Health, which, in many ways, is very innovative thinking on the part of both Departments, I believe that we are getting to a point now where that can and will be the case. I am sure that the Minister will be able to update us on how that relationship with DETI is going.

We are hearing a lot about the 38 cancer drugs that are available. We would all support absolute equality for patients in Northern Ireland with patients in the rest of Great Britain, but we have to be conscious of the fact that, in many ways, we are comparing apples with pears: there are 38 cancer drugs available in the rest of the United Kingdom, but there are also drugs that we fund here that are not available over there, so we have to accept that there are differences.

In many ways, that has also led to confusion, particularly about the PPRS. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding of the PPRS is that it does not bring new money into the system; it is a scheme designed to mitigate the price rises in branded medicines. My interpretation is that the rest of the United Kingdom receives considerable income from prescription charges, which we do not have to pay, so we do not have that income. So the Department in Great Britain has the flexibility to divert the PPRS money, which we cannot do because we would leave ourselves financially exposed to any price hike in a brand of medicine already approved. Balancing the funds has to be taken into account, and Mr Wells made that point very well.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am sorry, Mr Beggs, I am running very short of time. The Minister made it clear to the Assembly that he would support the reintroduction of a small prescription charge in Northern Ireland. Whilst I know that there were

caveats attached, and I would not expect anything different, I take encouragement from Mr McCarthy saying that the Alliance Party is at least open-minded. So, hopefully, we can get buy-in from the other parties as well.

We have to deal with not just the cure but the prevention. There is a lot of work going on in the Department on prevention, including the use of alcohol and tobacco. I thank the Deputy Speaker for the opportunity to contribute.

Mr McCallister: Like colleagues, I support the motion and the amendment. Like huge numbers of our constituents, there is not, sadly, anyone in the House who has not been affected in some shape or form by cancer or had a relative or loved one who, at some point, has had that diagnosis. That gives us some idea of the scale of the problem that we face in tackling cancer.

As Mrs Cameron said, there are many preventative things, and we have a duty to start a drive on those. The Minister, in conjunction with the Public Health Agency (PHA) and other agencies, right through from our education system, needs a much more coherent and joined-up approach to tackling the very issues that Mrs Cameron talked about: dealing with the effects of poor diet, alcohol abuse, or misuse, and looking at the number of units that individuals consume. All are contributory factors. The glorious weather over the last few days can also be a contributory factor. There are many preventative things that we have to do.

Mr Brady talked about the financial impact. Over a number of years, the work of groups such as Macmillan has highlighted not only the turmoil of dealing with a cancer diagnosis but the impact that it can have on a family.

When it comes to developing new drugs, Northern Ireland has, over the past few years, developed a certain reputation and expertise. We want to continue to build on that.

We want to encourage as much of that innovation as possible, and partnerships between Queen's University and the cancer centre are welcome and build on that. That is something that we must do all that we can do to encourage.

Many Members have talked about the statistics and some of the welcomed improvements that there have been in survival rates. We are still not doing as well as many other comparative parts of Europe. That is something that we need to keep a focus on. I commend the work

that the health service is doing in being much better at addressing the patient's journey from diagnosis to treatment. It is an example of where we could provide a much quicker, faster response from the health service for other conditions. Thankfully, we are doing better in some of those measures in cancer treatment, but we need to keep the focus on research and development and on bringing in new partners to develop clinical trials, as Mr McIlveen talked about. We need to focus on how we can encourage that and on how we can make sure that those treatments are being developed.

There is also the important point about new and approved drugs being accessible to members of society — our constituents. It is of enormous regret, and, I am sure, very disturbing to Members, that we seem to be lagging behind other parts of the country in respect of the number and range of approved drugs that are available in Northern Ireland. I support some of what the Minister has talked about with regard to looking at a modest prescription charge and directing it to that. That would be important, if he could guarantee that the money would go to that, as I would hope he could.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr McCallister: That is something that is certainly worth having a debate on.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member explain why he would want to introduce prescription charges if there is a backstop on the pharmaceutical budget?

Mr McCallister: If money was available in the pharmaceutical budget, you would, of course, go there first. You would not introduce a prescription charge when you are not using all of the moneys available in the pharmacy budget. I have heard the Minister talk about how we might develop a dedicated cancer drugs fund that would be used to fund the very high cost, sometimes experimental drugs that are very, very expensive to use. That is something that I want to see people across Northern Ireland having access to. It is vital that they have access to those drugs; I want to see that.

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

Mr McCallister: We are lagging behind the rest of the country in doing that, and that is something that the Assembly and the Minister should be aiming to put right.

Mr Agnew: My election to the House was filled with mixed emotions. The day before I was elected, I buried a good friend of mine, Conor Shaw, who unfortunately lost his life at age 31 as a result of cancer. As many Members have mentioned, it is a disease that will affect almost all of us in some way, directly or indirectly, so prevalent is it in society. Pam Cameron gave the statistic that one third of people will likely die from the disease. Indeed, our former colleague David McClarty, unfortunately, was lost to the illness.

A number of Members have made mention of the impressive campaign from Cancer Focus NI calling for equal access to cancer drugs. I think that it has been so successful in getting support because it is something that all our constituents will have had some degree of experience of.

4.45 pm

The Minister took questions on access to cancer drugs during Question Time earlier, and I regret that he chose to turn it into a debate about welfare reform. Access to drugs for many illnesses, but for cancer in particular, was a problem for the health service before the debate about welfare reform came up; one did not cause the other. Whilst we need to have mature conversations around Budget allocation, it is a shame to turn such an important and emotive issue for people into a political squabble.

Conversely, I welcome the fact that the Minister has brought forward proposals, such as an annual charge for prescriptions. It is certainly something that we can look at as a possible option although, as has been stated, we need transparency around finances. Would a charge go directly to providing funds for cancer drugs? What would the line of financial accountability be? What other options can and are being considered? I know many people who feel strongly that there should be no prescription charges, but there could be a voluntary payment scheme whereby people could choose to pay for prescriptions if they believe they can afford to. I prefer that approach, but let us look at the evidence and research on what approaches have been taken elsewhere and let us present proposals rather than simply a take-it-or-leave-it proposal. That would be the best way forward.

My intention, on behalf of the Green Party, and, seemingly, the intention of all parties in the House, is to support the motion and the amendment. The Minister can see that when he is willing to work with his ministerial colleagues, his Committee and the Assembly the political will is there. I think we can agree on the destination of getting equal access to cancer drugs for people in Northern Ireland. Let us have a reasoned and sensitive debate about how we get to that destination, what steps are required and what steps we are willing to take to achieve that because, whilst financial issues are, of course, a consideration, people feel that they are part of the National Health Service and that there is an injustice when treatment is available to people in GB that is not available in Northern Ireland. I think that we would get much more understanding from our constituents if we were seen to work together on this issue.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome today's motion. I am grateful to the honourable Members for raising the important issue of cancer research and treatment. A reduction in the number of people who develop cancer and in the number whose lives are ended prematurely are goals that we all desire.

We are in the midst of demographic change. Every day brings new statistics on how our ageing population will change our future society. One change is that, with higher numbers of older people, we may see more people with cancer. Other things are changing, too. Through research and the clinical application of research findings, we have improved how we diagnose and treat cancer, so we should not resign ourselves to a future with more cancer. We can do something about that.

Prevention reduces the impact of cancer on our services, and, of course, on people. Our Public Health Agency has campaigns in place and in development to raise awareness and provide advice to minimise the risks through our lifestyles — it is always worth repeating — whether it is tobacco and the absolute necessity to stop smoking altogether; alcohol consumption and making it very clear that you should not consume alcohol or consume it in moderate quantities; taking exercise, which is abundantly important; weight management, or sunlight exposure.

These programmes are based on the best available evidence from research on how to prevent cancer. Our screening programmes raise awareness of symptoms of early cancer and opportunities for early intervention.

Excellence in cancer diagnosis is essential to support the best outcomes for patients. Our cancer diagnostic services include one of the UK's most advanced in molecular pathology, deploying cutting-edge technologies to serve both research and cancer services.

On that particular front, I think that it is absolutely critical — Mr McCarthy is here — that DEL, my Department and DETI engage with Queen's University in developing a programme for them to advance further. That will involve a capital investment, and it will involve a recurrent investment, but it will put Northern Ireland in an even more advanced place when it comes to cancer research. I do not have much time for people who suggest that we are in danger of losing cancer research. People are here because of the quality of the research that is carried out, the quality of the people who are carrying out that research and the availability of people who are willing to participate. The fact that we have an electronic care record puts us in an advantageous position. Northern Ireland has worked hard to get to that point with key research people.

We have also more recently, just last year, started contributing to a national fund of some £2 million, which reaps around £4.50 for every £1 that we spend on research. Research is well placed in Northern Ireland. For one in five cancer patients in Northern Ireland who participate in such research, those tests enable patients to receive the most appropriate treatment specific to their tumours — the treatment to which they are most likely to respond. The staff and facilities that enable the development of the most advanced, personalised treatment are supported in part through funding from Cancer Research UK and our own regional Health and Social Care R&D funds. That is something that we should not discount when we are having this discussion. That is something that many people in other parts of the United Kingdom are not benefiting from and will not benefit from, but we in Northern Ireland are delivering right here. One in five cancer sufferers are probably at the cutting edge of technology and of research in the services that they are receiving.

Radiotherapy services and research have been boosted significantly in recent years, and our capacity for effective and efficient treatment of patients will be enhanced when our regional radiotherapy facility at Altnagelvin Hospital is completed. I know that the Ulster Unionist Party did not think that we should do that project. I know that it wanted to pull that project. It was patently obvious to me, within the first week that I took office, having visited

Altnagelvin, having met the Pink Ladies, having discussed the matter with my Chief Medical Officer, my permanent secretary and key people in cancer research, and having been to the cancer centre at Belfast City Hospital, that it was something that was absolutely necessary, and not just for the people of the north-west — although it is a good enough reason that people who are suffering from cancer and need 15 minutes of radiotherapy should not have a four-hour round journey to receive that treatment. However, it was necessary not just for the people in the north-west, but because of the rising number of people with cancer. Belfast City Hospital would not have been able to cope with the numbers. It was an absolute necessity.

So I will tell you something, Mr Deputy Speaker: I will not be playing politics with cancer. It is far too important. We are looking at about one in three of our population developing cancer at some stage in their lives. Look around this Room; it will probably affect every family in this Building. This is not something to play politics with; it is something to get real about, and we must be absolutely serious about how we respond to it.

Radiotherapy services and research have been boosted recently, and that is something that we are proud of. I am proud of the improvements in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment that are deriving from research undertaken in Northern Ireland. For example, the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry has shown that we now have the best breast cancer survival rate of any part of the UK, yet I read a headline in a newspaper scaring people about breast cancer, when we are actually delivering the best results in breast cancer in the United Kingdom. Cancer is not something to scare people about. It is scary enough if you have breast cancer, without reading newspaper headlines that compound that.

We are committed to minimising the number of people whose lives are impacted by cancer, and research is one of the surest ways of achieving that. In addition to the evident benefits for people's health, investing in cancer research also makes sense for economic development. Locally, we have seen initiatives that began as straightforward research projects being translated into commercial developments and products that are destined for the global markets, with the support of local and global industry and Invest Northern Ireland, to provide better care for people across the world, with Northern Ireland being a place that people are looking to for doing things that are significantly better and carrying out improvements that can help others advance in their treatments.

According to a report published two weeks ago, on June 16, each pound invested in cancer research generates a continuous stream of benefits equal to 40p a year thereafter. The report was commissioned by the Academy of Medical Sciences, Cancer Research UK, the Wellcome Trust and the Department of Health in England.

On all of those things, I have heard Members says that all they want is equality. Really? Is that what you want? At this moment in time, England is the only place with the cancer fund in place. Scotland introduced a rare conditions medicine fund in 2013 to cover its orphan drugs — medicines for illnesses that affect fewer than one in 2,000 people. Not all will be cancer, but some will be. It has also replaced its IFR process with a new peer approval process, and the first decisions under that approach are expected this autumn. So, it is not doing the same as England, but you are asking me to do the same as England at this moment in time, and I am listening to that. I am saying that I would like to do the same as England. Scotland's processes will be considered under the evaluation of our IFR system along with systems in England and Wales in reaching our judgements.

One of the Members said that he wants equality with England. England charges £8 a head for prescriptions. I am not proposing that we do that. I want to do something considerably less. The Member said it. I will take an intervention from that Member who wanted equality with England. Does he want an £8-a-head prescription charge? It would be equality with England to do that. I want to do something considerably less to ensure that we have the funds.

The truth is that the PPRS, which has been mentioned by quite a few Members today, delivers around £3 million a year for us. We are in the PPRS. Let us not be in any doubt about that. We are in it, and that is what it benefits us each year.

Last year, for example, in terms of introducing new drugs, Queen's had a breakthrough on cystic fibrosis, and a drug was identified that impacted people who have the Celtic gene of cystic fibrosis. Such was the breakthrough and the quality of the drug that was produced that people who have cystic fibrosis and have the Celtic gene can now, if they receive that drug, expect to live a full life. They do not die at 20 or at 40; they live a natural life. They can expect to live to 70 or 80 years of age, the same as everybody else, and not die from cystic fibrosis. They may die from something else earlier, but

cystic fibrosis is not something that will take them earlier. For those 23 people, those drugs cost us £3.7 million. That is more than the PPRS delivers.

The Assembly can make itself into a talking shop — I think you are about to speak for 10 minutes, Mr McKinney — or it can be absolutely serious about the job in hand. I am absolutely serious when I come to the Assembly and say that I am £160 million short this year. I did not come and tell you that last year or the year before, because that was not the case. My permanent secretary has just taken up a new role in DETI today. I was with him last week. He is also the accounting officer.

I said to him, "I want you, as accounting officer, to tell me this: do you believe that the £160 million is for real, or can we make significant reductions in the requirement?". His response, as someone who is going to be an accounting officer in another Department, was that any savings that could be made would be on the margins. I have a new accounting officer/permanent secretary coming in, and one of his first jobs will be to try to drill through that £160 million and see whether we can make savings that will not have that negative impact.

5.00 pm

If Members want equality with England, do they want me to apply charges on domiciliary care? We spend £40 million providing domiciliary care, mainly to elderly people and vulnerable adults, that you have to pay for in England. Does the Member who wants equality with England want that? Does the Member who wants equality with England want to charge the over-60s for using public transport, because free transport is not available to them in England. Does the Member who wants equality with England want us to charge our students £9,000 a year for fees instead of £3,200? Does the Member who wants equality with England want to have water rates? Does he also want to increase our rates, which would mean that every member of the public pays twice as much for household rates? Those are the real decisions of government, and we have to take responsibility on occasions. Being in government and delivering governance involves taking difficult decisions on occasions. I am glad —

Mr McKinney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: I am not giving way, Mr McKinney, because you will be speaking for 10 minutes shortly.

I am glad that we are in a situation in which we have been able to do so much for our public. I am also glad that we have that £3 million coming in from the PPRS, because it will help us. However, the truth is that, if we have not got it in us to put our hand in our pocket and produce a few pence for a prescription to enable people who are dying from cancer to have that support for longer and have the potential to live that bit longer and have a greater chance, there is something inherently wrong. I honestly think that, morally, we cannot continue to do what we are doing, which is saying that we would rather spend money on welfare than on health and we would rather give everything out for free, ignore our responsibilities and just keep demanding that others contribute. On some occasions, we have to step back and say, "Do you know what? This will involve a small margin of pain". It will be a few pence, and a maximum of 50p a week for any individual in Northern Ireland. We will have to bear that pain to enable others to enjoy the benefits and the good.

The arguments to me are clear, simple and absolutely valid. Do you know what? I do not blame the previous Minister for taking away prescription charges. He made a decision, and it was absolutely fair at the time. We are in different circumstances today, and I want a ring-fenced amount of money —

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

Mr Poots: — for specialist drugs. That will include drugs for cancer but will also include drugs for other illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis, through which people's health has been greatly inhibited as a consequence. A specialist drugs fund that is ring-fenced.

Mr Wells: The Minister has stolen much of my thunder, because I was going to make exactly the same points as him. I assure honourable Members that there has been no collusion. I will sum up on behalf of those of us who tabled the amendment.

Mr McKinney started his comments in a surprisingly reasonable way. He paid tribute to the huge advances that have been made: the start of the breast screening campaign in 1993; the publication of the cancer services framework in 2011; and, five years earlier, the opening of the Northern Ireland Cancer Centre. He was absolutely right to pay tribute. Two weeks ago, we passed a very important milestone in the history of cancer treatment in the United Kingdom. For the first time ever,

there are more people who will be alive 10 years after a diagnosis of cancer than will have passed on. That is a remarkable achievement.

When I was young — a very long time ago — a child who was diagnosed with leukaemia had a death sentence. It was a dreadful thing to happen, and in school at the time I remember hearing about children who had leukaemia. Today, almost 90% of those children will live. That is a huge advance, and the Minister has already outlined the huge success that we have had in breast cancer, where the survival rate is over 80% in five years. Northern Ireland has played a leading role. We have punched way above our weight as a society in the research that has brought about those dramatic developments. Unfortunately, we are running very hard to stay still because, as a result of demographics, we will inevitably have more cancer because cancer is often linked to age. As we get older as a society, there will be more individuals with cancer, so we will have to continue to work hard. However, success has been achieved.

Apart from the Minister's contribution, I was disappointed by the debate because so many Members homed in on one issue. Indeed, some of us might suggest that the motion was deliberately tabled to continue the debate on the cancer drugs fund. The Minister has been able to explain the situation that he is in quite clearly. There is no new money. There is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The drug companies are not trying to force-feed the Minister with extra cash to buy these drugs. Whatever is saved on the PPRS is eaten up by other vital services in the health budget. There is no money —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes, I will.

Mr McKinney: I appreciate that the Minister did not take an intervention because he thought that I was making a winding-up speech whereas I had moved the motion. Will the Member accept that we are trying to address inequality and transparency, particularly of funding? You pointed out that the Minister is trying to fill another hole. The PPRS, however, is supposed to be about price regulation and innovative drugs, not filling the other hole. When the Minister talks about prescription charges — by the way, we do not see the costings for those — we think that that is about addressing his wider financial problems and not cancer drugs treatment and provision.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will be glad to know that he has an extra minute.

Mr Wells: I have been on the Health Committee for a lot longer than the Member. I have been on the Committee for five years today, and, if truth be known, it feels like 50 years. The Member fails to understand the huge conflicting demands that are also inherent in the Minister's budget at the moment. It is not a question of £3 million or £4 million sitting gathering dust with nowhere to go. There are hundreds of competing demands that the Minister has to answer.

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr McKinney: The agreement is that that money should be spent on innovative drugs. The House has also learned that, under the new deal, with a 10% share of the overall money, we could receive £27 million this year.

Mr Wells: That £27 million could be spent 10 times over, given the present financial situation. I do not think that Members have really grasped the situation. Have they not noticed that, for the first three years, the Minister has made it clear that he could live within his budget? It was going to require a lot of belt tightening —

Mr McKinney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: No, I think that I have been very fair.

It involved a lot of belt tightening and a lot of very hard work. He was not crying wolf, unlike the previous Minister, who said almost daily that he did not have enough money in much more benign financial circumstances than we are in today.

This time round, the Department means business. The Department has a monitoring round budget request of £161 million. Last year, the same June monitoring round yielded £80 million, so it does not take a genius to see that, on this occasion, it is unlikely that the Minister will get all that he needs to balance the books. We are in great difficulties, Members of the Assembly, and we have to be realistic and realise that the good times are over as far as large increases for health services are concerned. The demands continue to rise inexorably by between 5.9% and 6.1%, and resources are increasing at 1.9%. We must have the courage of our convictions. I have had a few health problems recently, and, unfortunately, I have visited the pharmacist

quite a lot. It makes me feel guilty to get a bagful of material and not have to pay for it. Why should I, on my salary, not pay for my prescriptions? It is madness.

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

Mr Wells: The Minister is asking only for a small contribution to try to balance the books, yet we are running away. Remember, equality works both ways, and the Minister has outlined —

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

Mr Wells: — some very difficult decisions if you want equality.

Mr Rogers: I support the motion and the amendment. On a personal level, I know only too well the devastating impact that a cancer diagnosis can have on an individual and on a family. However, access to screening and early detection mean that there are more cancer survivors and more positive stories like my own. The Chamber needs to send out a clear message to the public today that we need to encourage our people to come forward and get tested, because early diagnosis saves lives.

As elected Members, we must ensure that the medical profession can conduct and access the necessary research that many Members have spoken of today. That research is required to deliver the best possible outcomes. The present inequity of access to innovative cancer drugs in Northern Ireland is not only impacting on patients; it is inhibiting researchers' ability to attract trials. Despite the Minister's statistics in a recent statement, when he said that 1,200 patients were participating in clinical research, only about one sixth of them are involved in clinical trials.

We must always be mindful and thankful for the expert care and medical treatment that many people have spoken about today and which I and my family members received in our hospitals and specialist centres across the North. The dedicated and well-trained staff in our hospitals play a major role in the successful outcome of the treatment of our citizens.

It is time to tackle the cancer drugs inequality in Northern Ireland. Patients here must be able to avail themselves of the necessary medical help. My SDLP colleague has repeatedly raised the issue in Committee, and we in the SDLP are appalled that, in Northern Ireland, citizens are denied access to treatments that could make a

positive impact on their health outcomes. Why should that be? Surely we in the House are tasked with safeguarding the health and well-being of our constituents; therefore, we are obligated to ensure that all available resources are used to promote good health in our population. Access to cancer drugs has been raised with the Health Minister on many occasions, and we have called on the Minister to address the inequalities concerning cancer drug treatment here.

The principal question is this: why should 38 cancer drugs be available in England but not in Northern Ireland? Many Members mentioned that. As we heard from Mr McKinney, the situation is even more troubling when you learn that some of those drugs are being developed and trialled here but are ultimately not available here, even to some of those who helped in the trials. We call on the Minister to say clearly that he will address the fundamental cancer drugs inequality. The lack of action on the provision and accessibility of cancer drugs is similar to the inaction that we have witnessed on the need to adequately review the wider health service. We must recognise the substantial work that has been done on cancer research and treatment.

I now come to Members' comments. Mr Dunne talked about the importance of high-quality research and the fact that there must be more focused and targeted treatment and said that we really needed to do more. He outlined the good work carried out by cancer charities, particularly the lobbying by Cancer Focus. The Chair of the Committee, Ms McLaughlin, made the interesting comment that cancer does not recognise age, gender or borders and that a third of us will develop cancer. She also talked about the positive developments in the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin. Mr Beggs highlighted the fact that the 38 drugs that we are talking about are part of the PPRS and do not need more money. He praised the work of the cancer centre, Paddy Johnston and many others. Mr McCallister said that we needed to drive on preventative health and that we needed a joined-up approach. He also commended the work of the National Health Service.

Like many of us, Mr Agnew has lost good friends through cancer. We need better access to these drugs, and there needs to be a reasonable and sensible debate for us to get to the desired place. Mr McCarthy said that we needed to give the Minister all the support that he needs to ensure that this unnecessary suffering is reduced. Mrs Cameron made a very positive contribution and said that she had

visited the cancer centre. I have visited it too, but I did not visit it until I had to visit it on 35 occasions. However, it was a positive outcome for me. She talked about the holistic approach, as did other Members — the preventative side, education, early intervention, reducing or giving up smoking, reducing the intake of alcohol, a balanced diet, etc. As a House, we need to leave the political posturing aside.

5.15 pm

Mr Brady, too, has personal experience of losing a loved one through cancer. He talked about the financial impact on the family and of living with cancer in the home. Mr McIlveen acknowledged those who help by taking part in clinical trials, and he supported equality for patients in Northern Ireland. We need to have the same opportunities as those in the rest of the UK. It is not just about caring; it is also about the preventative side. Mr Wells, who will make a very good Health Minister, brought home to me how cancer treatment has changed. My experience is that, 20 years ago, my daughter had leukaemia, and I remember the quality of the care that she got. She has lived to tell the tale. Most Members talked about how research has come on over those years.

Minister, we need to keep working. There are positive stories: the Minister mentioned that cancer survival rates have doubled over the last 40 years, and Mr Wells talked about more people living through than dying from cancer. That is testament to the good work being carried out by committed doctors and nurses across the North.

As legislators and public figures, we must ensure that our communities receive positive public health messages. However, the message that came across from everybody was that more must be done to address the more than 4,000 deaths here every year as a direct result of cancer. The key to dealing with this is investment in early diagnosis and screening. Early diagnosis can make that big difference, and I urge anyone who notices any unusual or persistent changes in their body to attend their GP to get them checked.

The cost of healthcare must not fall on the most vulnerable. It is important that, while facing up to the challenge of caring for our ageing population, we do not place the cost burden on the most vulnerable. Areas of health and social care policy will present us with real and deep financial challenges in the future, not least the cost of social care. Given that we have an integrated health and social care system in

Northern Ireland, we cannot and should not have to ask people of limited means to contribute to social care for elderly people, particularly those for whom doing so is well beyond their means.

The Minister talked a lot about equality. Minister, equality is the equality of treatment. I will finish by saying that, 10 years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer. I was given treatment and the right drugs. Are you really saying no to people like me today, to the hundreds of people out there who need these drugs? As an Assembly, we must unite behind our Minister and ensure that the 38 drugs are made available here.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the prevalence of cancer in Northern Ireland and the efforts made by front line staff and professionals to counteract the disease; notes the advances in cancer treatment being made here and the achievements of the cancer centre in South Belfast, which, in collaboration with the pharmaceutical sector, has made significant and unique strides in biomedical diagnostic research; applauds the global and local economic and health benefits of such research; acknowledges that the predicted increased rates of cancer dictate that more needs to be done in terms of furthering research and treatment; supports efforts to broaden access for local patients to innovative treatments and clinical trials; encourages the establishment of a university-linked biomedical research centre; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to support this work to develop Northern Ireland as a world-class centre for cancer research and treatment.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The House will take its ease for a moment while we change the top Table.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Transitional Family Support Services: West Belfast

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

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé an-bhuíoch as an seans an cheist seo a ardú sa Tionól inniu. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue in the Assembly.

Integrated Services has been an extremely positive programme for west Belfast and has provided much-needed support at many levels for a number of years. It has been a model of good practice in the partnership work that it does with local community groups, schools and statutory agencies to provide the best service available for families that are in the greatest need.

It has often been the case that families with complex needs have been sitting on the edge but have managed to stay on track because of their ability to avail themselves of services provided by early intervention. In such cases, it can be detrimental if that support is suddenly withdrawn, and, ultimately, that causes them to go into the statutory services environment, where the route back can often be difficult and not always straightforward.

It is readily accepted that where a family can be prevented from entering the social services arena, action should be taken to ensure that that happens. Integrated Services carried out very positive and meaningful work, which filled that gap. As a result, families have been assisted in turning their lives around and moving onto a more positive, independent path.

Quotes from users of the services are the best indicators of what Integrated Services has done best. As one young mother put it:

"Without the family support I received, my mental health would have got worse rapidly.

I want to thank Integrated Services for helping me to be the mum I used to be."

Similarly, a father of two young children who had challenging behaviour and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) struggled to deal with those issues whilst trying to cope with an eating disorder and dealing with trauma. He stated clearly:

"Integrated Services was able to provide a full service for me and my son, dealing with everything we had going on. I wouldn't have known where else to go. We were at our wits end."

What exactly happened at the end of March this year? Funding for Integrated Services came to an end, and the tender was awarded to Extern to provide services at tiers 3 and 4. That meant that there was a gap in tier 2 early intervention services.

Under Integrated Services, 265 families were supported between April 2013 and March 2014. That number reduced by 128 over that period due to cases being closed for various reasons. In some of those cases, families were ready to move on due to the progress that had been made. The remaining families were reviewed and were found to be in need of different types of support, including statutory involvement. However, several families have been left unsupported as they only qualified for tier 2 services, which are no longer available.

Given that west Belfast is an area of high deprivation that has some very complicated social needs, it is reasonable to expect that families will continue to emerge that require the type of support services that were provided by Integrated Services. We need to ensure that the services required to provide those families with the appropriate interventions, capable of supporting them out of their difficult circumstances, are made available. We also need to find a way to ensure that the families who have most recently had their integrated services terminated will be supported in all of their needs.

Not only did Integrated Services provide support at the most appropriate level, it averted families from the likelihood of becoming known to the statutory agencies at a later date, as problems and issues tend to escalate due to a lack of support services.

There are processes in place to implement the early intervention transformation programme (EITP), but I am concerned about what exactly that will mean for west Belfast. I seek

assurance that the EITP will be appropriately resourced and hope that any transitional family support services will also be supported.

Ultimately, it would be wrong to stop the vital service provision, and I urge that appropriate resources are put in place to ensure that the vulnerable families that are in the greatest need are not let down due to a failure to continue to provide them with the services that are appropriate to their needs.

Mr Attwood: I thank Ms McCorley for bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly.

I concur with her that the best voices to rely upon when it comes to dealing intensively with individual, family and community difficulties — multiple difficulties — are those of the people who, under Integrated Services, were being supported. It is curious what they say, because any of us who have met the individuals and families who have been supported through Integrated Services, have been impressed by their conviction that the model has worked for them and needs to be sustained to continue to work for them. Ms McCorley relied on what they said. One woman said:

"Some mothers are frightened by social workers; they take power away from parents. The staff and family support had a more rounded approach and empowered us."

Another said:

"Integrated Services and the staff were so valuable to my family. They gave me and my family a glimmer of hope. Why is the rug being pulled from underneath the project?"

Similarly, one person said:

"We have not felt this good in years. Our new family members, as we call Integrated Services, have been a rock and life saviours to our family."

As I said, anybody who heard those families speak up here earlier this year or who has met any of them over the lifetime of Integrated Services would corroborate what they say. Therefore, this question arises: if it is a model of good practice that you work intensively with individuals and families who have multiple areas of need and requirement, why would you put that in jeopardy?

Since 2008, the life of Integrated Services has been a turbulent one. I remember, in March

2011, when I was the Social Development Minister, putting £500,000 on the table in order to try to sustain Integrated Services beyond 2011 and up to 2015. Difficult thought it was, other Ministers eventually came to the table and, over a period of time, even if it were in an ad hoc manner, funding was secured to sustain it.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: I will, yes.

Mr Poots: Does the Member recognise that it was the Department of Health that came to the table whilst the Department of Education, under a Sinn Féin Minister, ran away from the people of the Falls Road, the Shankill and the most deprived areas and took the money away from Integrated Services in the first instance?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Attwood: I certainly recall that when people were sitting on the fence — to put it at its least — some of us got off the fence in order to ensure, in the spring of 2011, that Integrated Services was sustained and to try to work up the full funding package. There is more than a grain of truth in what the Health Minister has just said about the conduct of other Ministers at the Executive table.

This question now arises: why was the rug pulled from under people's feet earlier this year? In March 2014, funding for this scheme came to an end. As Ms McCorley rightly indicated, as a consequence, those with lesser needs, even though they are significant needs, are left with nowhere to turn, and those with greater needs, which are very significant indeed, have to rely on the new project, around which there is still some need for certainty and definition.

So, I have some questions for the Health Minister, who is responding to this debate and who I welcome to the debate. First, why was it that a programme that had such an impact on the lives of many people across west Belfast, the Shankill and the Falls, and had such advocates at a community and political level, not continued?

Secondly, why was the tender for the new scheme only for specialist services and not also for general services in order to ensure that those who have "so-called" lesser needs are

not left in the lurch? Thirdly, what is now going to be done in order to ensure that those who are outwith the capture of the new tender being awarded to Extern will get the support required?

Fourthly, where are we precisely in respect of the Extern scheme?

It was meant to commence on 1 April, and we are now three months later to the day after it was meant to be up and operational. Where is it, what is its practice and what is its impact?

5.30 pm

Question six: why were good community representatives and activists on the Shankill left to dip into their reserves in order to maintain Integrated Services since March of this year, whilst a new project gets up and running, given its limitations? Why were they required to dip into reserves which are now running out, as I speak, and which would see the end of the support programme that they put in place beyond the end of Integrated Services — would see that secondary scheme itself run out of space, time and money? If a project has such a good impact — in the way that Ms McCorley and I have tried to articulate through the voices of women who have spoken to us and who have reduced to writing what they believe — why would you ever want to put that in jeopardy? Why was there not certainty, throughout the period of Integrated Services, to see that scheme continue beyond 1 April?

Ms J McCann: I, too, thank my colleague Rosie McCorley for bringing this debate to the Floor. It is a very important debate, and I hope that people will not use it for point scoring. That said, most of us — whatever work we are involved in in the Assembly and Executive — are interested in trying to make life better for people, particularly children, young people and families out there.

As has already been said, not just today but in other debates in the Chamber, of all the constituencies right across the North, West Belfast has the highest proportion of people in poverty and child poverty. It has poor health outcomes; indeed, it has the lowest life expectancy for both women and men, and the highest number of post-primary pupils on the special educational needs register. Those are just some of the statistics: I do not want to stand here quoting statistics, because there are Members present from all parties who know too well the difficulties that people, and families in particular, face in that constituency.

Unfortunately, we see that a lot of our children do not have the same equal start in life as some other children. That is no fault of their own; it is because of the family circumstances that they are born into, or the social and economic situation of the family. There is a duty and responsibility on us, as a Government, to ensure that any support mechanisms or help that those families need are given to them.

In terms of Integrated Services, I was involved the last time, as Mr Attwood pointed out, when the first funding became unavailable. I, Paul Maskey MP and my other colleagues here — MLAs, some of whom are here today — went to a range of Ministers and Departments to ensure that everybody was aware of the difficulties and also put money there from their Departments to carry it forward.

My colleague Rosie McCorley pointed out that, unfortunately, in the situation that we are in today, a number of families that were involved in the Integrated Services programme have not been picked up by the new programme. We have to be concerned about those families. It is very important that we provide services for families with complex needs, particularly for children and young people who have those social needs. We also need to ensure that we intervene early with those families to give them the support and services that they need, to ensure that they do not become a family that actually has more complex needs. That is important. I just want to concentrate on —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, and I appreciate all that she has said. I pay tribute to the staff of the Integrated Services programme in west Belfast and greater Shankill. Along with Members across the Chamber, I have had the experience of dealing with those staff, when they were dealing with our constituents and troubled families in the most difficult circumstances.

I welcome what the Member said and her clarification about her party's support, but that has not always been the case. It has to be said that, previously, when there was a gathering of people from west Belfast and Shankill outside this Building in March 2011, this Minister came down to speak to the people, but the Education Minister could not be found and would not come out and speak to the people. I appreciate that Sinn Féin is now in a different place on this, and that is to be welcomed. We will see what potential funding will come from the Department of Health now.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms J McCann: I want to say again that I hope people do not use this debate for political reasons and point scoring. We are talking about vulnerable families, about need and about trying to help people. The new early intervention transformation programme will be rolled out, and we need to ensure that the commissioning of those services and engagement with community organisations that already have skills and expertise in delivering those services continues, because, at the end of the day, we do not want to throw the baby out with bath water. We want to be able to ensure that models of best practice are continued. I worked as family support worker across west Belfast before I came into the Assembly, and there is good working engagement between people and organisations in west Belfast and greater Shankill, and I would like to see that continuing.

As I said, a number of families are out of the loop now because integrated services have stopped. I and some of my party colleagues have had a number of meetings with people from the Health Department and other Departments. I see it as a joined-up project, not primarily just an issue around health. I think that it includes Education, Health, Justice and the Department for Social Development. This is part of the Executive's Delivering Social Change framework, and we need to be working in that integrated way and in that capacity. I want any proposals that are brought forward not simply to be driven by the family support hubs, because, again, this work is ongoing. We talk about this all the time in the Assembly, and it is unseen work that goes on in communities every day. Those community organisations and groups deliver those services and the valuable way that they do that is sometimes not recognised. It is about the services for the families. I want to reiterate that. That is what we are talking about here. We are talking about vulnerable families who need the continuation of those services. I hope that the Minister takes that on board. Other programmes are getting rolled out. It will be targeted at specific families, and I think that is a good thing, but we should not lose sight of the fact that other families are maybe not just at the level of need that some families with more complex needs are, and we should not overlook them.

I thank my colleague for bringing this important debate forward, and I hope that we can all work together — all the Ministers and all the Departments in the Executive — to ensure the continuation of this project.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for tabling this debate and the Members who have contributed. In my role as Health Minister, I have been actively engaged in seeking to address the issues outlined by the Members in the west Belfast and greater Shankill areas following the cessation of funding for integrated services for children and young people. Whilst Ministers McCausland, O'Dowd, Farry, Ford and I have worked together to fund a new £5 million intensive family support service across Belfast, which will benefit some of the families previously supported by Integrated Services, I am aware that both partnerships between them have identified 99 families with lower-level needs who will not benefit from that new service and who may not have been able to transfer to other local family support services available in the area. It is my understanding that those families do not meet the threshold for statutory social work involvement.

Before addressing the transitional needs of those families, I would first like to say a few words about the new intensive family support service being funded by me and my fellow Ministers. The service seeks to intervene with families with very complex needs across Belfast. Those families often experience very poor outcomes across generations, including long-term unemployment, addiction, poor health, poor school attendance or exclusion, involvement with the justice system and homelessness. The new service, modelled on the Troubled Families initiative in England, seeks to break the cycle of poor outcomes for the most socially complex families in Belfast. The families that will benefit from the service are engaged with a range of statutory services, including youth justice, social services and educational welfare. As well as providing additional support to those families, the new service will seek to improve the level of coordination between the various statutory agencies that are often involved with the families on a single-issue basis. The new service is being delivered by Extern, following an open procurement process. That is something that I cannot involve myself in. Procurement has to be fully above board, and that is how it was done.

I recognise the importance of the 99 families with lower-level needs who are not eligible for the new intensive service, and who have not been able to be transferred to other local services, receiving the support that they need to effectively transition from the integrated services for children and young people project. That said, the support offered should be transitional in nature. It needs to be time-limited and focused either on helping those

families engage with other tier 2 services in the area or on successfully addressing the issues that they face in the period of transition. The establishment of family support hubs in Belfast, which I will say more about, should help with that process.

Having recognised that a need exists, as verified by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, I have been working with Minister McCausland, given his neighbourhood renewal responsibilities, to agree a transitional funding package. Some transitional funding has already been provided by the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency to facilitate the transfer of those families who meet the criteria for entry to the new intensive family support service.

From a longer-term perspective, I am aware that, in addition to the large number of existing services already in place for those types of families, a number of new services are being planned that will enhance the level of family support provision across Northern Ireland, including a number of initiatives being developed under the social investment fund and Delivering Social Change programmes that will benefit children, young people and families. For example, under Delivering Social Change, and with the support of private philanthropy, we have established an early intervention programme, underpinned by a £30 million fund. Between five Departments, we have contributed £10 million to the fund over three years. One of the principal aims of the transformation programme is to embed early intervention approaches across all mainstream children's services.

There is a proposal to develop a new early intervention service across Northern Ireland. The proposed service will aim to provide a consistent level of support to families with problems at an early stage, before those problems become embedded. If we are successful, that will prevent the need for future statutory involvement in the lives of many children and families across Northern Ireland. The design and development of the proposed service is currently being undertaken in partnership with the five outcomes groups and locality planning groups, which are part of the children and young people's strategic partnership arrangements, to ensure robust engagement with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. The proposed development of the early intervention service, along with other proposed developments by way of initiatives such as the social investment fund, will seek to complement and integrate with

existing family support services in areas such as west Belfast and the Shankill.

As I have referred to briefly already, my Department is developing a network of family support hubs across Northern Ireland. There will be 25 hubs in total, seven of which will be created in the Belfast area, across all parts of Belfast. The family support hub for Upper Springfield and Whiterock is already up and running, and other hubs will be coming on stream over the next weeks and months. It should be noted that the hubs do not deliver services directly but will play a vital role in coordinating the activities of local providers that will jointly identify appropriate tier 2 services for specific families.

As for integrated services, I pose a question to Mr Attwood. I welcome the fact that, when he was Social Development Minister, he put his money where his mouth was when other Ministers, in the Department of Health and the Department of Education, were not supportive. Subsequent to me becoming the Minister of Health, I have put my money, or my Department's money, where my mouth is. I recognise the vulnerability of the families involved. I recognise the need for children in those areas to receive additional support to give them an opportunity in life that they would not otherwise be able to avail themselves of.

In doing that, I gave ministerial direction to make this happen whilst Minister O'Dowd and the Department of Education walked away. That is not playing politics; that is telling the facts. When it came to west Belfast and the Shankill, the Sinn Féin Minister walked away, and he has to answer for himself why that was the case.

5.45 pm

Work has been ongoing in the last two months to deal with the issue. The MP for North Belfast has been in with me on three or four occasions to discuss the issues, pressing for the people in the Shankill and west Belfast whilst I have not yet had a request for a meeting from the MP for West Belfast. I am pleased that I have been able to clear a paper that was received this week, which will allow up to £270,000 to go to Integrated Services to ensure that it can continue until the hubs are fully established.

To summarise, I am pleased to be able to announce the additional support for the West Belfast Partnership Board and the Greater Shankill Partnership Board in meeting the transitional needs of the families identified. I

also outlined a range of new developments, some of which are aimed at supporting families with complex needs while others are targeted at families who require earlier interventions. These new developments are intended to complement and improve coordination between existing services across Northern Ireland, including west Belfast. Our aim is to ensure that families who need a range of supports are able to access them locally and earlier.

It is time that people stepped up to the mark as opposed to complaining a lot about equality, poverty and everything that is happening. When it was within their gift as Ministers to deliver for people in circumstances such as this, they were nowhere to be seen, whereas people such as us carry out actions to ensure that we can help people in the worst possible circumstances.

Adjourned at 5.47 pm.



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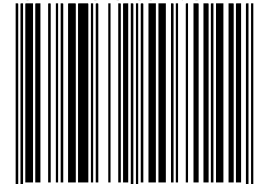
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