



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Office of the First Minister
and deputy First Minister

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Racial Equality Strategy: OFMDFM Briefing

12 March 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Alex Attwood
Mr Leslie Cree
Ms Megan Fearon
Mr Alex Maskey
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr George Robinson
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr Ken Fraser	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Ricky Irwin	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Deputy Chairperson: I welcome Ricky Irwin and Ken Fraser. You are very welcome, gentlemen. Are you happy to make some opening comments before we take questions?

Mr Ricky Irwin (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Yes, thank you. We are very glad to be here again. We welcome the opportunity to present the draft consultation document to the Committee today. Our last racial equality strategy for Northern Ireland was published under direct rule in July 2005 to cover the period 2005-2010. That strategy was the product of extensive consultation with people from a minority ethnic background and wider civil society during 2003 and 2004. Following devolution, the strategy was endorsed by the Assembly in a debate on 3 July 2007. Since the time of that publication, the needs of our minority ethnic population have changed. While the numbers and rate of arrival here may have slowed down, and despite the economic downturn, Northern Ireland remains a popular beacon and has become ever more multicultural.

A revised strategy, which takes account of those and other changes, is appropriate and urgent. Accordingly, we have been working in close association with representatives of the sector to produce a meaningful strategy that is focused on the deliverable, the achievable and the aspirational. The consultation paper was prepared in close consultation with the racial equality panel, which is a group chaired by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister and made up of representatives from Departments, relevant statutory agencies and minority ethnic representative organisations. The panel met on a number of occasions last year, most recently, just before Christmas, and was presented with a draft consultation document based on its input. It was invited to submit formal

opinion and revisions by the end of January, and officials have been redrafting it to reflect the amendments.

The strategy is key to identifying the actual and real needs of our ethnic minority population. Census figures show that the population has continued to grow, though the numbers arriving here are slowing down. There is clear evidence that those who are here are determined to remain here and to try to make a better life for themselves and their families. At the heart of the strategy remain the six shared aims that we have refined and refocused to reflect real need for the people whom we seek to empower. We intend that those aims shall provide a framework for action by individual Departments and agencies.

The strategy also sets out how Departments will work in partnership with others in pursuit of the strategic aims. We believe that the proposals in the document, which aim to promote racial equality and tackle racism, will help to raise awareness of the issues and responsibilities in this area. They will foster good relations and thus promote greater social cohesion and equality of opportunity for everyone here.

The strategy will be an important part of the Delivering Social Change framework, within which OFMDFM Ministers will work together to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The framework seeks to coordinate key actions between Departments in order to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages; improve children and young people's health, well-being and life opportunities; and break the long-term cycle of multigenerational problems. Delivering Social Change complements and adds extra focus to the much larger social and economic policies and programmes that operate against poverty.

As with the previous strategy, this strategy, first and foremost, is for the Executive, and they will lead on implementation. The 12-week consultation will allow everyone with interest in the sector the chance to contribute evidence, experience and ideas to help shape a meaningful and useful strategy. We shall facilitate sessions in the major languages of our minority ethnic people and host events in the areas of highest minority population. By the end of the summer, we shall be ready to publish a document that people can believe in, one that can set the agenda for the next decade and match the changing landscape of our changing society.

Ken and I are happy to answer any questions that members have on this draft consultation document.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thanks very much indeed, Ricky. It is obviously a welcome development, given the passage of time since the end of the last strategy in 2010. I have a number of questions, and I am keen that members have an opportunity to ask questions as well.

What research was undertaken to determine the current levels of racial inequality, discrimination or harassment in Northern Ireland? Will you also give us an idea of what those current issues are?

Mr R Irwin: I believe that the document sets out some of the statistics collated by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Ken, are you aware of anything more specific on that?

Mr Ken Fraser (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): We worked with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the poverty and ethnicity study that it did. We have a number of different studies. We also hope to use the consultation period to gather in whatever information we can. As I drafted the consultation document, I listed what I thought were the major issues confronting minority ethnic groups; surprisingly, my list was exactly the same as that compiled in 2003-04. Some things change and some do not. The key issues remain things such as language and occupational segregation.

We will be happy to gather in whatever information we can in respect of research on inequalities, and we will happily publicise it in the eventually published strategy so that other people can be aware of it.

The Deputy Chairperson: OK. Will you give us a few practical examples of what you mean by "occupational segregation", language and a few of the other issues that are faced?

Mr Fraser: The difficulties are that Chinese people tend to find themselves in the food industry, for instance. People find it very difficult to break out of what, traditionally, they have always done. We hope that we can afford people the opportunity to go where their talents may take them rather than where their ethnicity decrees that they should be. That is one of our cases.

There are real issues around language. For instance, I think of the Romanian Roma in south Belfast, where there is a very low level of literacy. We need to do things urgently to address that if we are to get people into the labour market. So that is another thing that we want to do.

We mostly ask questions in the consultation document, but the one thing that we have set out absolutely clearly is that we want to have ethnic monitoring by all service provision Departments. It is the old story: trying to achieve racial equality without ethnic monitoring is like trying to do accounts without bookkeeping. You just do not know what is going on. You do not see who you are supplying services to. You do not know what difficulties they are experiencing etc. So we think that ethnic monitoring is a first step to making sure that our services accommodate the new multicultural Northern Ireland.

The Deputy Chairperson: Are we to conclude that there was inadequate and insufficient monitoring during previous periods of strategies?

Mr Fraser: There was no monitoring.

Mr R Irwin: There has been some monitoring in the health sector.

Mr Fraser: Yes, there was no practical, single way of carrying out the monitoring. DHSSPS, to its credit, is introducing monitoring along the lines of the best practice guidance that OFMDFM prepared for Departments. We look to other Departments to do more of that and to update their systems to make sure that they are fit for purpose for the new demographics that we have here.

The Deputy Chairperson: Ken, to be honest, I am a bit startled that, in response to the question, "Can you set out some of the key issues that are being faced?", you say that Chinese people find themselves in the food industry, but I will ask you a few other questions to see whether we can draw into that a bit further. Can you give us an idea of some of the member organisations of the racial equality panel and the type of feedback that it gave you, further to you sharing a draft document with it?

Mr R Irwin: To go back to your previous comment, the six shared aims within the strategy set out what it is trying to tackle with regard to examples of race hate crime, discrimination, and so on. The racial equality panel is chaired by OFMDFM. A number of Departments are represented on it, including stakeholders from the minority ethnic sector. Ken can elaborate on some of the specific Departments and others.

Mr Fraser: We have a number of the service provision Departments, such as DHSSPS, DEL and the Department of Education. We also have the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. From this sector we have the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), Bryson Intercultural, Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum and representatives from Traveller groups, so there is a broad spread. I would not say that we have covered everyone, and we will be looking at the membership after we have accomplished the consultation. However, it gives a fairly good sounding board. I hope that the racial equality panel looks on the consultation document as a joint enterprise rather than something that we have given to it and which it can fiddle with in the margins. We have taken on board all the comments that we can.

The Deputy Chairperson: What sort of feedback did you receive from the panel, further to sharing a draft document with it?

Mr Fraser: We got little bits of precision. For instance, it stated that we should mention the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as one of the standards, along with the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. We have done a bit of smoothing round the wording of the six shared aims. Some people argued that they wanted human trafficking to be included, and some groups argued that they did not. Eventually, it came down to the decision that human trafficking was best dealt with elsewhere and that human trafficking was not an exclusively minority ethnic issue.

We got a number of suggestions about how the strategy should interface with Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) and Delivering Social Change. People have sought a certain number of guarantees about how the funding for the minority ethnic development fund will go in the future.

There was certainly a fair amount of stuff from the panel, but I would not like to characterise it as being a process where we offer it something and then we say, "We'll have that, but we won't have that". We try to work together to make sure that the minority ethnic representatives on the panel and more widely feel a sense of ownership of this.

Mr R Irwin: This has been a very consultative process with the panel. Correct me if I am wrong, Ken, but it has been broadly content with the document as it is, as a draft that we are bringing forward to the Committee. Obviously, we will want to have a further consultation meeting with the panel after this, to reflect any further comments they may have, before we go out to full public consultation.

The Deputy Chairperson: Have you a timescale in mind for when that consultation will commence?

Mr Fraser: I would like to say 1 April, but you make definite statements and then you get into trouble for that. Mid-April is the time I would envisage.

The Deputy Chairperson: The strategy sets out the creation of a programme of work as well. Have you a timescale in mind for that?

Mr Fraser: To be candid, with the previous strategy we had one action plan brought forward. The action plan comprised 260 actions. One would be sceptical as to exactly how much better each of those actions made lives for minority ethnic people. I do not want to see us chasing a large number of actions. I would far prefer to see us focus on the issues that will make the biggest difference to minority ethnic people. This may just be two or three actions per service delivery Department.

I envisage we would do that initially working through the racial equality panel to decide what needs to happen, how we go about doing it and securing the agreement of different Departments.

Mr R Irwin: It would be wrong, at this stage, to tie down a date when the programme of work should be specified. The document, on page 37, leaves that open because, as Ken explained, we need to have further consultation with the Departments involved, which are the lead Departments across delivery of services and so on. However, we will want to use existing structures through T:BUC and primarily the Delivering Social Change structures, where we have senior officials from across those Departments around the table on issues of social change, so we will want to complement the work that is going on there and drive forward delivery of the strategy.

Mr Moutray: Thank you for coming. Do we have any reliable figures as to the estimate of minorities in Northern Ireland? I would have thought that it is pretty key for a strategy to know how many people are impacted. I ask because a couple of weeks ago we had a briefing from NICEM and were presented with figures in relation to the Roma. We were told there were approximately 500. A couple of days later in an interview on Radio Ulster, a member of the Roma community, a spokesperson, indicated that there were 1,200 to 1,300.

Mr Fraser: People have reasons to exaggerate how many people are here. With the Roma community, however, it is difficult to estimate how many are here. In days gone by, people settled for a certain period. We understand that Roma migration here is seasonal, so people turn up towards the end of summer, stay for the winter and go back to Romania for the summer. There are also issues about whether they are Roma from Romania or Roma from elsewhere in eastern Europe. These numbers are not gathered. There is no one to gather these numbers.

Mr Moutray: So we have no idea.

Mr Fraser: We have an idea, yes. We certainly have an idea. The census will give us the net figures for 2011. People can arrive here, and they do not have to declare themselves to anyone, so we do not necessarily know.

Mr R Irwin: That is what I was going to say. The official statistics from NISRA from the census in 2011 provide a baseline for those figures. I do not have those figures with me today.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. I do not know whether you are aware of this, but Dungannon has the fastest growing population in the North, and that is linked to the foreign national population. We have a large meat industry, and, with recent investments in that area, we foresee an

increase in the foreign national population. I ask you to be cognisant of that. It would probably be worth doing a consultation in that area.

Have welfare reform cuts been given consideration?

Mr R Irwin: Firstly, I absolutely take your point about the Dungannon area. We can consider the need to have a specific consultation in that area.

The document does not go into the welfare reform issue specifically. It talks in more general terms about the change in the economic environment and the impact that that is having on the minority ethnic community here.

Mr Fraser: Certainly, when we see exactly where welfare reform is headed, we will be in a position to work out the implications that it will have for minority ethnic people. I have not done that so far.

Mr R Irwin: That work might come out of the consultation process.

Mr Fraser: We will be happy to take it on board.

Mr Maskey: There are statutory rules going through on habitual residence, which will impact on people from that community. Has the Department had a look at that?

Mr Fraser: We have a bit of a difficulty here in that there are lots of aspects of immigration policy that we need to be cognisant of, immigration policy still being the province of the Home Office. Certainly, Ministers have shown an interest in seeing a regionalisation of immigration policy and a policy that better suits the needs and concerns of this place.

Mr Spratt: You made a comment, which the Deputy Chair picked up on, in relation to the Chinese community, Ken. It is a bit disparaging to say, "They are in the catering trade". I do a lot of work with many people from the Chinese community, as I am sure Alex does. We have a very well-established Chinese community, many members of which have businesses that have been in existence for nearly 30 years. Many of those businesses employ local people. That community is well established among the local population, particularly in the south Belfast area.

Members of that community would resent that remark from you because they see themselves as part and parcel of the community in Northern Ireland. Some of them are families that are in their third generation, and some of them are making a very substantial impact on the economy of Northern Ireland through what they do and do well.

It is wrong for an official to come along here and say what you said in the way that you said it. Maybe you did not mean it that way, but that community would be deeply offended by your comments earlier today, and I want to put that on the record.

Mr R Irwin: Before you answer, through the minority ethnic development fund, the Department has been working for some years with the Chinese Welfare Association on issues of integration in south Belfast directly. So, I am aware that there has a lot of work done through Ken and his branch with that community.

Mr Spratt: I am talking about integration with the local community in schools and everything else. The children are in schools and are going to university. The community is very well integrated. It is a community that is very supportive of all the institutions that it belongs to. I just do not like what you said. Maybe you did not mean it like that, but I will leave you to explain that.

Mr Fraser: With respect, Deputy Chairman, I am not sure what I said that caused the offence. I am told by people who represent the Chinese community that there is a problem with occupational segregation. It would be arrogant of me to say, "No, this is not true". That said, I agree with Mr Spratt in everything that he said; the Chinese make a very significant contribution to this place and play an important role in this place. I wish to play my part in contributing to them playing an even greater role in affairs here. Through the minority ethnic development fund, we currently pay for Eileen Chan-hu's post and another couple of posts. Previously, we paid for the post of someone called Anna Lo, so we know fairly well the contribution that the Chinese community is making.

The Deputy Chairperson: That clarification was helpful, Ken. Obviously, more than one member expressed concern about the way in which you framed a comment earlier, and you have had an opportunity to clarify that. The concern is that we are asking questions about the broadly ranging issue of racial equality, and it was quite a focused comment that you meant, but you have clarified it. Jimmy made good reference to the wide-ranging contribution made by people of Chinese ethnicity in Northern Ireland. Hopefully, that is a positive clarification, and we can move on from that to — as you say — hear how the strategy will enhance and improve that even further.

Mr Cree: I think that it is important, Jim, that we view these things in their proper perspective. I take the point made by two members that we are looking at ethnic groups located in specific areas. That is not necessarily the case. Again, in a broader sense, Pakistani and Bangladeshi people have been integrated here for a long time and would not be part of those little focus groups, such as the Chinese Welfare Association or whatever else. They see themselves as part of the community. You talk about capacity building in your paper, and I am particularly interested in that. How do you see that working out, and how are you going to identify those people when they do not live in a little block somewhere in south Belfast, Cullybackey or anywhere else but are spread throughout the whole community?

Mr R Irwin: The work of the minority ethnic development fund will continue, and it has a couple of streams to it — tier 1 and tier 2 development — which are designed to be tailored to address the needs of the specific communities. Ken can talk at wee bit more about that. We want to work closely with the relevant service Departments, such as DSD and Health, in how they deliver their services. As part of the consultation, the programme of work that we refer to, which will be developed over the next few weeks and months, will, hopefully, address the issues that you have rightly raised around how people will be targeted and how best to meet their needs and so on.

Mr Fraser: If people are happily living as part of the community, if they do not define themselves ethnically and if they do not require any capacity building or community development, then that is fine. I have no problem with that, and I see no reason to track down those people and thrust money into their unwilling hands. However, we have communities such as the large number of recently arrived Somalian refugees. We are working with a group there with a view to providing a certain amount of funding so that the community can be self-supporting and make its own way in Northern Ireland. We hope to employ someone who can assist people in finding their way, orientating themselves, helping them with any problems that they may have and with language etc so that they can realise their rights and responsibilities.

Mr Cree: Again, that is all predicated on new entrants: people who have just come to live here from other parts of the UK or wherever.

Mr Fraser: Yes.

Mr Cree: What about the main group? Although they are scattered throughout the community, I believe, they need and would benefit from capacity building. How will you contact them, and what form of capacity building are you thinking about?

Mr Fraser: I am not sure that I fully understand. People can approach us: our fund is as wide open as we can make it. We advertise it in the regional and local daily newspapers. We put out word of the funding opportunities as far as we possibly can. I am not sure what else you expect me to do in the circumstances.

Mr Cree: With respect, you are focusing on groups who live closely together and have an umbrella organisation. I suggest that there are others for whom that is not the case.

Mr Fraser: They do not necessarily live closely together. Groups can be fairly widespread.

Mr Cree: Yes, but they are interconnected, obviously. If they were not, how would you know where they were?

Mr Fraser: They have formed an association, are members of something or other, or are in touch with an organisation that purports to represent them.

Mr Cree: That suggests new entrants. What about all those who are already here and doing a good job but could benefit from capacity building?

Mr Fraser: Capacity building to do what? If they are functioning happily in society, as I say —

Mr Cree: No, I am not saying that either, and you cannot assume that. I am asking how people who are already here can benefit, because a lot of them would be keen to progress.

Mr Fraser: I will certainly try to see whether I can find any evidence of this group —

Mr Cree: I am worried about all those who are partially integrated. Unless we have some way of targeting them, they will miss out.

Mr Fraser: I do not think so. We heard from Mr Spratt how Chinese people are making their way here. We still fund the Chinese Welfare Association —

Mr R Irwin: I should add that this is a consultation document. If such a need exists, and there are ways that we can address it, let us have that discussion as part of the consultation.

Mr Cree: Fine. It is important to recognise that they exist.

The Deputy Chairperson: Further to Leslie's point, in February 2013, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation produced a report on poverty and ethnicity. Some of its findings are similar to the point that you were developing, Leslie. It noted that the precise household circumstances and relative extent of poverty and inequality among minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland were unknown. So what work is the Department doing to establish knowledge of poverty and inequality levels in minority groups and, indeed, individuals, across Northern Ireland?

Mr R Irwin: The document refers to the development of a separate set of indicators for racial equality. That is also being put out as a discussion topic. We hope that, as part of the consultation response, we will get comment that may inform a process for how to gather that information. I emphasise again that this is about consulting on the key issues and how we can best address them.

The Deputy Chairperson: I understand that. I am increasingly concerned about the nature of the consultation process, in that you are depending a lot on other people and organisations to do quite detailed work for you. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation — Ken, you said that you worked closely with it — completed this work over a year ago and has set out what some of the key challenges are. By this stage, one would have thought that the Department would have been actioning some of them.

Mr R Irwin: I do not know whether we have been looking at those specifically already. We would need to talk to our colleagues in NISRA about the level of information that we have, and, if there is an opportunity for building on that, we are very happy to do so.

Mr Fraser: Clearly, there are issues with the size of the minority ethnic population here, however you define it. I understand from my statistician colleagues that trying to extrapolate from an overall survey is very dodgy because the sample is so small. Certainly, when we have ethnic monitoring, we will have lots of administrative data that will shed some light. However, there are things that will be unknowable.

The Deputy Chairperson: Another comment from the report is:

"the lack of recognition of overseas skills and qualifications, immigration status, language difficulties and problems in negotiating support services all serve as obstacles to improving some people's employment position and financial circumstances."

I assume that that is the type of challenge that the strategy board will seek to address.

Mr Fraser: Yes, among others.

Mr Maskey: I apologise for not having been here at the start of the meeting to hear your early remarks. I was attending another Committee. I hope that I have not missed anything.

We dealt recently with issues concerning the Roma community, and the Traveller community has long-standing issues. I am trying to work out how any consultation can get information of any quantity or

quality. The Roma community, in particular, is isolated in one area on the Ormeau Road. I wonder how you would weigh up any comments that you might get. There is great ignorance about it because not a lot of information is easily garnered, as you said, Ken, and you have been dealing with the issue in hands-on fashion for quite a while. I think that there needs to be a more dedicated, focused strategy for the Roma community. Can you elaborate on the Department's thinking on why there should not be a specific approach to the Roma? I also think of the Travellers in that context. However, given the fact that the Roma are isolated, more or less in one area, how would you qualify the consultation responses that you might get?

Mr Fraser: I make no bones about the fact that it is a very difficult set of circumstances. It will not be easy to get much sensible information on the Roma. You say that the Roma are isolated to south Belfast, but that is not strictly true. There are Roma in Derry, and in north and east Belfast as well, I understand, though they are of different nationalities. It is difficult to establish precisely what is happening because people move quickly. We recognise their vulnerability and that there are difficulties with housing, income etc, and people do move quickly in such circumstances. We will certainly look in depth at what we can do on the Roma population. I do not want to say that we will develop a specific strategy because I hope that we do not have to do a strategy on each ethnic group. I hope that a racial equality strategy and a refugee integration strategy will cover most of our needs. However, we will certainly seek to do a bit of focused work on the Roma.

Mr R Irwin: Work is ongoing with statutory partners such as Belfast City Council. Bryson Intercultural is supported to work directly with the Roma through the minority ethnic development fund.

The Deputy Chairperson: Alex, I will just build on that. The Committee received a briefing recently from NICEM, and I believe that the name of the network was the Traveller, gypsy and Roma network. Is that organisation represented on the racial equality panel or have you met it?

Mr Fraser: I am not sure that the network is anything other than an idea and a title. I know Mark Donaghue and saw him recently, but I am not aware of their having any representation or offices. I would be happy to have a discussion with them. In the meantime, we have good links with Craigavon Travellers Support Committee, Armagh Traveller Support Group and An Munia Tober, which is part of Bryson and represented on the racial equality panel.

The Deputy Chairperson: That is encouraging. You mentioned consultation events. Can you give us a bit more encouragement or detail on how you will consult across the board?

Mr Fraser: We hope to do a number of things. The minority ethnic sector seems to think that what we did last time round was a model of good practice. We will go off and hold our own events, not in plush hotels but in places where minority ethnic people feel happy to go. We hold events at times when minority ethnic people can attend. I mentioned occupational segregation. There are times when it is difficult for people to get away from work to see us, so we make ourselves available to them. We will go to Dungannon, Derry and the west, as well as the east. I hope that we will manage to hold a large number of events. We will also call on groups to undertake their own consultation, primarily within their own linguistic community, which is what we did last time. We provide them with the materials to consult on, and we provide them with funding to rent a place, to hire childcare facilities, to provide light refreshments and to interpret and translate the documents. In return, they present us with a report of which we will take full account.

Mr R Irwin: There are a number of strategies in OFMDFM that are out, or about to go out, for consultation. The Department is looking at the opportunity to hold combined events, and that will be under the banner of Delivering Social Change.

Mr Fraser: If any Committee members would like to go into greater depth, I am very happy to turn out when it would suit them to undertake the consultation.

The Deputy Chairperson: If the Committee can be of assistance in any way with the consultations, please contact us. We are keen to support and work with you to make sure that the process is as robust as possible.

Mr Fraser: Thank you very much.

Mr G Robinson: Thank you, Ricky and Ken, for your presentation. My question is about the new block of immigrants. How are they being funded and by whom? Where are they being housed? Which Department is looking after them?

Mr Fraser: Do you mean people from the A2 nations? There is no one necessarily looking after them. People come here and try to make their way. Some have access to more public funds than others. Until 1 January, for example, citizens of the A2 nations — Romania and Bulgaria — were denied access to the labour market under transitional arrangements put in place by the Home Office. I am not a big fan of transitional arrangements of that sort because they effectively allow people to come here but do not allow them the wherewithal to look after or support themselves. That is a dangerous position.

Mr G Robinson: I just wonder how they survive.

Mr Fraser: Many live with far too many to a house. One hears about 20 and 30 people to a house. Many survive on a pittance from car washes. There are those who beg, and we have all seen that. People get by in whatever way they can. You see the circumstances in which they live and you think, "If that is what they prefer, goodness only knows how horrible life is where they come from."

Mr G Robinson: Are they scattered throughout the Province?

Mr Fraser: Absolutely. There are certain congregations, and our understanding is that the south Belfast Roma were brought here by one particular person. This is viewed as a reasonably pleasant place for Roma to be. There is a reasonable chance of making a reasonable living without encountering some of the problems that they encounter at home.

The Deputy Chairperson: I have one last question, gentlemen. The draft strategy touches on questions relating to the 1997 Race Relations Order. It was before my time, but I understand that, in 2009, the Assembly expressed a consensus view that there was a need to review and enhance the Order. Indeed, I understand that the Equality Commission has set out nine reasons why it needs to be reviewed and enhanced, yet there seem to be questions in the draft consultation on whether the reform of the 1997 Race Relations Order is still a priority. Can you speak to that in any way?

Mr R Irwin: You rightly say that the Equality Commission has made further recommendations building on what was said in 2009. As I have said before, we really want this to be tested in the consultation process. There are a series of questions in the consultation on whether that work really needs to be taken forward now. Any changes in legislation have resource implications for the Department and the Assembly. Is there anything you want to add to that, Ken?

Mr Fraser: We have set out in the consultation document the Assembly resolution and everything, I think, that the Equality Commission said. We do not seek to conceal the fact that there is all this pressure for the Order to be changed. However, it is an honest question: does it need to be changed, and, if so, how and when should it be changed? Of course, all that will be fed back to Ministers when we have the results of the consultation.

The Deputy Chairperson: It is the nature of the question that troubles me:

"There is a limited amount of resource within Government to address each issue, including racial equality. If resources within OFMDFM are dedicated to legislative reform, this may mean that less can be done elsewhere. Is reform of Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 still a priority?"

Without any indication of the budget required for legislative reform, is it fair to ask a consultee to make an informed assessment of what OFMDFM or Government priorities should be?

Mr Fraser: I offer to amend that question.

The Deputy Chairperson: OK. Gentlemen, members have no further questions. We have had a fairly detailed discussion. As I said from the outset, it is a welcome development that the consultation has come forward. I must be honest: in light of some of the responses that we received today, I think that there is still significant work to be done to establish the extent and nature of the problem that we face with respect to ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland, the inequalities that they experience and the precise work that we need to do to tackle and improve the situation.

Previously, the Committee has been very clear in its condemnation of any racist abuse or activity and, in particular, the racial abuse that Anna Lo MLA has experienced. I have an interest, of course, because Anna is my colleague. However, I think that it would be remiss of us not to re-emphasise our condemnation, given my understanding that Anna experienced further racial abuse at an International Women's Day event on Saturday. I hope that members do not think that I am abusing my position in any way by speaking on behalf of the Committee and reiterating the view expressed previously that we stand four-square with Anna and the work of the Department to ensure that we build a united community in Northern Ireland, regardless of our background.

Mr Spratt: I just want to say on the back of your comments, Deputy Chair, that I do not think it inappropriate for you to raise the issue. I read about what happened in a newspaper just a short time ago. As a South Belfast colleague, I would like, as I have done in the past, to condemn roundly what happened to Anna again at the weekend. It is absolutely disgraceful and should not happen.

Mr G Robinson: Deputy Chair, I would like to be associated with those remarks.

The Deputy Chairperson: OK, gentlemen, thank you very much.