



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Together: Building a United Community
OFMDFM Officials

22 October 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Together: Building a United Community: OFMDFM Officials

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)
Mr Chris Lyttle (Deputy Chairperson)
Mrs Brenda Hale
Ms Bronwyn McGahan
Mr David McIlveen
Mr Stephen Moutray
Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Miss Donna Blaney	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mrs Linsey Farrell	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister
Mr Michael McGinley	Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I welcome Donna Blaney, Michael McGinley and Linsey Farrell to the Committee. Linsey, we received your paper at 5.00 pm yesterday. What was the issue with the late delivery?

Mrs Linsey Farrell (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): There was no issue other than that was the time that it was issued on behalf of Ministers.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): On behalf of Ministers.

Mrs Farrell: Ministers clear the briefing.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): At 5.00 pm yesterday. When was the briefing given to them for clearance?

Mrs Farrell: I do not have the exact date that we put it up to the private office.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Roughly.

Mrs Farrell: About a week to 10 days ago. I can check the exact date and get back to you.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I would be interested in that. I do not think that there is anything contentious about the papers, so why should we not get them in a timely manner? We have

expended a lot of effort in the last 12 months on liaising with the head of the Civil Service, the junior Ministers and the principal Ministers in an attempt to receive papers in a timely manner.

Mrs Farrell: I will check the exact date and get back to you.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Thank you. Would you care to make some opening remarks?

Mrs Farrell: Thank you, Chair, for your introduction and the invitation to appear today to update the Committee on progress on Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC).

As you know, the strategy was published on 23 May last year following the announcement of seven strategic headline actions by the First Minister and deputy First Minister. We had the opportunity to brief the Committee in February and welcome the opportunity to provide a further update today.

The strategy sets out a range of actions and commitments against four strategic priorities: children and young people; shared community; safe community; and cultural expression. However, the range of commitments and actions extends well beyond the seven strategic headlines. In total, there are in the region of 42 other actions and commitments that, compositely, will contribute to achieving our collective vision of a shared, united and reconciled community.

With the agreement of members, I propose to focus on progress against the seven headline actions, the delivery architecture required to monitor implementation and other key commitments arising from the strategy. Members of the Committee have acknowledged that they received a copy of a briefing paper in advance of the meeting. Hopefully, you have been given an opportunity to look at the areas that I will cover in the briefing.

Senior responsible officers (SROs) for the seven headline actions have been appointed by Departments with lead responsibility. Compositely, they make up the membership of the good relations programme board, which has met on six occasions to date. The programme board reports directly to the ministerial panel on the implementation and delivery of the strategy.

I will now move, in no particular order, to the headline actions. The first is the United Youth programme. The design day on 23 January, which the Committee was made aware of during our last visit, was the culmination of an extensive period of stakeholder engagement, and almost 300 participants attended. The co-design process begun by OFMDFM at that time is being continued by the lead Department, which is the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). DEL has appointed a United Youth adviser to take forward the next design stage, and that process is being supported by a design team that comprises representatives from a number of Departments and statutory agencies. Young people have been engaged with separately up to this point, and it is intended that they will also be invited shortly to become part of the design team. The design team has produced a draft outcomes and principles framework, and that will be tested during the forthcoming 2015 pilot phase. OFMDFM funded the first United Youth pilot through the central good relations fund, with 50 young people taking part in the Headstart initiative. Findings from the evaluation of that initiative so far are very positive.

The Department of Education (DE) leads on the headline action of 10 shared education campuses. The Department received 16 expressions of interest under the programme, and, on 1 July this year, the Minister announced the first three projects to be supported. They are St Mary's High School, Limavady and Limavady High School; a shared education campus for Moy Regional Primary School and St John's Primary School in Moy; and a shared education campus for Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle. Those projects will now proceed to the planning stage, and the target is to have three business cases submitted and approved by the end of 2014. A second call for applications opened on 1 October, and the deadline for submissions for further proposals is 30 January 2015. In addition to that, good progress is also being made on the Lisanelly shared education campus programme, which is over and above the 10 shared education campuses.

The Department for Social Development is leading on the coordination of the headline action on urban villages. A high-level design specification has been developed, and the first two locations identified are Colin and the Lower Newtownards Road. A strategic board chaired by OFMDFM junior Ministers has been set up to meet monthly. Its membership includes representatives from DSD, OFMDFM, the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) and Belfast City Council. Resources were secured through June monitoring to allow SIB to take forward the all-important stakeholder engagement to enable work to continue in the two urban village locations.

OFMDFM is responsible for taking forward work on the headline action of 100 summer schools and camps. A number of summer schools and camps took place during this summer, and further schemes are scheduled for the Halloween mid-term break. An additional £300,000 was secured in June monitoring to enable further work on summer schools and camps. Belfast City Council and the Department of Education will run further schemes and pilots, primarily at Halloween. Expressions of interest have been invited from other councils, and decisions on those will be taken in the coming weeks. A programme board has been established to oversee progress on this headline action, and the board had its first meeting on 18 August. External members of the board are from DE, Belfast City Council and the Community Relations Council (CRC), and we have just secured agreement for Youthnet to be represented. OFMDFM has worked very closely with Belfast City Council, and a consultant has been identified and appointed to carry out an evaluation of the schemes that have taken place. That evaluation will inform the final design of the summer schools and camps programme. Co-design workshops with a range of key stakeholders are planned for early December, and we hope to engage specifically with young people as part of that process.

The Department for Social Development is leading on the 10 shared neighbourhoods and, through an initial scoping exercise, has identified potential sites and a timeline. Eleven potential sites have been identified that could deliver more than 600 social homes, but the Department is also exploring major mixed-tenure developments through joint ventures by housing associations and private developers. The first social housing development at Ravenhill Road is scheduled to open shortly, and construction work has commenced on a further three sites.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has been appointed to take forward the cross-community sports programme. The purpose of the programme is to use sport as a tool in building good relations across our community and to break down divisions. A pilot will be delivered during this financial year, and it will be in areas that have experienced specific interface tensions and significant deprivation.

Finally, there is the headline action on the removal of interface barriers by 2023. Work on the removal of barriers commenced in 2011, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) has been taking forward a lot of that work, both before and since that date. Design proposals are at an advanced stage to start work towards establishing a 10-year programme to reduce and eventually remove the interface barriers. An important point is that this will involve working very closely with the local community. The number of interface structures has been reduced from 59 to 53, and engagement is ongoing and very active in 40 of the 53 remaining areas. There have been some positive developments this year. Security fencing was removed from the North City Business Centre in April and from Moyard Crescent in May, and the upper vehicle and pedestrian gates at Springmartin Road were removed in August.

That brings me to the end of the updates on the seven headline actions, and I will now briefly bring the Committee up to date with progress on other aspects, including the establishment of an equality and good relations commission. The strategy included a commitment to establish a commission that would act as an independent statutorily based organisation to provide policy advice and a challenge to government. Following a gateway project management review, a transition board was established to oversee the change management process relating to the establishment of the new commission. The membership of the board includes the chairs of the Equality Commission (ECNI) and CRC, representatives from OFMDFM and the Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO), along with an independent member. The objective of the board is to ensure that T:BUC objectives relating to the establishment of the commission are successfully delivered within an agreed timescale. Members of the transition board are concentrating on exploring approaches to delivering the relevant T:BUC objectives in advance of the new primary legislation being enacted.

The review of good relations funding was a core commitment in Together: Building a United Community. The review was taken forward in two phases. Phase 1 concluded at the end of March this year, and the SIB team commissioned to take forward the work drew upon existing evaluation and review material to inform phase 2, which involves substantial stakeholder engagement, including four geographic sessions held across Belfast, the north-west, mid-Ulster and Fermanagh, which were attended by a total 144 participants. A final session in Crumlin Road Gaol involved a further 112 participants. Feedback was extremely positive, and stakeholders reported being very welcoming of the opportunity to engage. The second phase of the review ended at the end of June, and, since then, we have been working closely with the SIB to finalise the report, which will go to Ministers shortly. Further engagement with stakeholders will be taken forward on foot of Ministers' consideration of the report.

Before I conclude, I can also report that the ministerial panel has met on two occasions. It is the central part of the delivery architecture set up to drive forward and oversee the implementation of Together: Building a United Community. As I mentioned at the outset, this panel is supported by a good relations programme board, which comprises senior responsible owners from all Departments, not just those with responsibility from headline actions. This group has now met six times, and the next meeting is planned for mid-November.

Work is also at an advanced stage to establish the range of thematic subgroups outlined in Together: Building a United Community, and, compositely, these structures will drive forward on the implementation and facilitate a fresh approach to stakeholder engagement and collaborative leadership on building good relations across our community. I welcome the Committee's ongoing interest in the implementation of a strategy that is, as I think that we all agree, vital to everyone. We look forward to working closely with the Committee as the implementation phase develops across all strands of the strategy. Thank you again for the opportunity, and I am happy to take any questions.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Linsey, thank you very much for that very comprehensive and welcome brief. It is a very exciting strategy. Can you update us on the budget, please?

Mrs Farrell: Yes, certainly. We have allocated good relations funding of almost £10 million in this year. All OFMDFM funding streams application criteria have been closely aligned with the four key themes of the strategy, as I outlined earlier, to ensure that projects being delivered by our stakeholders are focused on the delivery of the strategy's objectives. As I also mentioned, a number of Departments were successful in securing money through June monitoring as well. Those were OFMDFM, DCAL and DOJ, and that money was secured specifically to take forward work on Together: Building a United Community.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): What is the budget for the 10 shared campuses?

Mrs Farrell: DE is leading on that, so I do not have that information here, but I can find it and write back to you on the specific budget.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): There are 10 shared campuses in addition to Lisanelly, which is going ahead. As far as I know, the cost of Lisanelly is £120 million. If we take that as the template, the 10 shared campuses, which is one of seven T:BUC initiatives, will cost £1.2 billion. I put it to you, Linsey, that we do not have it.

Mrs Farrell: That has been under consideration by the ministerial panel.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): So, you accept that we do not have that money.

Mrs Farrell: We accept that there is an issue with resourcing across all Departments.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I will tell you what the issue is: the money does not exist.

Mrs Farrell: We are working with Departments very closely and actively on assessing the resource that they need each year so that we have a very detailed profile. We will interrogate those figures very closely to ensure that we inject some realism into what Departments are telling us and match that with what is available. It was noted at the last ministerial panel meeting that relying on the normal budgetary processes of applying for funding in monitoring rounds is putting Departments in a very difficult position. We will discuss that in more detail when a more detailed analysis of the resource implications will be brought to the next ministerial panel meeting.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): This is in the context of the Executive having to go to Treasury exceptionally and ask for a loan of £100 million, which is less than the cost of one of the 10 shared campuses, which is one of only seven initiatives under T:BUC. I put it to you again that the money does not exist for Together: Building a United Community.

Mrs Farrell: We accept that the public expenditure environment is very difficult and challenging, and that has been noted by all Departments at the ministerial panel. As I said, we are working proactively with Departments to produce the realistic financial data that we need but also to look at what work can be taken forward on a no-cost/ low-cost basis. I accept that a lot of the headline actions require huge expenditure, but in the shared education campuses, for example, the ethos is sharing, so that is what

we are working on with Departments. We are looking at outcomes and at what we can achieve with the resources available to us, notwithstanding the huge challenge that is still before us and the need to constantly be putting up the need for financial resources to support this. That is why we are doing that work through Departments, through the programme board and at the ministerial panel.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): So, you are asking Departments what is achievable in the short term.

Mrs Farrell: We are looking at the short term, medium term and longer term.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I am hearing an acceptance that there is not enough money for these big ambitious projects but that you will do what you can.

Mrs Farrell: No, we accept that there is a scalability issue, which is about looking at how we roll things out and the timing of the roll-out. We are absolutely not going back from the challenge to us in Together: Building a United Community. We recognise the challenging context that we are all in, and the Departments are all fully committed.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Is there a timeline for digging the sods of the 10 campuses?

Mrs Farrell: That is what we are looking at with Departments. We need a detailed timeline from them and an analysis of the initial costs.

A lot of the costs, as you can appreciate, and DE is a good example of this, were estimates before the call for expressions of interest. So, at that stage, the Department could not accurately anticipate what would come forward in those applications. Now that those three applications have come in and there will be a second call, there will be a lot more information and data for the Department to go on when making an accurate assessment of the resource requirements and a more realistic and accurate associated timeline. It is that sort of work that we are taking forward with all Departments.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): It is over a year and a half since OFMDFM said to the people of Northern Ireland, "Be of good heart. We've got a great idea. We're going to build 10 new shared school campuses". A year and a half later, you do not have the money or the timeline. You do not have anything to give the people.

Mrs Farrell: Very clear projects have been submitted and accepted by the Department of Education, and there has been a commitment to complete the business cases by the end of this year. There is a second call for shared education campuses, which sends a very clear message about DE and the Executive's commitment to the good relations agenda. We all accept the difficult economic climate that we are in, but that is not an excuse for inaction. We have lots of evidence of the amount of work by all Departments to continue to push forward this agenda.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I remain of the view that the money does not exist.

Mr Lyttle: I agree. I am on record as saying that the strategy is inadequate. I still do not see a comprehensive action plan or targets and deadlines with budget allocations, and it is difficult for the public or MLAs to assess progress in that context. I think that it is weaker than the shared future strategy, which had a triennial action plan attached to it.

However, to engage with what is available to us, there were 16 expressions of interest in the shared education campuses and three projects were awarded some type of funds, whatever they were. What were the selection criteria used to make those decisions?

Mrs Farrell: Again, as DE had the lead responsibility, it set those criteria. DE has advised that the Minister of Education was keen to ensure that the chosen projects would be of a high standard and meet all the criteria that it had set. To ensure the best chance of successful long-term and sustainable collaboration among the schools involved, the Minister wanted to ensure that the projects were building on a foundation of sharing that had already been established in those three areas, and that there would be support in the local community for the proposals. It is my understanding that that was the basis of the choice of those three. That is why only three were picked from the 16 that were submitted and a decision was taken to go out for a second call.

Mr Lyttle: Maybe I did not catch it there, but are unsuccessful proposals being assisted to develop into successful proposals?

Mrs Farrell: I am not totally sure of that, but we can go back to the Department and find out what the process is for doing that.

Mr Lyttle: OK. I am not clear on what an urban village is, but I am not going to ask you to tell me because that might take a while. What two urban villages have been selected? What were the criteria used to select those two areas — Newtownards Road and Colin? I have endeavoured to seek this clarification, but I am not sure if I ever got it: does the Newtownards Road urban village include the Short Strand area?

Mrs Farrell: The core aspects of the urban village concept were to create community space; improve the area and its aesthetics; provide a range of uses within the area; and create a community focus, hence the term urban village. It was felt that Colin and the lower Newtownards Road met those criteria through work that had been done previously, levels of deprivation in the area, or community infrastructure. The actual boundaries of the lower Newtownards Road urban village are still being considered. I can seek some certainty around that and get back to you.

Mr Lyttle: That would be helpful. I am a bit concerned that, having now asked about my fifth question of that nature, no one has been able to answer it just yet. It would seem quite strange that a strategy seeking to build a united community would identify an area as an urban village and not encompass an area of interface tension within that urban village, but maybe you can clarify that for us.

It says that 11 potential sites have been identified for the shared neighbourhoods. Do you know what those sites are? What criteria were used to select those?

Mrs Farrell: We can get a list of the 11 sent to you. I can tell you that construction works have commenced on Ravenhill phase 2; Felden Mill, Newtownabbey; and Crossgar, Saintfield. I can get a list of the 11 sites from DSD and report that back to the Committee.

Mr Lyttle: It says that membership of the ministerial panel has been widened to include local government, the voluntary and community sector, and key statutory organisations. Do you know what those organisations are?

Mrs Farrell: Yes. The ministerial panel held a meeting on 2 October. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) was represented at that meeting. Local government, through the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), was invited but unfortunately had to send apologies. The Housing Executive also nominated a representative onto the ministerial panel. It is the intention that, once the thematic subgroups are established, the chairs of those groups will be represented on the ministerial panel to ensure that other voices and perspectives on good relations are at the table.

Mr Lyttle: Was the Community Relations Council approached about membership of the ministerial panel?

Mrs Farrell: It was not approached for the last meeting, but that is something that we are actively considering in the context of establishing the equality and good relations commission.

Mr Lyttle: Is it possible to get a list of where the summer schools took place in the summer of 2014 and the budget that was allocated to them?

Mrs Farrell: Yes, we can do that.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Do you know the number of summer schools off the top of your head?

Miss Donna Blaney (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): There have been 125 so far. They would not all be classed exactly as summer schools or camps, but they are summer interventions involving children and young people that will inform the design of the pure summer schools camps next year.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Would any of those 125 have happened anyway?

Miss Blaney: A number of them would have happened anyway through our planned interventions programme, but we have allocated an additional £300,000 to interventions to be delivered that will —

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): How many of the 125 would have happened anyway this summer?

Miss Blaney: I do not know about the numbers of camps, but certainly our baseline budget for that was £300,000.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Right, but you know that there were 125 summer camps.

Miss Blaney: That have been delivered to date; yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): But you do not know how many would have happened anyway? Surely you know.

Miss Blaney: It is just about where the funding came through. We had baseline funding of £300,000, and we then increased the level of funding to deliver some more. I do not have the breakdown of that with me, but we can get it for you.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Again, that would be useful. We understand that some of the questions that you are being asked will mean that you have to liaise with other Departments. I appreciate that we cannot, therefore, expect you to come back in 10 days and that you may need a bit longer.

Mr D McIlveen: Going back to the budgetary side of things, a lot of the progress that has happened already on Together: Building a United Community already has been underwritten by PEACE moneys, Atlantic Philanthropies and other organisations. How much government money do you expect to be short by in order to take each of these 10 campus projects forward? Have there been any commitments from other organisations to support it? It sounds like a colossal amount of money when you talk about £120 million per campus. How is that money actually broken down? How much of it is coming from the Department? How much of it is being sourced from other places?

Mrs Farrell: That is part of the exercise that we are taking forward with Departments at the minute. We are asking them for their profile for each year, but also where they have sought funding from alternative sources such as PEACE IV when it is operational, to identify what the amount is, if that is relevant, and to assess the funding gap from there. That is something that we are taking forward with Departments across all the headline actions.

Mr D McIlveen: So the success or failure of these projects is not based solely on the Executive budget; is that what you are saying?

Mrs Farrell: Not solely. In some cases, there will be alternative sources of funding.

Mr D McIlveen: OK. There was also a point raised about the Community Relations Council a little bit earlier. It is something that I wanted to raise anyway. I am paraphrasing slightly here, but it was suggested recently that not enough was being done on good relations and so on. A figure that was discussed with me is that, since the Belfast Agreement, somewhere in the region of £3 billion has been spent on promoting good relations in Northern Ireland. Is that a figure that you recognise? If it is not, have any figures been estimated within the Department that suggest how much money has been spent?

Mrs Farrell: I have certainly heard that figure referenced before. I have also heard the figure of in and around £36 million to £40 million over the current CSR period. That is just what OFMDFM has directly invested in promoting good relations; it does not take into account the external funding from organisations like PEACE. OFMDFM provides match funding with PEACE as well, so that is also a significant contribution on behalf of the Department. Even more recently, through June monitoring, we in the Department allocated an additional £220,000 to the Community Relations Council to support good relations activity on the ground through its pathfinder scheme. Some £70,000 of that was specifically targeted towards race hate interventions in light of recent circumstances.

So I do not think that the Department would accept that it has not been showing leadership on this issue. We can show clearly that £1.4 million has been made available this year to the central good relations fund. That is going straight to the delivery of good relations work on the ground and to community groups and practitioners who are taking this work forward. A lot of that is being delivered through the Community Relations Council.

Mr D McIlveen: That is very helpful; thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I will just follow up on that, Linsey, because this session is being reported by Hansard. On the budgets for those 10 campuses, David asked a very valid question about other potential sources of income. David mentioned Atlantic Philanthropies, and you mentioned PEACE IV. I heard you say that other sources would, 100% for sure, contribute to the creation of those campuses. Are you content that that goes on the record?

Mrs Farrell: They will be explored as opportunities.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Ah, well, you see, I think you —

Mrs Farrell: We cannot give any certainty around Peace IV —

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I thought you did, you see.

Mrs Farrell: — because it is not operational as yet.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I thought that, in your answer to David, you did suggest that definitely —

Mrs Farrell: That was not the intention, because Peace IV is not operational yet.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Just to avoid doubt, which may only be in my mind, that is being explored but there is no guarantee at the moment that a single penny will come from anywhere else but Departments.

Mrs Farrell: Not at this point.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): That is great. Thank you very much.

Ms McGahan: Thank you for your presentation. I am familiar with Moy Regional Primary School in County Tyrone. I had a number of engagements with the school. I know that if the groundwork had not been done over the last number of years, a shared education model would not have worked for them. Therefore, the groundwork was absolutely vital. I would appreciate it if you could give me any more information that you have on the development of that campus. You said that you hoped to receive businesses cases by the end of 2014.

Mrs Farrell: The Department of Education will be completing that business case process. We can certainly get any information that the Department has on the development work with those three campuses. We will see what we can find out and get back to you on that. However, the business cases will go specifically to the Department of Education.

Ms McGahan: With regard to developing a significant programme of cross-community sporting events, I would like you to give serious consideration to my constituency in Dungannon where we have the fastest-growing population in the North, which is down to the ethnic minority population. I know that the soccer clubs in the Dungannon area do a significant amount of work with that population. Therefore, it would be important to consider that, because it is a rural area as well.

Mrs Farrell: DCAL is taking forward the cross-community sports programme, and I reported earlier that it is running out a pilot. It has not released the areas that that will be in, but it has said that it will concentrate on participation from minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities and young women. We are very conscious of the whole urban/rural issue within the context of implementing the strategy, and we have been working very closely with the rural community network to ensure that we are engaging on those specific rural issues.

Mrs Hale: Apologies for missing part of your presentation. If you have to repeat yourself, I apologise again. My question is on the back of what Chris said about the urban villages. Obviously we are waiting for another two to be identified. Are they going to be specific to greater Belfast? Is one of the essential criteria that they have to be an interface area? I know that many areas in my constituency of Lagan Valley would benefit greatly from the core aspects of the programme, but they are not interface areas.

Mrs Farrell: The other two have not been announced, and I have not seen any suggested locations for those. That is not to say that they will all be in the Belfast area or, indeed, that they have to be what would traditionally be viewed as an interface community.

Mr Spratt: Thank you for the presentation. I have a couple of minor points. I want to go back quickly to the 10 shared campuses. Am I right in understanding that three of those are at business case?

Mrs Farrell: They have started the business case process, and the hope is that those will be completed by the end of this year.

Mr Spratt: With regard to the Pathways to Work programme, which DEL is leading on, I understood that there was hope that that would increase to 10,000 places a year. Where are we with that, and what has DEL delivered?

Mrs Farrell: At the minute, it has been doing a lot of stakeholder engagement to inform the design of the programme. Proposals were submitted for pilots at the end of September, and DEL is probably in the process of selecting those at the minute. Following a development phase during October and November, pilot applications will be submitted in early December with a view to commencing pilots in January next year. I understand from DEL colleagues that those pilots will take a number of formats and structures, and the Department is very keen to get a variety in terms of delivery, to find out what ultimately will work really well in the final programme. It is very much a case of no one size fits all. That is why they are looking at various delivery mechanisms for those pilots. There will be important work going on through the Department for Employment and Learning to evaluate what is coming out of all those pilots to inform the final design and to make sure that we get the best possible good relations outcomes from the programme.

Mr Spratt: I will just go to another aspect that you mentioned: the taking down of barriers and the opening of gates. You gave us a few examples. It has been made public that, in lots of areas, communities are not ready for barriers to be taken down. What has the Department of Justice done to liaise with those areas to try to get some of those barriers down, given that, in some areas, there are ongoing problems?

Mrs Farrell: That is absolutely right. The key component of all this is having community buy-in and involvement before any barrier can come down. There are some areas where stakeholder engagement and buy-in has been quite minimal. We are actively working with DOJ to see how best to take forward engagement in those specific areas.

Donna, you might be across more of the detail.

Mr Spratt: Do you know exactly what DOJ has done?

Miss Blaney: It is working very closely with the IFI-funded peace walls programme with the seven partners. Those are across Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. It is now working with us to explore where we can increase that engagement with the community where it has not been done, perhaps in east Belfast or the Shankill, outside the greater Belfast area. We have tried to ring-fence some additional funding that we might be able to get some expansion of that programme of seven groups rolled out this year.

Mr Spratt: Has anything been done in the south Belfast area?

Miss Blaney: We do not have a group in the south Belfast area at the moment.

Mr Spratt: There are some barriers there. Do you not think that DOJ should be there?

Miss Blaney: We have established a good model and want to actively roll that out and get more engagement with the community. You are right to say that sometimes the community is not ready to go to full engagement over the removal of the barriers. It is about peace building and the creation of the conditions to remove the peace walls. We and DOJ are working with IFI on the peace impact programme, which is sort of a stage earlier than the peace walls programme and about bringing a community together that perhaps has not been engaged in peace building to start discussions with the relevant agencies.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Linsey, back in March, we were advised that the seven headline actions were under consideration within the Department in advance of a ministerial panel meeting on 27 March. Can you update us on the status of those plans? Indeed, can we have sight of them?

Mrs Farrell: Again, that ministerial panel meeting did not happen at the end of March due to unforeseen circumstances. The meeting happened on 2 October. For that reason, we are working with Departments to revise their costs and final project plan designs. I can certainly find out whether those are something that could be shared with the Committee.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): It had to be postponed on 27 March and could not be convened until 2 October?

Mrs Farrell: It was challenging getting a date. We were very keen, as I said, to have all Ministers there and all Departments represented; that was the challenge.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Is that reflective of the challenge of trying to work on a cross-departmental basis?

Mrs Farrell: Not at all. We actually have very good and positive working relationships. I should say that, during that time, the good relations programme board continued to meet on a bimonthly basis in the absence of the ministerial panel being able to secure a date agreeable to everyone.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): I do not ask to imply that there is anything other than good relations. I just ask about the logistical difficulty of pulling everybody together. We tend to work vertically, and you are trying to work horizontally through government.

Mrs Farrell: That is why it is vital to have the programme board there and meeting regularly.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): We are obviously very interested in what people think of the urban villages. Concern was expressed that "the two urban villages programmes announced appear to have little or no good relations content and local minority communities appear to be excluded from the areas of benefit". Is that a valid criticism?

Mrs Farrell: It is certainly something that we are very conscious of and a criticism that we have heard. For that reason, we are working very closely with the Strategic Investment Board at this stage in structuring the stakeholder engagement and building in the good relations outcomes that we clearly want to see from urban villages. As it is a headline action in Together: Building a United Community, good relations is a key outcome that we will look for. It will be very important to factor that in at the design stage with stakeholders and all sections of the community.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Another general observation was that, to a certain extent, it is top-heavy in terms of statutory input and that civic society has not had the role that it might have had.

Mrs Farrell: As we are at a very advanced stage in setting up the thematic subgroups, that will be the key place where other sectors, organisations, stakeholders and the all-important practitioners will be involved.

We are working actively with the Community Relations Council to develop a structured and constructive programme of stakeholder engagement across the four strategic priorities of Together: Building a United Community in an attempt to engage much more and recognise the practice and work that has gone in over very many years and find out what we can learn from that practice to ensure that we have practice-informed policy.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): In terms of engagement, the codesign process for United Youth seemed to be a very good model. Is that being rolled out across the other six?

Mrs Farrell: Yes, to lesser and stronger extents —

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): To the extent that it fits.

Mrs Farrell: It certainly is, and it is something that we rolled out in light of the review of good relations funding.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): At that January event, you had 300 youths at the Waterfront Hall. Do you update them?

Mrs Farrell: Yes. In fact, the Department for Employment and Learning has stayed in touch and carried forward that engagement. It held a follow-up youth event — a two- or three-night residential in Corrymeela at the beginning of September — and re-engaged with the vast majority of the young people whom we had engaged with in January at the Waterfront through the organisations that we had engaged with to ensure that continuity. It will be important for them to build on that.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Is there no frustration coming back about nothing happening?

Mrs Farrell: There have been frustrations voiced, but more in terms of the engagement. The young people very much welcome being part of the process, and they will be part of the DEL design team. Our own junior Minister McCann attended that residential and was able to hear at first hand the views of the young people.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): My interest is more in the extent to which they understand and accept the process and the length of time that goes into a process. If I promised one of my teenagers in January, "I'm going to do something good for you" and got to February without delivering, I would be in trouble.

Mrs Farrell: That has been balanced against them appreciating and welcoming the opportunity to be engaged and to contribute to the design to make sure that it is something that is right and meets their specific needs as young people.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): So that they see the value.

Mrs Farrell: Yes.

Mr Lyttle: I have a quick supplementary. You said that the Community Relations Council was not invited to the ministerial panel. Given that, out of a budget of approximately £10 million a year for good relations funding, you direct approximately £6 million to the Community Relations Council, and given the length of time it has been engaged in community relations work in Northern Ireland, why was it not asked to put forward a representative onto the ministerial panel?

Mrs Farrell: It was not invited because at the time it was thought that, within the context of establishing the equality and good relations commission — and we are actively looking at it should be one person from each of those organisations at the next ministerial panel meeting, or how best that representation can be included at the next meeting.

Mr Lyttle: So it may be included at a future date.

Mrs Farrell: Yes, that is something we are looking at.

Mr Lyttle: There was a comprehensive review of the structure, delivery and impact of existing funding delivery mechanisms carried out, which I understand has been completed. Is there a date for the publication of the report?

Mrs Farrell: We have been working with the Strategic Investment Board over the last number of weeks to finalise that report. That will shortly be with our Ministers, and we hope to re-engage with stakeholders following that.

Mr Lyttle: Are we not stakeholders?

Mrs Farrell: Yes.

Mr Lyttle: Why were we not engaged prior to the writing of the final report?

Mrs Farrell: I believe the Committee was invited to the stakeholder engagement sessions.

Mr Lyttle: OK.

Mr Spratt: You did not go, Chris.

The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt): Donna, Michael and Linsey, thank you very much.