

Official Report (Hansard)

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 18 September 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

Order in the Chamber

Mr Speaker: Before we begin today's business, perhaps at this early stage in the new session I need to say some words about order in the Chamber. It would certainly be timely to remind the whole House — Members and Ministers — of what is expected of parliamentarians in the Chamber.

Members should know that I expect debates to follow standards of good temper and moderation and that disagreeing with others is no reason not to show courtesy and respect to all Members. It is not in order to make personal remarks about other Members, for example about where they live or their family circumstances. I say that to the whole House. Some Members have continued to make personal comments about Members' families and, as I said, about where they live.

I would have thought that, by now, it would be clearly understood that it is not in order to speak directly to other Members or to address them as "you". That would not happen anywhere else, and it should certainly not happen in this Chamber. All remarks should be addressed to the Speaker. Some Members seem to think that it is enough simply to address their remarks to each other, rather than through the Chair.

Finally, it is not in order to deliberately misrepresent what other Members have said or to put words into their mouth. We have also had that in the Chamber since Members returned after the summer recess.

I hope that is clear. I know that these may seem like minor issues, but they are not. They are long-standing conventions in any Parliament and contribute to order and dignity in the Chamber. I speak to the whole House this morning and to all sides of the House. I have repeated these particular points over and over again. Once again, we find that Members

are not in their place for contributions when it comes to debates or the opening of a debate. In fact, they come in and make a contribution but do not stay for the debate, leaving after their own contribution. That is totally and absolutely wrong.

We also have Members who, for whatever reason, do not even turn up at Question Time. They put a question down on the Order Paper and then do not turn up. They need to understand that Departments and Ministers spend some time and huge resources trying to find an answer to some of the questions that are on the Order Paper for which Members just do not turn up. From now on, we are going to name Members — as happened yesterday — who are not in their place and give no reason for not being there.

I say to the whole House this morning that we need to get real around some of these issues. These are long-standing conventions, not only here but in any other elected institution, so we need to be absolutely clear in our work here as parliamentarians in the Assembly. That goes for elected Members, but it also goes for Ministers. Let us move on this morning. I hope that I have, once again, set the record straight.

I should say that we also had Members yesterday who, for whatever reason, got up in their place to ask supplementary questions that in no way related to the original question on the Order Paper. They must have just thought that they would get up and ask that particular question, even though they knew that it did not relate to the original question. From now on, the Member will be asked to take their seat, and we will move on. In the past, if the Minister wanted to answer the question, we would normally have allowed them to do so, even if it was totally and absolutely outside the scope of the original question on the Order Paper. That is now going to stop. You try to give Members some flexibility around some of these issues, and then they abuse the flexibility. From now on, that stops. Your question must, as far as possible, relate to the original question on the Order Paper. If not, we are just going to ask

Members to take their seat and we are going to move on, because, if I give Members latitude, they then abuse that latitude. Let us move on.

Ministerial Statement

Banks: Funding for Lending Scheme

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): After all those instructions, Mr Speaker, I hope I do not offend the rules in any way during this statement or the answers to the questions on it.

Thank you for the opportunity to update the Assembly on the engagement that I have had with the Treasury regarding the broad issues of access to finance and, most recently, the funding for lending scheme that was launched by the Government on 1 August 2012.

I have been concerned, as have Members from all parties in the Assembly, over the last three years that the availability of credit at reasonable terms could be restricting our economic recovery in Northern Ireland. It is an issue that I have been raising with the Treasury on an ongoing basis, and, unfortunately, I have become increasingly frustrated at the lack of attention paid to regional banking issues and the specific challenges that we face here in Northern Ireland.

As Finance Minister, I have received numerous representations from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) suggesting that the availability of finance is constrained and relatively expensive and often comes with strict conditions attached. I fully appreciate that the wider context here is very difficult. The global financial crisis threatened the very stability and security of our banking system and required the regulatory authorities in London and Dublin to act to require banks to restructure and recapitalise. We all have to accept that one consequence of that added security is that there has been less money available for lending. However, a situation in which lending is so severely constrained as to prevent viable local firms from accessing the working capital and growth finance they desperately need cannot be accepted.

Access to finance and bank lending to SMEs is a national issue and not just a Northern Ireland problem. However, I believe that our issues are greater and more complex than in other parts of the United Kingdom. This is very much a current issue despite the length of time it has been going on. The CBI in Northern Ireland has identified this as one of its priority areas in 2012, and my Department continues to work with stakeholders and the business community on this.

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

First, I will address the issue of bank lending data. A lack of detailed regional lending data makes it extremely difficult to get a clear understanding of the nature and scale of the problem here in Northern Ireland. It is something that my Department has been working on, and, following extensive engagement with the industry, the British Bankers Association (BBA) now provides me, on a confidential basis, with quarterly information on the overall lending provided to SMEs by our four banks. I now have data for the last eight quarters, from quarter 3 of 2010 to quarter 2 of 2012.

That data reveals that the stock of lending has been falling steadily over the period but the quarterly amounts of new lending are now fairly stable. The number of borrowing applications has fallen, reflecting subdued demand, but application approval rates remain at around 90%, although that includes the partial approval of loans, perhaps at a lower level than the amount originally requested. Separate DFP surveys in this regard suggest that full approval rates may be much lower.

It is the case that banks are still lending in some circumstances, and demand for credit is an issue. I have no doubt that this lack of demand reflects the situation that many companies are attempting to reduce their debt levels and are perhaps delaying investment projects given the current uncertainty around the economic climate. I also have no doubt that the cost and conditions now attached to credit are factors that may be dampening that very demand. Unfortunately, given the high-level nature of the BBA data and the lack of information around cost and conditions, it is impossible to get a clear sense of the scale or nature of the problem here. Greater transparency by the banks is required. The fact that banking matters are not devolved limits my effectiveness in this regard, as the Executive do not have the power to require the banks to supply information. That has led to a guessing game over the current state of our banking sector. I have asked them for more extensive data and to be able to refer publicly to it, but, after consultations with local banks, they have refused this on competitive grounds. That is still the position. We are still working on this, and I have asked the Treasury and the Bank of England to support us in our endeavours.

Although data is important, it is not my primary concern. My objective throughout has been to ensure that Northern Ireland has a safe and competitive banking system that meets the

needs of consumers and businesses here. As indicated, bank lending to SMEs is a national issue, and, in response, the Government have introduced a number of initiatives over the past two years designed to improve lending and liquidity in the banking sector which, they hoped, would in turn improve the availability of finance and reduce the cost of credit. Banking is a reserved matter, and I believe that it was and is the Government's responsibility to ensure that such initiatives and schemes are equally effective in all parts of the UK. They have not done this, and I do not believe that their schemes have been effective here. That is because the structure of our local banking sector is fundamentally different from that in the rest of the UK. The key structural difference is the extent of foreign ownership, with local banks subject to the decisions of parent banks based outside the region and, in the case of two Irish-owned and one Danish bank, outside the UK. Furthermore, the extent of the property boom and bust in Northern Ireland has left our banking sector more severely constrained, with our local banks still suffering the burden of impairment charges related to bad property loans, which, I believe, is also having an adverse effect on business lending locally. Our situation is further complicated by the role of NAMA, which is responsible for a significant volume of loans and assets.

10.45 am

Given this background, I have written to and met Treasury Ministers numerous times over the past couple of years, pressing them for a tailored Northern Ireland response to the challenges that face our banking sector, and I have been arguing that the national initiatives have not worked. The first scheme was known as Project Merlin, whereby the main UK banks agreed to lending targets, which they ultimately did not meet. No regional targets were set. When declining my request for regional lending information for Project Merlin, the Treasury indicated that it could not be supplied as, of our four main banks, only Ulster Bank, as part of RBS, participated. Therefore, that confirmed my fear that this initiative has been ineffective in Northern Ireland. In fact, it really did not operate here.

Separately, I have asked the Irish Government to ensure that the lending targets that they set Irish banks for lending to SMEs would apply to their Northern Ireland operations. There were legal obstacles to this, and it did not happen. That led to a situation where lending targets existed for GB and for the Republic of Ireland but not for Northern Ireland. We also faced a similar situation in relation to the UK

Government's subsequent national loan guarantee scheme, which was launched towards the end of last year. Again, as it operated through the larger UK banks, participating banks here accounted for less than half of the business lending in Northern Ireland. We understand that the design of that scheme meant it was not suitable for some of our other banks, which are relatively small compared to the large British high street banks, some of which have a very limited presence here.

In my view, it is not acceptable that national initiatives taken by the Government to address such a vital and strategically important issue as access to finance are not being effective in this part of the UK. In the context of the development of the then to be announced funding for lending scheme, this was a point that I made in the strongest possible terms to the then Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Mark Hoban MP, whom I met in July this year. Under the scheme, which was opened on 1 August, participating banks and building societies can borrow at lower rates, so long as they increase their lending to households and businesses.

Against this background, I am pleased to inform Members that the Financial Secretary subsequently advised me that Treasury officials have met the four main banks, which, I understand, view the new funding for lending scheme and its design positively. The banks, we understand, have been in discussions with the Bank of England regarding their possible participation. It is already operational in at least one of our local banks. Clearly, it is vital that the full initial interest is translated into actual participation and increased lending activity, and I have again urged Treasury to ensure that any issues that may arise are urgently addressed so that this can happen. I am particularly pleased that the then Financial Secretary committed to monitoring participation in the scheme here. The Government have not before agreed to the separate monitoring of such schemes, and this represents some progress. We will at least know what is happening and get a better understanding of any problems or bottlenecks, and I will take this forward with the new Financial Secretary.

Just last week, the Business Secretary, Vince Cable MP, announced that the Government are working on setting up a new Government-backed institution to help companies invest. We have taken this up with the Treasury to ask for details and have been told that the Chancellor and the Business Secretary are developing options for creating a business bank in the UK. An institution of this nature would

address long-standing gaps in finance for SMEs by promoting more competitive and diverse finance markets and drawing together the Government's existing finance initiatives under one roof. A big part of its role would be to rationalise, improve and potentially have additional powers to manage the large multibillion pound portfolio of support that the Government already provide. It would work through intermediaries, including alternative finance providers, such as challenger banks and non-banks. They see this as complementing what the Government are doing on supporting private sector lending through the funding for lending scheme with the Bank of England. I have been told that the Government will set out the details later this autumn. That is a very interesting development, and I will press to ensure that it is open to and will benefit Northern Ireland businesses.

Banking and access to finance are crucial and remain a very important strategic issue for my Department. There is an awareness of the unique challenges that we face, and some progress has been made. Clearly, however, there is much more to be done. I will monitor the outworking of the new government initiatives very closely to ensure that they have the impact that we so urgently need. We have been waiting too long for that to happen in a meaningful way. I can also assure Members that I will continue to press the Government and the local banks to take all possible steps necessary to ensure that our businesses have the finance they need made available to them so that they can continue to trade and grow. Our economic recovery depends on it. I thank you for the opportunity to make this statement this morning.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, and I appreciate the briefing that he gave to the Deputy Chairperson and me before making it.

It is clear that the banks continue to frustrate our economy, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises in the business community in particular. I want to focus on the funding for lending scheme to which the Minister referred. Given the refusal of the banks to provide data, how will the monitoring be undertaken? How can we ensure that the scheme will benefit the real economy? In some people's view, quantitative easing has delivered for the banks but not for the real economy. How encouraged is he that the British Treasury is providing an adequate, tailored response to our particular

circumstances and what he describes as the unique challenges facing our economy?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman for his question. In response to his second question, as I said in the statement, I am not happy that, to date, schemes that have been developed for increasing bank lending across the United Kingdom have been sufficiently tailored to our needs. The fact is that there was not a big uptake of the loan guarantee fund, and we did not even have the data for Project Merlin because the Treasury indicated that, with only one participating bank, the information would not have been useful. The schemes to date have not been sufficient.

The Chairperson asked about the monitoring of the scheme that was announced on 1 August and how we can ensure that it is effective in Northern Ireland. The first thing to say is that the banks can only draw the money down from the Bank of England in relation to their performance in lending to businesses and households anyhow. Before it releases the money at lower rates of interest and makes cheaper money available, the Bank of England must know what the lending performance of banks has been. It can no longer hide behind a smokescreen and say that it did not know, because it would only have been able to release the money on the basis of performance. The performance must be measured, and that will give us the data, which we know will be there. Secondly, of course, once the money is released, it will have lower rates of interest so that discounts can be given to businesses that borrow the money that has been made available to the banks. Eighty billion pounds is available for the United Kingdom as a whole, and, even on a pro rata basis, if we worked out that our share is 3%, well over £2 billion should be available to local banks.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement. I want to ask about the data that the banks have. Does he believe that it indicates the sectors to which lending has and is being made? That would help the Executive to target areas with small and depleted resources for economic development. Will the Minister advise whether there are measures that we could put in place to ensure that the money coming from the Treasury scheme will be targeted towards the sectors that, we believe, greatly need investment?

Mr Wilson: First, the data that is available to us is fairly high-level. It is in the form of what has happened to the value of loans in the economy over the period that we measured, which was

from the third quarter of 2010 to 2012, the number of loan applications and the amount of net lending that has been made available. It does not break it down into sectors, although I understand that the Bank of England has some of that information. We have been seeking to extract that from the bank, but it requires the co-operation of the banks and the Treasury. To date, we have not got that.

I turn now to the funding for lending scheme and how it can be targeted towards particular sectors. The way that this will work is that, as banks perform sufficiently to draw the money down from the Bank of England, they will get money at a lower rate of interest, which they can then discount to businesses. However, it will be up to the banks to decide which businesses to lend to. That will depend, first, on which businesses apply and whether they can meet the conditions that the banks lay down for the lending. The Government do not see the scheme being specifically targeted at particular sectors, other than it will make a pot of money available that should help to improve lending and reduce the cost of lending to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr Cree: I, too, thank the Minister for his report. For three years now, many of us have doubted exactly how helpful the banks were being. If three of the banks decide not to take part in the funding for lending scheme, is there anything further that can be done to encourage the other banks to step up to the mark? To me, the business bank looks to have potential because it will control that government portfolio. The Minister mentioned additional powers to manage the multibillion-pound government pot. Will he flesh that out a little more?

Mr Wilson: I hope that the market will drive participation in the funding for lending scheme. Banks in Northern Ireland that participate and are able to draw down money from the Bank of England and, therefore, lend at lower interest rates will find that they become more attractive to businesses than banks still charging very high rates of interest. Therefore, the market itself and the availability of that money will, hopefully, attract banks to participate in the scheme. If we find that banks are not participating, I will want to find out why and whether it is because of some of the conditions attached to the scheme. At my last meeting with the Financial Secretary, all the indications were that, if we identify problems, we can quickly go back and see whether there are ways in which the scheme could be tailored to encourage non-participating banks to come in.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas fosta leis an Aire as ucht an ráitis a rinne sé. I thank the Minister for his statement. He might be aware that the 'FSB Voice of Small Business Index' for the third quarter of this year, which was published yesterday, suggests that business conditions here are much tougher than in other regions of Britain. It also shows that, at UK level, banks rejected 42% of loan requests from small firms, which is up 40% on the previous quarter.

Indeed, the Minister said that Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) surveys suggest that full approval rates are lower than some of the bank figures indicate. How confident is the Minister that the funding for lending scheme can address and, indeed, reverse that situation? Will he tell us what performance measures are being considered for the new initiative?

11.00 am

Mr Wilson: The Member gave some statistics from the FSB report, and I will not go through all the details. As we discussed with the British Bankers' Association (BBA), and as a result of the some of the changes that have now been made, measures have been put in place that, over time, should help to improve that position. We will monitor that to see that that is the case.

Let me mention some of the things that will be done as a result of the agreement that has been made with the BBA and which will apply in Northern Ireland. First, there will be a mentoring scheme for firms that are applying for loans. That will help them to tailor their application and give them an indication of the kind of information that they should be providing to make that application more likely to succeed. Secondly, there is an appeal procedure. It is not automatic, and firms have to apply for it. The BBA's first report on how the appeals system has worked states that 14% of businesses were turned down when they made loan applications. We reckon that the figure is much higher than that if you take into consideration the fact that some of them did not get all the money that they asked for. Only 2% of them appealed the decision, but 40% of those who appealed were successful. Therefore, there is a mechanism whereby firms that have been turned down can now have some redress, either through early help with the mentoring scheme or through the appeals system.

On the matter of how we ensure that money from the funding for lending scheme is used effectively, we will be monitoring to see what money the banks in Northern Ireland draw down. We will look at the kinds of discounts that they give, the conditions that they attach to loans, and so on. Of course, the performance will be measured on how much money comes to local banks from the Bank of England.

Mrs Cochrane: I also thank the Minister for his statement. I will also touch on the bank lending data. You stated that the stock of lending has been falling but that new lending amounts are fairly stable. However, the way in which banks measure new lending varies widely and can include restructuring of existing debt and extensions of existing overdrafts. In the case of people adding to their loan, the bank system will often capture a figure that reflects the entire amount, not just the increase. Will the Minister detail how lending is measured and defined by his Department?

Mr Wilson: One of the problems is whether the amount is net or gross and how the banks provide information. It is all fairly high-level stuff, but a number of things concern me. The value of new loans has fallen by 20% from the first quarter in which it was measured to the last quarter, although it now appears to be fairly stable. We cannot separate out how much of that is due to a lack of demand and how much is due to the draconian conditions that are attached.

You mentioned the value of outstanding debt. It has fallen by 15% over the period. Again, it is high-level information, so we do not have the detail on how much of that is genuinely firms wanting to reduce their levels of debt and to pay back loans and, more worryingly, how much of it is due to businesses having been forced to do that by the banks saying that, even though the businesses are keeping up their repayments, they are forcing them to sell assets to bring down their level of debt. That can sometimes be damaging to firms.

We do not have the kind of detail that you have asked for, and that is one reason why we have been saying to the BBA that we need not only the high-level information but information that drills down more deeply. That is also why we have been asking the Bank of England to provide that information to us if it has it.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement and answers so far. Did Her Majesty's Treasury not engage with the banks

in Northern Ireland to get them to participate in the national loan guarantee scheme?

Mr Wilson: It did, although I think that the Government were fixated more on the banking industry generally than on engaging with specific regions. I do not know how much of it was due to the fact that they did not push the national loan guarantee scheme, but our participation is well below participation pro rata in other parts of the UK. In fact, I got an interesting statistic this morning: NAMA has lent more money to people whom they have taken into their remit in Northern Ireland to develop properties and assets than was lent under the national loan guarantee scheme.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The previous Finance Committee, along with the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, took evidence from a group of Churches and businesses on the challenges that they have in accessing finance. Following that, DFP decided to press local banks for a more separate and transparent appeals process. Can the Minister give an update on what progress has been made on that issue?

Mr Wilson: I have already mentioned the appeals process, and that is now in place. I do not have the local figures, only the UK ones, but, nationally, 14% of loans were turned down, and only 2% of those who were turned down appealed. There has been a 40% success rate, and that is probably mirrored across all regions of the United Kingdom.

I now want, first, businesses to be more aware of the appeals process that is available. You do not automatically go to appeal; you have to apply to do so, and I am not sure that many people who are turned down know about the appeals process. Secondly, I want businesses to be prepared to make an application for appeal, given the success rate that there has been. However, some might say that the 2% who applied were fairly sure that they had been badly done by and that many of the rest knew that they did not really have a chance when they applied for the loan. That might account for the high success rate, but I do not know. We will continue to get information about how successful the appeals process is.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his statement. Why did Project Merlin not work here and how does this scheme differ from Project Merlin?

Mr Wilson: The main reason that Project Merlin did not work in Northern Ireland is because of the size of the banks here. Some people have said that it was not suitable for some of the smaller banks. We are guessing that Project Merlin did not work — it is a fairly informed guess — because we did not see any impact in Northern Ireland. We do not actually have the figures. Project Merlin did not realise its goals in the rest of the United Kingdom either, but performance seemed to be particularly poor here. It seems that it was to do with the size of the banks and the structure of the banking system, in which so many banks are foreign-owned.

Mr Beggs: Thank you for your statement, Minister. Statistics show that the Northern Ireland economy has continued to decline while it has stabilised in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is recognised that lending to business is affecting jobs. It has taken some time to recognise that Project Merlin failed here, so how long will it be before we learn whether the new funding for lending scheme is working? Given that Project Merlin failed here, has the Minister approached the Treasury for additional support for either this lending scheme or another scheme for Northern Ireland?

Mr Wilson: I have not approached the Treasury for additional support. Given that the scheme was launched only on 1 August and given its structure, if the scheme were going to work, it would be a bit premature for me to go to the Treasury and say that we want additional support for Northern Ireland.

I believe that this scheme will be different. First, the banks have to perform. To access the finance, they have to meet certain targets of increasing lending to consumers and businesses. Secondly, the scheme will be fairly transparent. I assume that information will be given on a quarterly basis. The first quarter will not give us a great deal of information, so we will have to see the position develop over a number of quarters. So, given all those things, I imagine that it will probably be a year before we know what effect the scheme has had.

Maybe I should have said this, although it was mentioned in the statement, but, as an Executive, we have not ignored this situation. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment already has a number of schemes — I think that there are five. Some are in their infancy, others have just been launched and some are now receiving their first applications. There are five separate schemes, totalling well over £100 million, for lending to small businesses and for growth and development for

those businesses. All those schemes will make an important contribution to the availability of finance for businesses in Northern Ireland.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as a chuid freagraí.

I thank the Minister for his statement. During the summer, I, too, wrote to the local banks to ask about their participation in what, on the face of it, seemed to be a pretty big scheme that made £80 billion available to fund banks and lend to small businesses. We all know the problems that those small businesses are having. Does the Minister share my view that perhaps there was not a great rush among the banks to avail themselves of that scheme? That is what I took up. I found that somewhat disappointing, given the difficulties and problems that many of our small businesses encounter in their dealings with banks not only in accessing funding but in underpinning existing loans that they might use to help their businesses grow at a time when we need growth.

Mr Wilson: I do not mind bashing the banks if I think that they are not doing their job. However, let us put this in perspective. The scheme was announced on 1 August, and the detail of it was then made available to the banks. It was then up to them to decide how they would operate it. On 1 September, which was within a month, Barclays Bank confirmed that it would be participating. It will be giving a 2% cashback to customers as a result of the cheaper money that it will be able to get from the Bank of England. Ulster Bank will announce its scheme within the next week. Again, Ulster Bank will offer a discount to customers who borrow as a result of the scheme, and there will be no arrangement fees, etc. We have no details from the other banks, but they may be working up the details or contemplating whether to participate in the scheme.

As I said in answer to an earlier question, with the kind of discounts that businesses will be able to get as a result of the scheme, I believe that there will be certain market pressures on other banks to participate. I want to know whether there are particular difficulties that mean that they do not want to participate. However, they all showed enthusiasm. One of the things that I was pleased about was that, when the Treasury officials spoke to local banks, they all showed a positive response then. So, I hope to see that followed through. It may well be that, because some banks are based in Dublin, or wherever, it will take a while

for them to agree the terms they are going to attach to their participation in the scheme.

11.15 am

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his statement and for his continuing persistence in pursuing the banks in a variety of matters, particularly this one. Going back to the appeals process: on the basis of the figures that the Minister gave us this morning, that only 2% lodged appeals, 40% of which were successful, does the Minister think that there is more that his Department, in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and, possibly, the British Bankers' Association, given that it has a mentoring scheme in place, could do to assist our SMEs in being more proactive about taking up appeals?

Mr Wilson: Yes, and there is also a role for business organisations here to make their members aware, if they are turned down for a loan, that that is not the end of the story and that there is a mechanism they can use to have their case looked at again. I think that this is a case of communication. I am not too sure why there has been such a low participation rate. The mechanism has not been kept secret, I can tell you that.

As I said in answer to an earlier question, it may well be that many of the businesses that were turned down expected to be turned down anyway because they knew that their cases were marginal and, therefore, did not pursue the matter. If they either do not believe that the scheme, or the appeal, will be of any benefit to them, or they do not know about the appeal scheme, it is important that we have the kind of communication that we have had, and publicise the fact that 40% have been successful on appeal and that the appeal mechanism is available. A whole range of people can play a role here. I have been encouraging banks to let their customers know that an appeals mechanism is available and that, although it is not automatic and they have to apply, they should be doing so.

Mr Allister: The Minister aspires to arrangements that are tailored to meet the needs of Northern Ireland. In that context, it was trumpeted in the Programme for Government that a £50 million loan scheme was being established. How is that going for small business? Is the fact that it is charging rates above the commercial rates of banks something that tailors it to the needs of Northern Ireland business?

Mr Wilson: The detail of the question is more for the ETI Minister. However, the scheme is in place and, as I said, it is only one of a number that will make available well over £100 million to businesses. There is a £5 million pot in the loan fund for small businesses, the growth fund has £50 million and the development fund has £60 million. I am always reluctant to encroach on other Ministers' areas in case I get the figures wrong. However, I know that, globally, if you take all of the schemes together, there is over £100 million available. We have delivered on that commitment.

I spoke to the ETI Minister about this and, again, although I cannot remember the figures off the top of my head, a large number — 50 or so — business cases have already been submitted. Some of those business cases have been approved. Businesses turned down by the banks even though they had good strong business cases that showed that they had the ability to grow, had a market, and had viable business propositions place, will be accepted by this fund. That is important in giving the kind of liquidity and working capital that firms need.

Mr McNarry: On the business bank concept, some £50 billion, I believe, will be released sooner than previously thought. Has the Minister any idea about how much of that £50 billion Northern Ireland could gainfully use? I am assuming that he has at his disposal a bid list supplied by business, commercial and industrial interests expressing their willingness to dip into the fund when it becomes available.

Mr Wilson: First of all, I am not aware of the detail of the business bank as yet, because the government intends to announce it some time in the autumn. We have not got the time for its being announced, let alone its details and how it will be organised. It is to be done through financial intermediaries and other bodies. I do know — and I have been arguing this all along — that given the lack of competition in our banking structure in Northern Ireland, any new entrant into the market will be beneficial. If it adds to what we as a government are doing and what the finance scheme that has been announced by the Government will, hopefully, do within the banking sector, it will be to the good. Do I have an indication from local businesses as to what the demand is likely to be? I do not. DETI may well have some of that information from businesses that have indicated what kind of lending requirements they have, as part of funding packages they applied to it for, etc, but I certainly do not have that information in DFP.

Committee Business

Standing Orders: 49A, 57(1), 69A and 69C

Mr Deputy Speaker: As the next four motions relate to amendments to Standing Orders, I propose to conduct the debate as follows. The first motion to be moved will be motion (a), as shown on the Order Paper. That motion stands alone and will be debated separately. After the Question has been put on motion (a), I propose to group motions (b) to (d), as detailed on the Order Paper, and conduct a single debate. I will ask the Clerk to read the first motion in the group and then call the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to move it. Debate will then take place on all three motions in the group.

When all who wish to speak have done so, I will put the Question on motion (b). I will then ask the Deputy Chairperson to move formally motions (c) and (d) in turn, and I will put the Question on each motion without further debate. If that is clear, I shall proceed.

Mr Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move motion (a):

After Standing Order 49A insert –

'49B. Changes to Statutory Committees

(1) This order applies where all Northern Ireland Ministers cease to hold office as a consequence of the application of section 18(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, for example, where a new department is established or an existing one dissolved.

(2) All statutory committees shall be dissolved.

(3) After all Ministerial offices are subsequently filled, the procedures referred to in paragraph (4) for constituting statutory committees shall be run as they are run following the election of the Assembly.

(4) Those procedures are the procedures set out in Standing Orders for –

(a) determining the number of statutory committees;

(b) establishing them;

(c) appointing chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to them; and

(d) allocating seats on them.'

On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring this motion to amend Standing Orders to the House today. The motion will introduce a new Standing Order 49B to reflect establishing the number and membership of Statutory Committees during the course of a mandate. In the event of departmental reorganisation by the Executive, the rerunning of d'Hondt for Ministers will be required, and that will have implications for the related Statutory Committees.

The current Standing Order 47 only makes provision for the establishment of Statutory Committees following an election, so it is necessary to introduce an additional Standing Order to reflect establishing the number and membership of Statutory Committees during the course of a mandate.

The new Standing Order will apply where, under section 18(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all Ministers cease to hold office. When that happens, all existing Statutory Committees are dissolved and, once the new Ministers are appointed, have to be re-established. The standard procedure for establishing Committees would then be run as it would be run following an election of the Assembly.

Mr Deputy Speaker, for the first time in Standing Orders, an example is used in the proposed Standing Order 49B(1). The example is included to aid the reader, as the reference to a section 18(1) event would be relatively meaningless for Members, unless they have the Northern Ireland Act 1998 with them and are prepared to wade through section 18(1) and all the cross-references within it. The obvious use for that order will be if there is a change in the organisation of Departments, so that is the example used.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this is a straightforward amendment to Standing Orders, and I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no other Members wish to speak, I will put the Question. I remind the House that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

After Standing Order 49A insert –

'49B. Changes to Statutory Committees

(1) This order applies where all Northern Ireland Ministers cease to hold office as a consequence of the application of section 18(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, for example, where a new department is established or an existing one dissolved.

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(4) Those procedures are the procedures set out in Standing Orders for –

(a) determining the number of statutory committees;

(b) establishing them;

(c) appointing chairpersons and deputy chairpersons to them; and

(d) allocating seats on them.'

Mr Deputy Speaker: We will now move to debate the second group, which consists of motions (b) through to (d), as indicated in the Order Paper. I call the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures to speak to all motions in the group.

Mr Clarke: I beg to move motion (b):

Leave out Standing Order 57(1)(c) and insert –

'to consider any matter relating to the conduct of members;'

Leave out Standing Order 57(1)(e)

In Standing Order 57(1)(f) leave out 'Standing Orders 69B and 69C' and insert –

'Standing Orders 69A to 69C'

The following motions stood in the Order Paper:

(c) Leave out Standing Order 69A and insert –

'Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards

(1) This order supplements Part 2 of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(2) In these Standing Orders "the Commissioner" means the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards established by section 16 of the Act.

(3) The Committee on Standards and Privileges shall exercise the following functions in respect of the Commissioner –

(a) considering any report made by the Commissioner under section 17(1)(c) or section 26 of the Act;

(b) requesting and considering advice from the Commissioner under section 17(1)(d);

(c) directing the Commissioner under section 24 (including specifying matters under section 24(2)(b)(i) and making requirements under section 24(2)(b)(ii));

(d) requesting a further investigation under section 26; and

(e) publishing a report under section 27(3).

(4) The consideration of a report or advice by the Committee on Standards and Privileges does not preclude its consideration by the Assembly.

(5) The Commissioner must investigate a referral –

(a) made by the Committee on Standards and Privileges, that relates to –

(i) the conduct of members; or

(ii) members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breach of privilege by a member;

(b) made by the Clerk to the Assembly, that relates to –

(i) the conduct of members, and

(ii) the Clerk's duties as accounting officer within the meaning of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.' — [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

(d) Leave out Standing Order 69C and insert –

'Members' Interests: Rectification of Minor Errors

(1) This order applies to a failure by a member –

(a) to register an interest in the Register of Members' Interests,

(b) to declare an interest.

(2) The Committee on Standards and Privileges may determine not to apply Standing Order 69B in respect of that failure if–

(a) the Commissioner recommends it;

(b) the failure was minor or inadvertent; and

(c) the member acknowledges the failure and apologises to the Assembly for it.

(3) Where the failure is under paragraph (1)(a), the Register must also be rectified.'

— [Mr G Kelly (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Mr Clarke: On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring these motions to amend Standing Orders to the House. The three motions relate to matters surrounding the functions of the Assembly Commissioner for Standards. The amendments are necessary so that Standing Orders accurately reflect the requirements of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

I will point out at this juncture that today's motions do not touch on the actual appointment process or who may be appointed, but refer rather to the requirements laid out in the legislation and how those must be supplemented by Standing Orders. The Assembly has already agreed to the appointment of the Commissioner for Standards, with effect from 17 September, hence the timing of today's motions.

The main changes resulting from the 2011 Act are dealt with in the proposed amendments to Standing Order 69A, so most of my comments will relate to that. The amendments to Standing Orders 57(1) and 69C are consequential to the amendments to Standing Order 69A. The reasons for the proposed amendments can be grouped into three main areas, which I will now outline in turn.

First, the proposed amendments will clarify which matters may be referred to the commissioner in respect of which the commissioner must carry out an investigation, and by whom those referrals may be made.

Back in 2010, the Assembly Commission proposed, and the Assembly subsequently agreed, that the Clerk/Director General, as accounting officer, should be able to consider any potential breaches by Members of the rules in the 'Members' Financial Services Handbook', and, if necessary, refer the matter to the commissioner. The commissioner could then carry out an investigation to establish whether or not a Member had breached the code of conduct. The proposed amendments to Standing Orders will provide for that.

It is worth noting at this point that while matters can be referred to the Commissioner for Standards, once the matter has been referred, any investigation is to be carried out completely independently.

Secondly, the proposed amendments will clarify when a function or role of the Assembly in relation to the commissioner should be carried out by the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Throughout Part 2 of the 2011 Act, there are references to the role and function of the Assembly in relation to the commissioner. In practice, however, the Committee on Standards and Privileges will be the Assembly's agent in carrying out these duties. The proposed amendments will clarify the position on this. The proposed amendments also provide for the commissioner to report on an investigation to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

The 2011 Act provides that the commissioner shall, if requested by the Assembly, give advice on any matter of general principle relating to standards of conduct of Members of the Assembly. The proposed amendments will provide for the Committee on Standards and Privileges to be able to make such requests.

The commissioner will have to comply with any directions given by the Assembly either in respect of the general procedure to be followed in the exercise of his functions or in respect of the standards of conduct that he should observe. The proposed amendments will provide for the Committee on Standards and Privileges to be able to give those directions.

Further to a report from the commissioner on an investigation, the 2011 Act provides that the Assembly could ask the commissioner to

undertake additional investigation on a particular point and to report back on that. The Committee on Standards and Privileges needs to be able to request that additional investigation and the subsequent report back to the Assembly. In this instance, that should be made to the Committee, and the proposed amendments will provide for that.

The 2011 Act also requires the Assembly to publish any report made by the commissioner.

The proposed amendments will provide for the Committee on Standards and Privileges to publish all such reports.

11.30 am

The third and final reason for the proposed amendments is to delete or amend, as appropriate, the current references to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards to ensure consistency with the 2011 Act. For example, references in Standing Orders to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards need to be amended so that they now refer to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards, which is the name given to the office in the 2011 Act.

The proposed amendments to Standing Orders provide clarity on a number of matters, as I have outlined, and will enable the commissioner to undertake the statutory functions of that office. I commend the motions to the House.

Mr Ross (The Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges): On behalf of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I support the Committee on Procedures' motions to amend Standing Orders 57(1), 69A and 69C. The Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides for a Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards. The primary role of the commissioner is to carry out investigations into complaints that a breach of the Assembly's code of conduct has occurred and to report the outcome of those investigations to the Assembly.

Earlier this year, the Assembly appointed Mr Douglas Bain as the new Commissioner for Standards. Mr Bain's term of office began yesterday. To coincide with that, the Assembly Commission has commenced the statutory provision for the commissioner's functions and powers. As per the 2011 Act, all outstanding investigations have, therefore, been transferred from the former commissioner, Dr Tom Frawley, to Mr Bain. I am sure that the whole —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will.

Mr Allister: The Member refers to Mr Douglas Bain's appointment to this important independent role. Can he tell the House whether, in consequence, Mr Bain will be resigning from that divisive, controversial body called the Parades Commission?

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for his intervention. I cannot give him any further information on that at this time. I am quite sure that when Mr Bain first appears before the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Members who have questions, such as the one the Member has, will be able to put those to Mr Bain. As I said, we have not had an opportunity to do that yet, given that he took office only yesterday. Nonetheless, I am sure that the whole Assembly will want to wish Mr Bain every success in his new challenging role and thank Dr Frawley for serving, with distinction, as the interim Commissioner for Standards. As a member of the Committee, I have worked with Dr Frawley since 2007 and have always held him in the highest regard.

Now that Mr Bain's term of appointment has begun and the outstanding provisions of the 2011 Act have commenced, it is necessary to make certain changes to Standing Orders. The Committee on Standards and Privileges identified those changes last year and asked the Committee on Procedures to bring forward the necessary amendments. As the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures set out, there are three reasons why these amendments are needed. First, to clarify which matters may be referred to the commissioner and by whom, in respect of which the commissioner must carry out an investigation. Secondly, to clarify when a function or role of the Assembly in relation to the commissioner, as provided for in the 2011 Act, should be carried out by the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Thirdly, to delete or amend, as appropriate, current references to the Assembly Commissioner for Standards in Standing Orders in order to ensure that there is consistency with the 2011 Act.

On matters that may be referred to the commissioner for investigation, I first of all point out that the 2011 Act provides that the commissioner has a statutory duty to investigate any admissible complaint received from any person that a breach of the Assembly's code of conduct has occurred. It is clear that Standing Orders do not need to be

amended to provide for that. However, the 2011 Act also provides that, in addition to those complaints, the commissioner must carry out an investigation into certain matters specified in Standing Orders when they are referred by certain specified persons. Mr Clarke mentioned the referrals that may be made by the Clerk/Director General in relation to the conduct of Members and the Clerk's duties as accounting officer. The Assembly Commission has proposed, and the Assembly has already agreed, that the commissioner should have that function, and the Committee on Standards and Privileges was happy to agree. The provision clearly strengthens governance arrangements in the Assembly.

The Assembly has also agreed that the Committee should retain its power to refer matters to the commissioner for investigation. As per the current Standing Order 69A(2)(c), the Committee should be able to refer matters relating to the conduct of Members, including but not limited to complaints that a breach of the code of conduct has occurred. It is important that the Committee has that broader power to refer conduct matters to the commissioner, which includes and goes beyond the general power that any person has to complain that a breach of the code has occurred. Without that, the Committee might be unduly fettered in the matters that it might seek to have the commissioner investigate. The Committee should also be able to continue to refer matters that relate to Members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breaches of privilege, as per the provisions of the current Standing Order 69A(2)(a). This is without prejudice, of course, to the outcome of any future review of Assembly privilege.

The proposed amendments to Standing Order 69A set out those functions of the Assembly in the 2011 Act that should be undertaken by the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Mr Clarke has already gone through each of those in detail, so I shall not go over that ground again, except to say that those changes reflect what the Committee on Standards and Privileges had asked for.

Finally, technical amendments need to be made to Standing Orders 57(1), 69A and 69C to ensure consistency with the 2011 Act.

I thank the Committee on Procedures for tabling each of those amendments, and, on behalf of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I commend them to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer does not wish to respond. Before we proceed to the

Question, I remind Members that all three motions require cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

Leave out Standing Order 57(1)(c) and insert –

‘to consider any matter relating to the conduct of members;’

Leave out Standing Order 57(1)(e)

In Standing Order 57(1)(f) leave out ‘Standing Orders 69B and 69C’ and insert –

‘Standing Orders 69A to 69C’

Resolved (with cross-community support):

Leave out Standing Order 69A(and insert –

‘Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards

(1) This order supplements Part 2 of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

(2) In these Standing Orders “the Commissioner” means the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards established by section 16 of the Act.

(3) The Committee on Standards and Privileges shall exercise the following functions in respect of the Commissioner –

(a) considering any report made by the Commissioner under section 17(1)(c) or section 26 of the Act;

(b) requesting and considering advice from the Commissioner under section 17(1)(d);

(c) directing the Commissioner under section 24 (including specifying matters under section 24(2)(b)(i) and making requirements under section 24(2)(b)(ii));

(d) requesting a further investigation under section 26; and

(e) publishing a report under section 27(3).

(4) The consideration of a report or advice by the Committee on Standards and Privileges

does not preclude its consideration by the Assembly.

(5) The Commissioner must investigate a referral –

(a) made by the Committee on Standards and Privileges, that relates to –

(i) the conduct of members; or

(ii) members and Assembly privilege, including alleged breach of privilege by a member;

(b) made by the Clerk to the Assembly, that relates to –

(i) the conduct of members, and

(ii) the Clerk’s duties as accounting officer within the meaning of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001.’ — [Mr Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Resolved (with cross-community support):

Leave out Standing Order 69C and insert –

‘Members’ Interests: Rectification of Minor Errors

(1) This order applies to a failure by a member –

(a) to register an interest in the Register of Members’ Interests,

(b) to declare an interest.

(2) The Committee on Standards and Privileges may determine not to apply Standing Order 69B in respect of that failure if–

(a) the Commissioner recommends it;

(b) the failure was minor or inadvertent; and

(c) the member acknowledges the failure and apologises to the Assembly for it.

(3) Where the failure is under paragraph (1)(a), the Register must also be rectified.’

— [Mr Clarke (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures).]

Private Members' Business

Ulster Covenant: Centenary

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to the debate, I would like to advise Members that I have received a letter from the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to say that she is unable to attend plenary business today and next week. However, the Minister of Education has agreed to respond to the debate on her behalf.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Copeland: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the signing of the Ulster covenant on 28 September 1912, in its centenary year, as an historic and significant event in the history of Northern Ireland; notes the availability of all the digitised signatures of the covenant via the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland website; and affirms the importance of Ulster Unionists Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon and their legacy, which remains in place today.

In the corner of St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast stands a stone font. It is all that remains of the parish church of St Anne that existed on that site prior to the construction of the cathedral. I know that because my grandmother was christened in that font in 1899. Just a few feet from the font lies a grave. An unremarkable grave, it is ordinary in many ways, even plain in some. It contains earth from the six counties of Ulster that now comprise Northern Ireland and earth from the city of Londonderry. In that grave lies Sir Edward Carson, later Lord Carson of Duncairn.

He was a Dublin-born Irish unionist who was a lawyer in that city. How can it be that someone from the city of Dublin became so intrinsically linked with the consciousness of the people of Ulster then and remains so today? He was a successful lawyer who represented the Cadbury family in a slavery case, took part in the prosecution of Oscar Wilde and, some say most importantly, the defence of naval cadet George Archer-Shee — the Winslow boy — who was charged with stealing a 10-shilling postal order, which is hardly the stuff of high and great advocates.

However, Carson found himself at the helm of resistance to the notion that one million people could be removed, contrary to their will, from a sense of identity, a system of government and a status of citizenship with which they were happy and placed, contrary to those sentiments, at the mercy of those they saw at that time as their mortal enemies.

Ireland was a different place in those days. Most of it was rural, but the north-east corner that now constitutes Northern Ireland was industrial. Indeed, James Connolly described the north-east corner of Ireland as the only place on the island where organised labour could take a foothold and stand up for the rights of ordinary men. However, he described those same workers as the most willing slaves on the face of the planet. To counter that, Mr Henderson, a one-time Mayor of Belfast, said that the factories of the city provided work for the men and the boys, the mills provided work for their wives, and, if that was not enough, their daughters and friends could find work in the largest rope-manufacturing plant in the world.

Resistance to home rule was inevitable. It was organised, and a covenant, based on an ancient pact between the Israelites and God and mirroring a similar covenant taken by the Covenanters in Scotland some 200 or 300 years previously, bound them one to another to do whatever was necessary to preserve their citizenship and sense of being and place. The covenant laid out not only the citizens' responsibility to God but, in a way in which only Ulster Presbyterians could, implied the responsibility of God to the citizens.

The covenant and the women's declaration were signed on Ulster day, 28 September 1912, by almost 500,000 people. It was signed in good order, largely without violence. It drew a further line in the sand, indicating the lengths to which they would go to defend what they saw as their position. Months later, it led to the establishment of the Ulster Volunteers, as they were called in those days, and, in some ways, gave rise to the establishment of the Irish Volunteers.

Subsequently, and contrary to the law, between 35,000 and 50,000 rifles and three million rounds of ammunition were imported to allow those who thought that the covenant was empty rhetoric and the threats were toothless to understand the lengths to which the unionist population of Ulster was prepared to go. At the same time, an equivalent army — if that is the correct term — was established in the South. Two groups of people, each fervently believing

in the justice of their own cause, were prepared to fight the British Government, at that time the most powerful Government on the face of the earth, and, indeed, to fight each other.

An event was then brought about by a guy called Gavrilo Princip, who, strangely enough, represented a group called the Black Hand as opposed to the Red Hand. He shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the city of Sarajevo. The smouldering embers of diplomacy, technology, industry and territorial avarice took the world into a conflict that lasted from 1914 to 1919. Irishman, at that stage, fought beside Irishman. They fought for Ireland and for Ulster. Ancient enmities were set aside, and the foundations of the Northern Irish state were created.

Carson was, without doubt, a brilliant lawyer and orator. He was regarded by those who saw him and spoke to him as approaching almost the status of a god. He stood for what he believed in, and others stood with him. All that would have been for nothing without the organisational skills of James Craig, who was a stockbroker, a whiskey distiller, a veteran of the South African war and the consummate organiser.

11.45 am

The signing of the covenant took place in not only Ulster but in Dublin, on ships on the high seas and in the stokers' mess of a Royal Navy ship halfway up a river somewhere in China. To deny the importance of those events, whether you agree with them or not, would be churlish, because they were fundamentally important. They were important to my family then, and, in many ways, they affect vast numbers of people, not thoughtfully but emotionally, to this day.

I visited recently a graveyard in Flanders — I cannot remember whether it was Belgium or France; it all looks pretty much the same to me — called Tyne Cot, where there are the remains of or memorials to almost 50,000 people, many of whom do not enjoy a grave; there is simply a name carved on a wall. There is a name there of one of my relatives whom I never knew was remembered at Tyne Cot. The most striking thing was that, after that great sacrifice and at the conclusion of that war, when Irishmen and Ulstermen had stood together in the shadow and the light of the covenant to defend what was widely promoted as little Catholic Belgium, to paraphrase, the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone re-emerged from the mist and restated the integrity of their struggle.

There are many graves in that graveyard, but there are three gravestones that are placed shoulder to shoulder with no gap between them, signifying that they contain the remains of three individuals who could not be separated from one another. One is an Irish Guardsman, who could be a unionist or a nationalist, or a Catholic or a Protestant. One was a Royal Dublin Fusilier, who, in all likelihood, was Catholic, and, in all probability, could be described as nationalist. On the right flank is a headstone commemorating a soldier of the 14th battalion of the Royal Irish Rifles, which is commonly styled the Young Citizen Volunteers. They lie together, embracing one another in death for eternity, to have given us the chance to make this island a better place for all of us and not to deny any aspect of our history but to look at it honestly and judge the sentiment as well as the actions.

We approach these centenaries hopefully having learnt the lessons of the past. Ireland was not all Protestant/unionist or Catholic/nationalist. Indeed, the party opposite derived its name from Mary Lambert Butler, who was a cousin of Sir Edward Carson. There is a pub in Belfast called Molly's Tavern, where a relation of Sir James Craig's eloped and —

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

Mr Copeland: — fought inside the GPO with Cumann na mBan.

I ask everyone to consider thoughtfully what I have said and support the motion.

Lord Morrow: I congratulate those who secured today's debate. I inform the House that it is our party's intention to support the motion. Just as yesterday's debate was very timely, this one is equally so. I listened intently to what the Member who spoke previously said, and I look forward to hearing what others have to say on this important and topical matter. The date of 28 September marks an important and historic event in the heritage and history of Northern Ireland, and, indeed, in the establishment of Northern Ireland as an independent state, detached from the rest of Ireland but firmly within the United Kingdom. On that day some 237,000 men signed the Ulster covenant, alongside the more than 234,000 women who signed the women's declaration to:

"associate with the men of Ulster in their uncompromising opposition to the Home Rule Bill".

Those who signed had pledged:

"to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland."

The first meeting was held in my constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, when Sir Edward Carson arrived in Enniskillen on Wednesday 18 September, 10 days before the covenant was signed. He went to Portora Hill, where some 40,000 members of unionist clubs marched past. On the eve of the covenant signing, Sir Edward Carson attended a rally at the Ulster Hall in Belfast, where he was presented with a yellow silk banner that was understood to have been carried by King William's troops at the battle of the Boyne. Carson, deeply moved, said:

"May this flag ever float over a people that can boast of civil and religious liberty!"

Those comments are in sharp contrast to the words of Eamon de Valera, who proclaimed in February 1932:

"The majority of the people of Ireland are Catholic, and we believe in Catholic principles. And as the majority are Catholics, it is right and natural that the principles to be applied by us will be principles consistent with Catholicity".

Supporting that stance was the then Archbishop, Cardinal MacRory, when he pronounced:

"The Protestant Church in Ireland — and the same is true of the Protestant Church anywhere else — is not only not the rightful representative of the early Irish Church, but it is not even part of the Church of Christ".

Back in Belfast, James Craig, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, said in an address:

"It is our earnest desire to live in peace and amity with the Free State and to encourage in every way a better understanding between all classes and creeds."

Edward Carson had declared his wish to see tolerance for Catholics at the formation of Northern Ireland when he said:

"While maintaining intact our own religion let us give the same rights to the religion of our neighbours."

I believe that it is important to recall all these quotes in this debate, because this is a day and age when history has become distorted and twisted, and those things are seldom said in the articles that we read. However, as someone once said, why let the facts get in the road of a good story? That seems to be very prevalent today.

During yesterday's debate on an apology from the Republic of Ireland, I referred to the fact that, at the time of partition, the Protestant population in the South was some 12% and that it has now reduced to 2%. Although some find it difficult to face up to that reality, perhaps a glance at some of the remarks that leading statesmen and churchmen of that time made will shed some light on the reality.

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

Lord Morrow: In October 1937, speaking in Geneva, Deputy Prime Minister O'Kelly declared:

"the Free State Government was inspired in its every administrative action by Catholic principles and doctrine".

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Lord Morrow: I am sorry, my time is up, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I think that you will put me down if I do not sit down. Thank you very much.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I was very tolerant with you.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

The debate is worthwhile, although I stress from the outset that I do not think that anyone intends to do a historical accuracy fact-check this morning. Although our history is shared, it is very complex, and we have very differing interpretations of many elements of that history. The period in which the covenant was signed 100 years ago is no different to many of the other significant periods in history.

The motion is interesting in so far as it states:

"this Assembly recognises the signing of the Ulster covenant...in the history of Northern Ireland".

However, Northern Ireland was not an entity at that time, so the motion is flawed. Notwithstanding that, our party's perspective on all these things is, as we have discussed before in the House, that we are in a decade of centenaries and that it is very important that, rather than having these events commemorated in a way that is exclusive — not that we want to tell people how they should celebrate or commemorate historical events — in order to make this a more fruitful decade that helps on the pathway towards reconciliation and a greater understanding amongst our communities, we must endeavour to make sure that such events are commemorated in an inclusive way and in a way that is not about rerunning history but is about trying to understand history better.

The motion goes on to talk about recognising:

"the importance of Ulster Unionists Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon and their legacy".

Of course, we can all say that those individuals and others at that time were important and left an important legacy. However, that is not to suggest in any way that we share the views of others on what that legacy has been. Many of us would argue that the legacy that we have been left, not just by those individuals but by the historical period that we are referring to, is the unfinished business that many of us are trying to work our way through. We have had decades of strife and political instability across this island, from which no citizen could truly say that they benefited. It is important, therefore, that we look back on these important historical events in a manner that does not add to the division that we have experienced over all these decades and instead benefit from them by reconciling our communities and trying to understand people better.

I urge people who seek to commemorate this particular historical event in the next number of weeks to stand back and reflect on the manner in which some of the demonstrations unfold, because, given the contention around them, they do not add anything to mutual understanding, greater respect or furtherance of reconciliation, which most people in our community strive for. Reconciliation does not mean that we all just agree with everything, but it does mean that we learn how to debate and discuss those matters, particularly since these events happened 100 years ago and should,

therefore, not cause further division. Commemoration of these events should act as a tool to help us work together more constructively.

Michael Copeland spoke for 10 minutes, and to be quite frank, I am not sure what the central point of his contribution was. He ended by asking us all to reflect on his remarks. His remarks travelled around anecdotes and homespun stories. There is nothing wrong with that, and it helped Michael to set the tone. His speech was scant on historical facts and skirted over historical realities. However, I appreciate the tone that Michael sought to establish, and I hope that that remains the tone throughout the debate because, as I have said, it is important that we remember what happened. We should not miss the point that whenever the covenant was signed, —

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

Mr Maskey: — it was about marshalling and mobilising tens of thousands of armed people. That brought its own responses, the consequences of which we are still living with.

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

Mr Maskey: As I said, we are hopefully working together to build reconciliation on the back of these celebrations and commemorations in a very mature and constructive fashion.

12.00 noon

Mr Eastwood: There is no doubting the significance of the Ulster covenant, nor that each of the men who signed it knew its significance and future historical imprint. However, it is important that it is properly remembered within its context and time. For example, there is a risk that, because of the deliberate, orchestrated and obvious symbolism of the signing of the Ulster unionist covenant, the tradition of the Irish unionists will be forgotten and lost. That risks losing figures of such eminence as Samuel Ferguson, WEH Lecky and Edmund Burke and the intellectual contribution of such Irish unionist publications as the 'Dublin University Magazine'. It was a tradition that was completely proud of and in its Irish identity, and it would not have contemplated partition. It is important that that tradition is remembered. It has much to add to our collective historical perspective.

The choice of Ulster unionism in 1912 to break with the tradition of Irish unionism has acted to

shape the course of this island for the past 100 years. It was a decision of massive political consequence, not least in its challenge to the British Government of the time. It is right and proper that it is recognised, and I think that nationalists and republicans completely accept that. We understand that it is important to the unionist community and respect it. However, unionism must also understand that the covenant's political vision and trajectory was and remains a great tragedy for Irish nationalism. From the perspective of Irish nationalism, it caused an unnatural and damaging division of Ireland's people. Unionism does not have to agree with that fact, but it should try to understand it.

Unionism should also recognise that there were many other significant events in and around that decade. We must all be prepared to enter into a mature and respectful conversation about those events. Whether it was the home rule Bill, the Easter rising, the war of independence, partition or the civil war, those events and others have shaped all our political perspectives on the past and the future. We must all rise to the challenge of ensuring that, 100 years on, those events do not serve to divide us any further. We must all take responsibility for marking those events in a way that is respectful and courteous to the other tradition. That will be the mark of the progress we have made.

In many ways, the covenant marked the beginning of the decade of transformation that was to follow on the island of Ireland. Today, Ireland stands ready for another period of change, and the great success of the last generation will ensure that any desire for that change will not be accompanied by the force of arms. The next Irish generation will enact change through the democratic will of all the Irish people, North and South.

Mr Lunn: I rise to confirm that we will, of course, also support the motion. I say "we" in its loosest sense. *[Laughter.]*

A Member: Is that the royal "we"?

Mr Lunn: The royal "we"; that will do.

Mr Weir: Through the Chair, I thank the Member for giving way. I wonder whether the Member is following a different political tradition today that is very much "ourselves alone".

Mr Lunn: I will leave that hanging. We may have something to say — I may have something to say — towards the end about the

final part of the motion and the legacy, place and importance in history of Lord Craigavon and Lord Carson. However, I will come to that.

The question is whether the covenant was historic and significant, and, of course, it was. At that time, it was probably the biggest petition in history, and almost 500,000 men and women confirmed their desire to remain British. At the time, they had good reason to suspect that something was afoot that may have been designed to change that status. The third home rule Bill was coming forward, and there was a threat — it has already been alluded to — of armed insurrection from various quarters on the island. The British Government were, for sure, wavering in the face of Irish pressure. Perhaps what saved the day, in unionist terms, was not so much the signing of the covenant as the beginning of the First World War.

We have had some discussion about this within the party, and I have been asked whether we should support a motion that gives praise to an organisation that threatened to take up arms against the legitimately elected Government of the day. All I can say about that is that the times were different. It was not the only organisation making that threat, and perhaps events proved it to be correct, because a few years later the Easter rising came along — I want to say something about that too, if I have time — as did the First World War and the enormous sacrifice at the Somme and other places. It is ironic to think that the people who signed the covenant threatened to take up arms against the British Government but also gave their lives — perhaps it was their sons — in support of the British Government a few years later. Our history is full of ironies, as we all know.

The reference to the digital records is interesting. I have always assumed that my grandfather, Robert Lunn, signed the covenant, and so he did. I was able to check yesterday on those digital records; it was very interesting. There were seven Robert Lunnns, all from that area of west Belfast, who appear to have signed the covenant, so now I will have to figure out which one of them was my grandfather. I am fairly satisfied that — *[Interruption.]* Sorry?

I want to talk about the legacy of Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon. I do not want to be in any way controversial, but there are elements of that legacy that, if I were a Unionist with a large "U", I would not want to dwell on and may not be all that proud of. For a start, I understand that they were responsible for the break-up of Ulster. They rejected the three counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal, in case they

would upset the balance of their votes. They also, from the formation of the state right through, perhaps, to the time of Terence O'Neill, ran this place in a manner that a lot of people would have considered questionable. There was an element of discrimination — I am being very kind here — as well as elements of favouritism and gerrymandering that could not be ignored and led, eventually, let us face it, to the rise of the civil rights movement and all that has happened since.

For us, a shared future means respect for a shared history. It is important that we share our history and acknowledge the two traditions on the island. I am very heartened to hear that Sinn Féin and, I think, the SDLP do not intend to oppose the motion. That is good. I was asked yesterday what attitude we would take if the motion referred to the Easter rising instead of the covenant and if the two names were Pearse and Connolly. I can tell you that we would support it, because it would be every bit as significant. I hope that, in four years' time, if we are all spared and are standing here having a conversation about a slightly different motion, the unionists will remember what happened on this side of the House today. We will support the motion.

Mr G Robinson: Much can be said about the signing of the Ulster covenant and declaration, but the central issue is that it was signed by approximately half a million ordinary men and women in Northern Ireland. The fact that they signed it demonstrated their desire to remain British citizens and was a means of signalling their intent to refuse to recognise a home rule Parliament that they saw as detrimental to the union. They had greater vision than they realised. The desire among unionists of all opinions and, indeed, some nationalists to remain British has not declined in the years since, despite murderous campaigns waged against them by the enemies of our Province. It is only right that that historic event should be commemorated, due to its profound effect on today's Northern Ireland and the way in which Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon's leadership was inspirational across all sections of society. To them, we owe a debt of gratitude.

In Northern Ireland today, as indeed throughout the world, the desire to trace family ancestry has been aided by the online availability of the signatures of those who signed the covenant and declaration. The Public Records Office must be congratulated on the hard work it has done to enable this. Northern Ireland has many unofficial ambassadors throughout the world as people emigrate for work or retirement; therefore the significance of the covenant and

declaration is far beyond our borders. Many families have looked eagerly for a relative's signature as they played their part on a monumental day in the history of Northern Ireland. The noble Lords Carson and Craigavon probably did not fully realise the extent to which their principled stance would influence the following generations in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is important that their legacy is acknowledged today and long into the future. That legacy is acknowledged through this debate, but it will also be acknowledged at the end of the month by people eager to celebrate their culture and heritage, which these two extraordinary men did so much to protect and enhance. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As this is the first debate in which the Assembly will hear from Rosaleen McCorley, I remind the House that it is the convention that a maiden speech is made without interruption.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom glacadh leis an deis i mo chéad óráid a rá gur mór an onóir agus cúis bróid domh a bheith roghnaithe mar ionadaí sa Tionól do mhuintir Bhéal Feirste Thiar.

I would like to take the opportunity in my maiden speech to say how proud and honoured I am to have been given the chance to represent the people of West Belfast in this Assembly. I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Paul Maskey, who has given great service to the constituency over the years. Obviously, he continues to do so in his role as MP. I know that Paul will be a valuable source of guidance for me in the future, and I thank him on behalf of West Belfast for all his sterling work, past and present, so buíochas ó chroí le Paul.

The centenary of the signing of the Ulster covenant is one of many significant and historic events that will be commemorated over the next decade. In reading up on the covenant, I was intrigued to learn that a certain Fred Crawford allegedly signed his name on the document in blood. I also noted that a man named Riobaird Ua Muireadhaigh signed his name in Old Irish, a fact which, for me, serves to confirm the historical relevance of the Irish language to Irish people from all backgrounds and of all political persuasions. Sa chomhthéacs sin, ba mhaith liom aird a thabhairt ar chomóradh tábhachtach eile atá ag titim amach ag an am seo.

In that context, I would like to draw attention to another important anniversary that is occurring at this time. The Líofa initiative was launched a

year ago this month by the Culture Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín. On Saturday 22 September, there will be a birthday event at Custom House Square in Belfast to celebrate a very successful first year of Líofo. Tá 2,300 duine tiomanta do fhoghlaim na Gaeilge anois. To date, 2,300 people have signed up to learn the Irish language. I commend the Minister and her Department for bringing forward this unique initiative, which has encouraged so many people from various backgrounds to take ownership of the Irish language and to appreciate its beauty and cultural richness. I also wish the Minister a very speedy recovery from her recent illness, ádh mór ort, a Aire.

As I said, the focus of the debate is the decade of centenaries, particularly the signing of the Ulster covenant, which has played a particular role in our history. The covenant was significant for many people, and I totally acknowledge and recognise its importance as part of our shared history. Other events in the decade of centenaries, such as the Easter rising of 1916, are equally important. As we commemorate these events, it is vital that they are not in any way used to promote division or heighten tensions in our divided society. The challenge for us is to use this as an opportunity to learn from history and reflect on the past in a way that ensures that we are promoting a greater understanding of those events and not seeking to perpetuate division.

12.15 pm

We cannot change the past, but we can learn lessons from what has gone before and allow that to inform how we move into the future. Tá muid ag pointe suntasach inár stair. We are at a significant juncture in our history. We are emerging from a long period of conflict and are, hopefully, developing as a mature society through the peace process. I believe that consideration must be given to how commemoration of the Ulster covenant is carried out, because that could well influence the events that follow in the decade of centenaries. Creidim nach bhfuil an dara rogha againn, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We have only one option: we must approach this decade of centenaries in a spirit of outreach, respect and generosity. We should grasp this opportunity with both hands and place the Ulster covenant, the Easter rising and all the other events in the calendar over the next decade in a context that has at its core equality, reconciliation, tolerance and respect. History is important to us all. It can inform who we are and how we view ourselves as a society. However, all versions of history deserve to be heard, listened to and reflected upon. We in

the Assembly must lead by example and take a positive and mature step forward into the next decade. When history comes to judge us after the next 100 years, do not let us be found wanting in our commitment to reconciliation, equality and respect for diversity.

Mr Weir: I thank the Members who tabled the motion. As a unionist, I commemorate and celebrate the Ulster covenant. I appreciate that that level of celebration may not be shared by all in the House, and I suppose that Mr Lunn is in a halfway house between celebration and commemoration. Alex Maskey said one thing that was accurate when he said that the Ulster covenant predated the foundation of Northern Ireland. In many ways, the historical significance of the Ulster covenant is that it is, effectively, Northern Ireland's birth certificate: its legacy lives on.

Over the days to come, I suspect that many unionists of various descriptions will express our support for the covenant and our association with Edward Carson and James Craig. In many ways, all of us on the unionist side of the House, of whatever strand and opinion, are the sons and daughters of Carson and Craig. We are all, rightly, honouring their memory, and indeed —

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I will just go back to his "halfway house" comment, if he does not mind. I am not in any halfway house on this. I support the motion absolutely, but I am prepared to recognise the reality of the intervening 100 years.

Mr Weir: Through the Chair, I did not suggest that you were not in any way supportive of the motion. I think that the Alliance Party is in a hokey-cokey situation over the celebration — half in and half out. However, you are perfectly entitled to take that position, and I appreciate perfectly that not everyone in the House will see the Ulster covenant as positively as I do or seek to celebrate it in that way. However, all of us clearly acknowledge that the Ulster covenant's legacy is a lasting one, without which I suspect that none of us would be sitting in the House today.

As was indicated, the covenant had historical resonances. The proposer referred to its biblical implications and how it very much reflected the 17th-century Scottish covenant, which I think was significant. Indeed, its emulation of that document is shown in two other significant strands in the covenant. First, it was very much a declaration of nationhood, of being part of the British nation. To that extent,

one of the covenant's great legacies was that it reflected the reality of two nations on the island of Ireland. I appreciate that that will not be accepted by all Members, but it reflected reality then and reflects it now. The Ulster covenant also embodied, as did the Scottish covenant, a belief that political participation and expression of political will were not simply for the elite but for all the citizens of the country. Therefore, the Scottish covenant and the Ulster covenant were signed by many: in the case of the Ulster covenant, by about half a million people. It is also the case that the two allied documents, at a time before there was universal suffrage and before women had the vote, recognised the support within unionism for the suffrage, rights and equality of women. In many ways, what happened in 1912 was way ahead of its time. That is also something to be celebrated.

The covenant has historic significance. It was produced by the combination of Carson and Craig, a partnership that was complementary but also stood the test of time in ways that other contemporary historical partnerships did not. It was an era in which political duos were commonplace. On the Irish nationalist side in the late 1910s and early 1920s, there was de Valera and Collins, and, in British political life for over a decade, there was the key partnership of Asquith and Lloyd George. Both those relationships ended fairly badly — that is about as kindly as I can put it — but Carson and Craig's partnership endured. Indeed, it is hard to believe that the success of the covenant and the foundation of the state of Northern Ireland would have been achieved had it not been for both those men.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. He is right to draw attention to Carson and Craig, but will he also pay tribute to Sinclair, the man who drafted the covenant, who was a tremendous wordsmith of his time?

Mr Weir: That is undoubtedly the case as well. There is a lot to be learned from this centenary. George Mitchell once said that, in America, people knew too little about their history and, in Northern Ireland, they knew too much. That is wrong. At times, there is a level of ignorance of our history in this country, and it is important that we use this as an opportunity to educate people about it.

As was said earlier, Carson is not, perhaps, the two-dimensional figure that has been portrayed. He was ultimately prepared to embrace pragmatism. What eventually emerged was not the ideal solution that Carson would have put in place.

History is not just about the vast sweep of the creation of a nation; it is about the personal and about the family. Therefore, I also welcome the fact that the motion refers to the excellent Public Record Office project, which all of us, whether or not we come from the unionist tradition, can check to see where our ancestors and their neighbours lived 100 years ago when they made that contribution to public life.

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

Mr Weir: This centenary is an event of great significance, and I welcome and support the motion.

Mr Nesbitt: The year 1912 must not be seen as a singular moment in our history. As with much in our past, 1912 and the events that surrounded it need to be seen in a specific national and international context. Although today the Ulster covenant and the home rule crisis are portrayed as a struggle exclusively based on this island, the epoch spanning the home rule period from 1886 to 1921 ushered in dynamic political change for the whole of the United Kingdom. It would be a failing of unionism if we were to focus solely on the consequences and the outcome in a purely Ulster or Irish context.

The proposals of the third home rule Bill fundamentally changed the character of the United Kingdom. Those who were opposed to the Bill did so to maintain the Union and to save the empire and fought in the interests of the individual citizen. Home rule was not an issue solely for Ireland; it was an issue for the whole of the UK at every level of society and was taken up in the great cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Newcastle, where opposition to home rule was as fervent as it was in Belfast. The leadership of great British leaders such as Bonar Law, Joseph Chamberlain, FE Smith and others in the crisis has largely been forgotten, but today, we must reassert the fact that Ulster was not an anomaly. Ireland was not alone; the United Kingdom was an amalgam, a fusion of four countries bound by history, character and economics. The fight of 1912 was for the kingdom, not for a small corner of it. The same will happen between now and 2014, when Scotland will vote on independence. What sort of crusade will unionists in this House mount against that? What powers of persuasion will we employ?

My predecessors had a plan: a solemn oath and covenant that had its roots, as we heard, in

the Scottish Covenanters of the 17th century. I pay tribute to my colleague Michael McGimpsey who, when Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, had the foresight to digitise and upload to the PRONI website the Solemn League and Covenant. There, I am able to read the name of Alfred Nesbitt of 113 Agincourt Avenue in Belfast. I read it, sir, with pride. It is interesting, though, to look at the records and at how they are broken down and see that resistance to home rule was not restricted to people living in what is now Northern Ireland. The PRONI records contain signatures from many, many areas. One hundred years on, it is interesting to note how many beyond the borders of Northern Ireland signed up. The full list is broken down as follows: Antrim by five subregions; Armagh by four; at sea; Australia; Belfast; Canada; Cavan by three regions; China; Donegal; Down by five; Dublin; England by 38 subregions; Fermanagh; Kildare; Kilkenny; Leitrim; Limerick; Lisbellaw; Londonderry; Louth; Mayo; Meath; Monaghan; Scotland; Sligo; South Africa; Tyrone; United States of America; Wales; Waterford; Westmeath; Wicklow; various; and not recorded.

On this day 100 years ago, 18 September 1912, Carson held the first of 11 meetings over 10 days that formed his famous covenant campaign. The venue was Enniskillen, and, as we heard, 30,000 to 40,000 people gathered at Portora Hill. Historian Gordon Lucy of the Ulster Society described it thus:

"The town set the tone for all the later demonstrations, exhibiting the people's mixture of solemn determination and confident enthusiasm for the Campaign ... Special trains from Belturbet, Cootehill, Bundoran, Monaghan, Castleblayney ... and many other towns brought Unionists to ... Enniskillen".

The departure points of those trains remind me of statistics that we heard in the House as recently as yesterday. The unionist/Protestant population of the Republic disappeared under partition, which was the very thing that Carson fought against. It shrunk to some 2% of the population from a starting point in double digits. By contrast, the nationalist population in Northern Ireland is flourishing, albeit with opinion polls suggesting that few would currently vote for a united Ireland. Therefore, today, we see the Union more secure than at any stage in our past. Our traditional enemies now accept the state in which they live.

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

Mr Nesbitt: I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wrote a piece on commemoration and celebration some time ago, and I will quote from it here if I may. Commemoration is the putting of historical events into a modern-day context. It is a reflection on what happened in a certain period of history. Commemoration may include some aspects of celebration, but, in a lot of cases, it will be of events that, on the face of it, would not necessarily be something that you could celebrate; for example, the 1916 rising or the battle of the Somme. We all know the great cataclysms that those events brought about. Therefore, commemoration has to be done in a very dignified and open way so that you are being generous to others as well as commemorating and celebrating.

All the commemorations that will take place over the next 10 years should open up a national debate on what our relationships are in their totality. They should ideally promote reconciliation rather than deepen division. In that sense, there must be some inclusive aspect to all of them. None of them can be totally stand-alone. The commemorations give an opportunity for everybody to look back on what is a shared history on this small island.

The incoming decade of commemorations will also challenge people to look at things that they may never have looked at before. We saw that to a certain extent with the Titanic commemoration that was held earlier this year. We have to look at it in the context that the legacy and history of the Titanic and the shipyard is not necessarily an inclusive one. I spoke about that in the Chamber when we discussed the Titanic commemoration. However, we must deal with all that in its totality as part of our shared history and that of Belfast.

It is important that commemorations of the past, such as of the signing of the covenant, are not used to promote division and heighten tension in a divided society such as ours. There should be no triumphalism or coat-trailing. The challenge is how to use these events to promote greater understanding of events from all perspectives and lived experiences and see how they impacted on the lives of people from all traditions. It should help us to understand the political, social and economic factors and dynamics that motivated individuals and groups to do what they did and change the course of history. Our history is a shared and complex one that still reverberates today. I remind Members that we, as Gaels, celebrate Edward

Carson every year when we compete for the Poc Fada on the lawns at Stormont for the Corn Eamonn Mac Carsáin, the Edward Carson Cup.

The Ulster covenant may not, on the face of it, look like a shared historical event, but we all recognise the import of the covenant for our shared history and realise that, for every action, there is a reaction. The usurpation of democratic national desire for home rule and independence that was brought about by the covenant preceded the formation of the Ulster Volunteers and the Irish Volunteers and the Larne and Howth gunrunning exercises. We must also remember that we were being used in a bigger picture and that the politics of Britain came into play in this part of the world. Randolph Churchill, famously, played the orange card, while the minority Liberal Government required nationalist backing.

I hope that the events of this summer will not unduly colour the events marking the covenant. I know that sensible and sober debate is taking place on that. In that respect, I feel that I may speak on matters in my town of Dungiven over the summer. Some things have been said, some of which are half-truths and untruths. We have very good community relations in Dungiven and, indeed, in the borough of Limavady. The minister of the church bore that out in his statements to the 'Derry Journal' recently. People may not know this, but we normally have two annual parades in Dungiven.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Member must return to the motion.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As I said, I hope that cool heads will prevail over the events on 28 September. The importance of that event and how it is carried out will influence how other commemorations will take place over the next 10 years. So, I urge everybody to take a step back and to have a look at this in its historical context. Let us hope that it will act as a catalyst for all the other events over the next decade.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I therefore 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 debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

2. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the option of alternative dispute resolution as an alternative to taking a case to court. (AQO 2443/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): As I have said on many occasions, I support the use, in appropriate cases, of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes that can avoid court proceedings, which may be lengthy, costly and stressful for those involved. The access to justice review report commissioned by my Department highlighted a number of potential benefits of ADR, particularly mediation, including greater flexibility over outcomes and sustaining better relationships between parties. As the review report also emphasised, it is important to select the right cases for ADR.

The report noted that the development of ADR in Northern Ireland to date has been piecemeal and unco-ordinated. It is a fragmented landscape. Therefore, our first step is to comprehensively map the current provision for ADR in Northern Ireland. That work has been commissioned and will be completed by the end of the year. Alongside that, we are engaging with other Departments with an interest in alternative dispute resolution processes. That will provide a better understanding of the current position to allow us to identify ways in which ADR could be further supported, while ensuring value for money.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for that reply and his candour in describing some of the measures thus far as piecemeal and unco-ordinated. In pursuit of that and to try to rectify that, will the Minister outline any update in respect of how his Department will continue to work with community restorative justice (CRJ) as one of the very important methods of alternative mediation?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maskey for his supplementary question. He will realise that there is engagement with a number of bodies such as CRJ, which have satisfied the requirements of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland and play a part in the criminal justice process. As I see it, at this stage, the alternative dispute resolution process is largely directed towards civil justice, although we have seen some successes, particularly with young people, in the criminal justice field, too.

Mr Kinahan: What best practice from other jurisdictions is the Minister working to with regard to alternative dispute resolution?

Mr Ford: As I said, we are seeking to map out what exists in Northern Ireland. There are clearly lessons that can be learned, although I am not sure that Northern Ireland is that far behind what is being done in other jurisdictions in these islands. As I have said before, I am quite prepared to learn lessons from anywhere in the world that can help us to provide the best possible system of justice in our jurisdiction.

Mr A Maginness: Although it might be unpopular with fellow lawyers, I have to confess that I think an alternative dispute resolution system here would be exceptionally helpful. Does the Minister have any plans to extend training in alternative dispute resolution to lawyers?

Mr Ford: Oh dear, Mr Deputy Speaker, I fear that Mr Maginness is going to make me hug a lawyer, which could be bad news. The reality is that the training of lawyers is not my responsibility. There is training within the two branches of the profession and at institutions of higher education. However, just last week, I discussed with representatives of barristers the view that, in many cases, alternative dispute resolution may benefit from the input of those with a legal background. Therefore, there is clearly scope for Mr Maginness's professional colleagues to engage in ADR, and I trust that many more of them will take the training courses that are available to them.

Crime: Elderly People

3. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice what steps are being taken through the community safety strategy or other strategies within his Department to combat crimes against elderly people. (AQO 2444/11-15)

Mr Ford: The community safety strategy sets out the framework for reducing the fear of crime

and for helping older and vulnerable people to feel safer. The importance of the safety of older people is also reflected in the Programme for Government, with a commitment to tackle crime and the fear of crime against older and vulnerable people by more effective and appropriate sentences and other measures. The community safety strategy acknowledges the impact of the fear of crime amongst older and vulnerable people. A key focus of work will be on developing intergenerational practice at regional and local level to build trust between young and old and to consider how to develop a wider understanding of the fear of crime in Northern Ireland and its particular impact on older and vulnerable people. The new strategy will build on existing good work, such as neighbourhood watch, local alert schemes and community safety warden schemes, to prevent attacks on elderly people.

Policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) play a key role in tackling crime and building confidence locally through engaging and consulting with communities on the issues that matter to them, and PCSPs across Northern Ireland are delivering a range of projects and initiatives with local communities to tackle crime and improve community safety.

I am also consulting on a strategic framework for reducing offending. That aims to deliver a safer society for all, with fewer victims of crime of all ages, by addressing the factors leading people into criminal behaviour and the obstacles to them moving away from it.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his response and the initiatives that he has outlined. In light of the House's support on the subject, has the Department given any reconsideration to the idea of minimum mandatory sentences for attacks on the elderly?

Mr Ford: The simple answer to that is that I am waiting to see the results of the work being done by the Lord Chief Justice's group, which is looking at the issue of guidelines. Guidelines from the independent judiciary, involving the wider process with the lay membership in the Lord Chief Justice's work, is the best way to address the issue.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Last week, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development announced a programme aimed at tackling rural poverty and social isolation. Will the Minister collaborate with her on that new idea?

Mr Ford: I can inform My Lynch that I have had no request from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to engage in that programme. I fear that if were to go into the issues of wider rural crime, I might be trespassing onto a subsequent question, and Mr Irwin might be displeased.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister support the introduction of tougher sentences for those who attack the elderly? If so, what plans has he put in place to do that?

Mr Ford: The simple answer is that I support the use of appropriate sentences to deal with all crimes, whatever range they come from. I recognise the reality of the limited amount of crime that is directed against older people but the seriousness of that which does occur.

Mr Rogers: The fear of crime is probably one of the biggest concerns among our elderly people. How does the Minister intend to reassure them that they are top priority for all justice agencies for protection?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Rogers for that point. The reality is that the Northern Ireland crime survey 2010-11 showed that there is less fear of crime amongst older people than amongst the population generally, whether it be violent crime or expectation of becoming a victim of burglary or car crime. So, clearly, it is not necessarily the case, despite the efforts of certain people in the media, that older people are in fear of crime more than others. It is clear that older people have a greater fear of crime than their likelihood of being affected, and Mr Rogers quite rightly highlights that issue. Part of the role of policing and community safety partnerships is to ensure that we address that fear of crime alongside the crime itself.

Prison Service: Redundancy Scheme

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Prison Service redundancy scheme. (AQO 2445/11-15)

Mr Ford: A total of 544 members of staff applied for the voluntary early retirement scheme. Of those, 159 staff have been released to date, and a further 139 have been told that they will be allowed to leave when it is operationally possible for them to do so. All other applications remain under consideration.

Mr Hamilton: As the Minister outlined, the redundancy scheme was incredibly popular and was oversubscribed. He outlined that 139

members of staff wished to go but have not been able to go, and, obviously, operational considerations are at the forefront. Does the Minister appreciate that the inability of those people to leave is having an effect on their morale and could he outline to the House when he anticipates that they might be able to leave the service?

Mr Ford: I appreciate that there are morale concerns among those who wish to leave but have not yet been permitted to do so. However, Mr Hamilton should bear in mind the specific issue that if we were we to give people advance notice, it would lose them the compensation in lieu of notice that is a key part of the redundancy scheme. So, although it is unfortunate that we cannot give people the full details, we simply cannot do so, in order to ensure that they get the maximum benefit.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that the redundancy scheme is a part of the wider reform package, will the Minister give us an update on the rolling out of the reform programme?

Mr Ford: I will resist the temptation to take the rest of Question Time to talk about the whole of the reform package. I suspect that Mr McCartney and other members of the Justice Committee might particularly want to hear about the HR aspects of it. We now have the first 60 recruits engaged in the training course at Millisle as of this week: that is, three classes of 20 recruits. Last week, I had the pleasure of going to meet those who are starting their course today. One of those I spoke to was one of the first class, who, on the basis of seven days in training college, gave an extremely impressive comment on what she had learned, the work that was being done and her ambitions and those of her colleagues to be a part of a reformed Prison Service. I have no doubt that that aspect of the programme — getting new staff into place to reinforce the good work that is already being done by other staff in the Prison Service — is going apace as fast as we can expect. As Mr Hamilton pointed out, that will allow others to leave in the future.

Mr Dickson: Minister, thank you for your answers to the questions so far. The reform programme includes oversight and governance arrangements. Will you tell the House how those are progressing?

Mr Ford: I resisted going to the wider issues for Mr McCartney, but I am now caught.

There is now a formally established oversight group, which I chair. It meets on a quarterly basis. There is a very detailed report going to the meeting this week, which explains all the different work strands, including HR, estates and all the other pieces of work that are going forward together. I believe that it shows that good work is being done by the Prison Service. I also know that those who sit on the oversight group with me will robustly question the officers of the Prison Service who come into that meeting and will ensure that the commitments given are being lived up to and that the work that is said to be completed has been properly carried through. Those reports go — in a slightly amended or abbreviated form for obvious reasons — to the Justice Committee, which gives the Committee the opportunity to keep in touch with what is happening.

Criminal Justice: Victims and Witnesses

5. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice what progress is being made to implement the recommendations contained in the report by the Justice Committee following its inquiry into the experience of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system. (AQO 2446/11-15)

Mr Ford: I was very pleased to welcome the Justice Committee's report of its inquiry into services for victims and witnesses of crime. As I said in the Chamber on 3 June, I commend the Committee on what is clearly an extremely important piece of work and the Committee's thorough approach to it. I have accepted, or accepted in principle, each of the Committee's 30 recommendations, and my Department has written to the Committee to confirm how those will be taken forward.

I assure the Member that work is already under way to give effect to those recommendations. Within the next few weeks, I plan to publish for consultation a new five-year strategy aimed at improving access to justice for all victims and witnesses. The content of the draft strategy has been substantially influenced by the Committee's deliberations.

I hope that slightly over half of the Committee's recommendations will be implemented over the next two financial years. The draft strategy will, of course, be shared with the Committee prior to publication. I look forward to continued collaboration with the Committee in that important area.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for the way in which he has engaged with the Committee and recognised the good work that has been done in producing the report and accepting its recommendations. Obviously, the Minister is aware that a number of them require significant resources. He indicated in his primary response that they will be implemented over the next two financial years. Will he assure the House that the financial and human resources needed to give effect to those recommendations will be found?

Mr Ford: I made it clear that we hope to progress a number of the recommendations over the next two years. It is my intention to prioritise, perhaps in conjunction with further discussion with the Committee, those issues that can be addressed. There is no point in saying that we will prioritise them without ensuring that resources are addressed to those key issues. However, the Committee Chair is well aware of the difficulties that we are under and there will be a difficult job in prioritising to ensure that we deliver the best we can.

2.15 pm

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Has the Courts and Tribunals Service given any consideration to improving its estate to facilitate victims and witnesses, the need for which was outlined in the report?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Bradley for that question. Yes, the Courts and Tribunals Service is engaged in reviewing the estate. Members will be aware of the issue around the five hearing centres. It is clear that although a number of our courthouses provide good accommodation, none of them provides the best possible accommodation for victims and witnesses, particularly vulnerable victims and witnesses, and a number of the older courthouses provide accommodation that is, frankly, not up to the purpose that I would wish to see. That will be ongoing work for the estate strategy.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Is he concerned that, only last week, a number of high-profile trials collapsed because of prosecution witness difficulties? Does he accept that the non-attendance of prosecution witnesses through fear or intimidation is a failing on his part and that of his Department?

Mr Ford: Funnily enough, Mr Deputy Speaker, no, I do not accept that it is a failure on the part

of my Department. Clearly, there are issues as to how we support those who are vulnerable witnesses, and that requires long-term investment in buildings in some cases; it requires different methods of support; it requires, for example, the work that we will be proceeding with in the next Justice Bill to deal with the avoidance of cross-questioning of witnesses twice through the preliminary inquiry process. All those issues are being addressed by the Department, and all those are clearly relevant. Blaming the Department of Justice for problems that have existed in the system for many years is just a little bit party political.

Multiagency Risk Assessment Conferences

6. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the introduction of an information-sharing agreement in relation to multiagency risk assessment conferences. (AQO 2447/11-15)

Mr Ford: Members will be aware from my answer on 22 May that it was the aim of the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) operational group to have the information-sharing agreement signed by all parties when the group met on 18 June. As a result of the discussions on 18 June, it was agreed that further clarifications were required from the Information Commissioner's Office. In addition, some members wished to clarify the latest version with their own legal advisers.

I believe that it is essential to have a robust information-sharing agreement in place to meet data protection principles and to ensure the protection of information for victims' participation in a MARAC. It is important, therefore, to ensure that the final document is fit for purpose. I am very pleased to inform Members that all the necessary clarifications have been obtained and that, at its meeting yesterday, the MARAC operational group agreed in principle to the information-sharing agreement and has now embarked on the process of obtaining the relevant signatures.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am glad that there has been progress on this issue. He is well aware of the concerns that I have raised with him on the issue over a protracted period. Will he expand on his definition of "in principle"? Surely, the issue now is that it should be put in practice, and it should not be left to civil servants to look over and further discuss in principle, but put in practice, because victims here should be at the centre of the process.

Mr Ford: I entirely agree with Mr Storey that the issue needs to be put in practice at the earliest possible point. My understanding is that I have used the term "in principle" because, in some cases, issues had to be referred back to the formal leadership of the organisations concerned. However, he refers to civil servants: I can assure him that the civil servants in the Department of Justice have been doing all they could in recent months to speed the process up.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I listened to the Minister's response to Mervyn Storey. With regard to ensuring that, through the multi-agency conferences, information is provided, is he minded to look at the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and how that information will be processed?

Mr Ford: A number of issues are being looked at as we consider the wider issue of the joint domestic and sexual violence strategy. The current document, which outlines priorities until September next year, is a joint production between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and my Department. In the coming weeks, we will be looking towards developing the new strategy. It will look at the whole issue of domestic and sexual violence so that we have a strategy in place from September next year.

Mr Gardiner: Minister, information sharing in relation to domestic abuse is vital. Can you outline how sharing is facilitated across different jurisdictions and how successful the current approaches are?

Mr Ford: I am not in a position to give the House a detailed comment on the sharing of information across jurisdictions in that general sense, but if Mr Gardiner wishes to raise specific questions with me, I will happily respond to them.

Mr Dallat: Assuming that this thing will get beyond being agreed in principle and actually happen — it should have happened a long time ago — can the Minister assure us that it will not be overly bureaucratic and that it will, in fact, be practical and work?

Mr Ford: I can assure Mr Dallat that that has been the whole basis on which MARACs have operated up until now. There have been issues over information sharing and the role of the Information Commissioner's Office in giving advice, but the key point is to ensure that all the relevant statutory agencies, together with the

key voluntary bodies, are able to work together to protect those — largely, women and children — who are vulnerable. That issue is the whole basis of MARAC, which the Department is determined to support.

Burglary: Self-defence

7. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to review the law governing homeowners' defence of their properties and families from attack by intruders. (AQO 2448/11-15)

Mr Ford: Situations where householders are confronted by intruders are, thankfully, rare, but they are extremely distressing when they happen. The law already provides that people are entitled to use reasonable force in resisting crime. The reasonableness of the level of force is a matter for the courts, but the law offers principles to assist. It will judge people's honest belief about what was happening, even if that belief was mistaken. It will not expect people to make precise judgements in the heat of the moment and, in particular, it will take into account the nature of the threat, including whether it was to life and limb or simply to property.

My view is that the existing law in Northern Ireland provides sufficient protection for householders. However, I am considering the value of issuing public guidance on the use of reasonable force to protect against crime. My officials have been working with the Public Prosecution Service and will consult with the Justice Committee.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am sure that the Minister will accept that many homeowners, especially the elderly, feel vulnerable, and that they certainly feel that they are not adequately protected in protecting themselves, as the law stands. Am I right in saying that the Republic of Ireland is in the process of passing new laws to give more rights to people who are protecting themselves and their property?

Mr Ford: I am not aware of the situation across the border, but I am aware that there was some codification of the law, which was recently carried through in England. The reality is that all it did was restate the existing common law practice — the use of reasonable force — which is the common law as applies in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Overend: I want to take that on further. Has the Minister considered how homeowners

are protected in other European or Commonwealth countries?

Mr Ford: No, but if the Member has information that she wishes to supply, I will gratefully receive it.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as a chuid freagraí. I thank the Minister for his responses. Does the Minister have any statistics with regard to the defence of property and families from attack by intruders in the North over the past two years? I know it is a pretty big issue. Many people, especially older people, feel vulnerable and are traumatised by these circumstances.

Mr Ford: I do not believe that statistics are compiled in the way that Mr McGlone has just referred to, but if there is anything useful, I will write to him with the information.

Prisons: Full-body Imaging Scanners

8. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice what progress has been made on the installation of full-body scanners at locations within the Northern Ireland prison estate. (AQO 2449/11-15)

11. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the body scanner pilot schemes in Magilligan and Hydebank Wood prisons. (AQO 2452/11-15)

Mr Ford: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 8 and 11 together.

As I previously announced, I made a commitment that the Prison Service would pilot and evaluate the use of two types of full-body imaging scanners — millimetre wave and transmission X-ray scanners. Prison Service officials have leased two millimetre wave scanners from two different suppliers, the first of which was delivered and installed at Magilligan prison yesterday. Following the delivery of staff training, it is anticipated that that pilot will commence on 26 September.

A second millimetre wave scanner from a different supplier is due to be delivered to Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre next month, and a similar pilot will commence then.

The Prison Service has also commenced the process of seeking approval for the use of transmission X-ray scanners in prisons in

Northern Ireland, under the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004. Transmission X-ray scanners have not yet been approved for use in prisons in any part of the UK. A senior governor has been appointed to take that work forward and has commenced the process of preparing a NIPS justification application, as required under the legislation.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. When does he believe the pilot will be finished? If successful, when does he imagine the scanners will be placed in Maghaberry?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Eastwood for his question. There are two parts to what he asked. The simple question was on the duration of the pilots at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood. It is anticipated that both pilots will last three months. They will involve the existing practice of full-body searching alongside the use of a millimetre wave scanner to see whether the scanner is as effective as the existing practice in ensuring the security of prisoners and prison staff. If they are successful, it is planned to put that technology into use in the two prisons at the earliest possible point.

The Member also asked about Maghaberry. There are serious issues over whether it is possible to have adequate protection in what is a category A prison with some of the most dangerous prisoners in Northern Ireland in custody at Maghaberry. Whether the technology that we plan for the other two prisons is adequate will be a key question that will have to be addressed if the millimetre wave scanners are seen to be effective at the other two institutions. That is why we are seeking justification authorisation for the use of transmission X-ray scanners at Maghaberry. They are seen as providing a more robust means of searching technology than what is being implemented in the two pilots at the moment. As I said, there has, as yet, been no approval for the use of transmission X-ray scanners in any UK prison. We, therefore, need to address significant issues to ensure that we can get the appropriate technology fully approved.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the timeline for the introduction of the X-ray machines? Will there be a process for the application? If so, how long will that take?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Ms Boyle's question. The difficulty is that I cannot give any guarantee about the timeline for the introduction of

transmission X-ray scanners, simply because the process has not been applied in any prison in any part of the UK. Therefore, the length of time that it will take to get the justification process through is simply not in our hands. There are issues that have to be addressed by other Departments and agencies. All I can say is that we are seeking to make progress on that as fast as possible.

Members will recall that an application was being considered by a prison in Yorkshire. We had hoped that we would follow that through. However, my understanding is that it is not progressing that application at the moment. Therefore, the Northern Ireland Prison Service is taking the lead on this in the UK, which makes it more difficult to determine what the timescale will be. All I can simply say is that it will happen as fast as possible.

Ms Lo: May I ask the Minister whether there are enough safeguards to protect pregnant women, particularly those who may not know they are pregnant, and their fetuses when going through those X-ray machines?

Mr Ford: My colleague raises a very significant question. The issue of transmission X-rays is significant and more complex in scientific terms than the issue of millimetre wave scanners. If any Members have passed through Belfast International Airport in the past few days, they will have seen the millimetre wave scanner at the search area. Such scanners are becoming increasingly common in airports. They do not emit ionising radiation and do not present anything like the same health concerns as transmission X-rays do. As Anna points out, the use of transmission X-rays involves quite significant issues for pregnant women. There are also issues with the frequent use of transmission X-rays potentially causing problems, particularly for younger prisoners, so a range of issues would have to be addressed. At this stage, there is certainly no plan to consider transmission X-rays for any female prisoner.

2.30 pm

Social Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Housing Executive: Redecoration Grants

1. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister for Social Development why Housing Executive tenants are being refused redecoration grants after having window replacements. (AQO 2455/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): First, no tenant who needs a redecoration grant following window replacement will be refused. The Member will be aware that I had concerns that the Housing Executive's specification for the supply and fitting of double-glazed windows did not offer value for money. I asked the Housing Executive's chief executive to review that specification. The new specification for replacement double-glazed windows, in line with the Glass and Glazing Federation's recommendations, allows window replacements from the outside rather than the inside of a dwelling, as has been the Housing Executive's practice. That means that existing windows can be removed and new windows fitted with minimal damage to inner reveals. This reduces the need for redecoration grants to be paid. However, the Housing Executive recognises that there may be some "by exception" situations in which redecoration grants are required following window replacements. For example, some window reveals may be damaged in their entirety by virtue of either the removal of existing windows or the fitting of new ones. In such cases, redecoration grants may be paid following the verification of such by the Housing Executive's area inspectorate. Initial estimates of savings using the revised specification is £15 million, the bulk of which comes from the reduced need for redecoration grants.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Not only has the refusal of redecoration grants put pressure on residents but many people have found that their blinds do not fit after the work has been completed. Is any provision being made to revise the decision to refuse grants or help those adversely affected by it?

Mr McCausland: I will make it absolutely clear: I said that there should not normally be a need for a redecoration grant because there will be no damage to the inner reveal. I do not know about the Member who posed the question, but I had windows fitted in my home. They were fitted from the outside, as is normal practice throughout the glazing sector. In my case, there was no need for any internal work. If that

is the case, we will be able to save £15 million. I would rather we spent the £15 million on, perhaps, fitting new kitchens, increasing insulation in Housing Executive properties or whatever — valuable, valid and important work — than squandered it on unnecessary and unwarranted work. I am sure that most Members share that concern. Certainly, as I said, exceptions will be looked at if there is a justifiable case in a particular situation.

Mrs Hale: Minister, you have said that you believe that financial benefits can be achieved from the review. Have you any idea what they are?

Mr McCausland: I always intended to ensure that we met the Programme for Government target while ensuring best value for money and meeting industry standards. The Housing Executive review has resulted in a revised fitting method that, in many cases, negates the need for a redecoration grant. That is where the bulk of the savings — estimated to be in the region of £15.1 million — can be made. That is a considerable saving. If we can put that £15.1 million into other priority areas, whether it be new kitchens, heating schemes or whatever, surely that will benefit the tenants who receive the new kitchens and heating schemes, which, in many cases, are long awaited. If we can save money and spend it wisely, rather than carrying out unnecessary and unwarranted work, so much the better.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister detail the level of consultation by the Housing Executive with its tenants before that type of work is undertaken?

Mr McCausland: I am not clear exactly what that question means. When a window replacement scheme is brought forward, people are usually clambering over one another to have it done rather than to have it delayed. I have yet to come across people who turn down new double glazing. In fact, when I came into the Department, I was appalled by the fact that it would take the Housing Executive 10 years to complete the window replacement scheme. That is why we set a target in the Programme for Government for this work to be completed within the lifetime of this Assembly, which was welcomed all around the Chamber and widely across the country. It was a personal commitment that I still stand over. We will have the work done within the lifetime of this Assembly, which is much better than the 10-year programme previously proposed by the executive.

Mr Dallat: The Minister just told the House that there is no need for a redecoration grant for replacement windows. Given the recent experience with Red Sky and others, will the Minister assure the House that, when contractors are not up to standard, redecoration grants will still be payable?

Mr McCausland: I welcome the Member's question because it gets to the heart of an issue that I am very concerned about. We need to be sure that the people who fit windows are good at it and that the job is done in a professional way. I have seen the work of a number of contractors — not just one — whose standard of fitting windows left a great deal to be desired. In fact, in one case in my constituency, a window was so badly fitted that you could put your hand in below it. That is simply unacceptable, which is why we are considering bringing forward an executive proposal for a separate tendering process for such work so that people with specialist skills will fit windows rather than people who may be general tradesmen but do not have that specialist skill. The executive has made the right decision, and I look forward to seeing that resulting in a better specification and standard of fitting.

Ilex: Fort George

2. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company will continue as the management company of the Fort George site. (AQO 2456/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The recent media speculation and ill-considered comments by some elected representatives around the future role of Ilex in the regeneration of the Fort George site have been unhelpful and confuse more important issues. A review of Ilex by the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) is under way. Concerns are regularly raised in the House about the efficiency and performance of arm's-length bodies. Reviews such as that being undertaken on Ilex are essential to ensure that arm's-length bodies deliver on the purpose for which they are established. I will be carefully considering what role Ilex should have in relation to the Fort George site in light of the conclusions of the PEDU review and the recommendations of the recent Public Accounts Committee report on former military sites and Ilex accounts. Whatever decision I take on the issue, I will ensure that there will be no adverse impact on the delivery of the projects earmarked for the Fort George site. I can assure the Assembly that I will continue to keep the focus on delivering proposed projects,

whether Ilex or my Department is tasked with the work. In the meantime, I urge everyone to await the outcome of the PEDU review. I also ask elected representatives to refrain from sowing confusion around the issue and undermining — [*Interruption.*] — the good work achieved to date. It is interesting that one Member felt obligated to try to interrupt there. I will leave people to draw their own conclusions from that.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. However, he should look at his own Department. A senior member of DSD staff in Derry made that comment. Will the Minister comment on where that senior official got the information to say that at a meeting in the city?

Mr McCausland: I am not aware of the comment to which the Member refers. If he is happy to give me the details of that and name the individual, I am happy to look into it.

Why is a change being considered? The recent Public Accounts Committee report on Ilex accounts for 2010-11 highlighted that the dual sponsorship of Ilex by my Department and OFMDFM was less than ideal and that the Department should consider a single departmental sponsor for Ilex. In addition, under the review of the financial process being taken forward by DFP, it is proposed that Departments move towards single sponsor arrangements for arm's-length bodies. OFMDFM and DSD have made a commitment to the PAC to work collaboratively to deliver single sponsor arrangements for Ilex by April 2013. The discussions have begun on how that change might be delivered and what its implications might be. One of the issues that is being considered is the possibility for the Department to take on operational responsibility for the management and regeneration of Fort George. That would place all responsibility and accountability for the one site in one organisation.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer on this occasion. Minister, what is the timescale for any decision or change forecast?

Mr McCausland: My Department and OFMDFM have made a commitment to the Public Accounts Committee to work collaboratively to deliver single sponsor arrangements for Ilex by April 2013.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. It is our job to scrutinise and question robustly. Is the Minister content with the degree of oversight of financial procedures

within which the Ilex regeneration company has operated?

Mr McCausland: Issues were clearly identified in Ilex. The appropriate changes have been made to maintain the highest possible level of oversight. I am satisfied that we are now in a much better place as a result.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing

3. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department will meet its target to have all windows in Housing Executive houses double-glazed by 2015. (AQO 2457/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Programme for Government target to provide double-glazed windows in all Housing Executive homes by 2015 will be met. However, the Member will be aware that I had concerns that the Housing Executive specification for the supply and fitting of double-glazed windows did not offer value for money. I asked the Housing Executive's chief executive to review the specification. While the review was taking place, I agreed that any contracts already placed with manufacturers and installers should continue. This year, over 7,000 Housing Executive homes will have planned window replacement carried out. The review will not have an impact on the target date of 2015 to have all Housing Executive homes double-glazed. Initial estimates of savings using the revised specification are around £15 million. Following an extensive survey earlier this year, the Housing Executive has put in place a three-year programme that will meet the Programme for Government target.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I certainly welcome it. Are there any other areas of concern in which targets for delivery will not be met?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question, because he raises an important point. Although I am not concerned about meeting the target to install double-glazed windows in all Housing Executive homes by 2015, early indications are giving me cause for concern about some of the other targets that the Housing Executive seems to be failing on — for example, the targets laid down for Bamford, the social housing development programme, response maintenance programmes, heating adaptations and disabled facilities grants. By way of an example, at the end of 2011-12, 96 Bamford units started against the target of 200 units. No Bamford units have started on site

during 2012 to date. However, a number of scheme proposals are business case-approved. In the light of that level of progress, securing starts on 850 units of supported housing accommodation during the four-year period from 2011-12 to 2014-15 will be a very challenging target. I want to see the budget for Bamford and all other budgets spent in their entirety this year. There should be no suggestion of surrendering moneys. There are 37,000 people on the waiting list who require a home of their own. Along with that are Housing Executive tenants who are in fuel poverty and are awaiting the replacement of old and expensive Economy 7 heating systems or old inefficient glass-fronted fires. We have the funding to replace those now. I want to see the lives and living conditions of vulnerable tenants improved while the budgets are there for installations, replacements and improvements. All work planned and agreed last year for implementation this year should progress according to plan, and I will hold the Housing Executive to account for making any excuse that there is no capacity for either identifying or completing work. My recent announcement on the boiler replacement scheme raised a lot of interest from contractors, who indicated to me that they are all available to carry out work. Already, more than 10,000 people have applied for the scheme, making untenable the suggestion that there is a lack of capacity.

2.45 pm

Mr McKay: Perhaps the Minister will update us on whether the Housing Executive has nearly completed that review. I am aware that he has met at least one company, Turkington Holdings, about the issue. Does he not agree that it is only fair that he should also meet the companies that have been directly affected by the suspension of this work?

Mr McCausland: I meet all who are willing to give me a view on the matter and, in fact, have something positive to contribute to the consideration. I am sure that the Member will share my concern that there was an unsatisfactory level of the fitting of windows and that the standard was not good enough in quite a number of areas. I have received widespread expressions of concern about that. I am sure that my experience in North Belfast with the company that was carrying out some work there was no different from the issues that came before MLAs in other areas. So, we need to be sure that we are getting good work that is to a high standard.

I am willing to talk to and listen to folk. The Glass and Glazing Federation is a useful point of reference, and that is why I met it.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister confirm that existing PVC windows that do not have double glazing will be included in the scheme, as well as externally facing doors?

Mr McCausland: The issue of windows is very clear: the term "double glazing" means exactly what it says. If it is not double glazing, it will be double glazing. There is no provision for doors in this scheme, but, as part of an ongoing scheme of improvements to houses, there can be situations where new doors are provided. I am sure that the Member will realise that there are financial constraints and that we have done a remarkable piece of work with the Housing Executive to get it to the point where we will get the work done in the next three years rather than under the 10-year programme that it proposed. That is a major advance, and I am sure that it will be appreciated by tenants right across the Province, including those in the Member's constituency.

Welfare Reform Bill

4. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he can give an assurance that there will be no breach in parity as a consequence of the delay in introducing the Welfare Reform Bill. (AQO 2458/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is normal practice for a Northern Ireland social security Bill to be introduced as soon as possible after the corresponding Westminster Bill has received Royal Assent. In this case, the Welfare Reform Act 2012 received Royal Assent on 8 March 2012. The Department for Work and Pensions accepts that some delay between the Great Britain Act and the corresponding Northern Ireland Act is inevitable, as Northern Ireland legislation can be introduced to the Assembly only after the Great Britain legislation has received Royal Assent and a number of pre-introductory legislative processes have been completed. On previous occasions, that delay was not regarded as a breach of parity, given that our aim has always been to facilitate the passage of the Bill and obtain Royal Assent in as timely a fashion as possible here. All the pre-introductory legislative processes have now been completed, and I have issued a paper to the Executive seeking their agreement to introduce the Bill to the Assembly.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Will he detail how the regulations that

will follow on from the Welfare Reform Bill will be awarded sufficient time for scrutiny before their anticipated commencement date of next April?

Mr McCausland: First, we are only now seeing the regulations that are emerging in Great Britain. We, therefore, will be in a position where, by taking the legislation through the Assembly and working in parallel on the regulations, the Assembly can make decisions about the legislation in the knowledge of the shape that the Northern Ireland regulations will take. In fact, one point that a number of parties made at an earlier stage was that they did not want to sign up to a legislative blank cheque without seeing regulations. That problem is resolved. The task before us is considerable, but I think that the Social Development Committee is well up to the challenge and will be able to accomplish the work in the time allotted. It will be a major piece of work. The Committee will have to meet frequently, and it will require a lot of commitment on its part. However, I am sure we all agree that it is a very important piece of work and that we need to get it right. Therefore, the Committee will give it time, energy and commitment.

Mr Storey: The Minister is right to underscore the importance of ensuring that the issue is dealt with in the right and proper manner. He referred to parity. Will he explain to the House what he understands to be the legal position should parity be broken?

Mr McCausland: The Belfast Agreement was given legal force by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 87 of the Act compels me, as Minister with responsibility, to consult the relevant Secretary of State at Westminster to seek to ensure that there is a single system of social security, pensions and child maintenance in the United Kingdom. The requirement to consult is, however, a two-way street, and I am looking closely at when and how Northern Ireland was actively consulted by Westminster in advance of the latest reforms. The Treasury's statement of funding policy notes that, if the Northern Ireland Assembly takes a decision on those matters, as it is entitled to, that deviates from the Westminster policy, those funding arrangements can be reviewed. Iain Duncan Smith made that very point in his most recent correspondence with me. Therefore, there would be clear implications if we were to deviate from parity.

Social Housing

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department, taking local public infrastructure into account, regulates where new housing association schemes are located. (AQO 2460/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive identifies what type of social housing is required and where it is required across Northern Ireland. Social housing schemes will either be built on land that is already in Housing Executive ownership or on land identified and acquired by housing associations that is in an area where there is a Housing Executive confirmation of need. Meeting housing need is therefore the predominant consideration in determining where such schemes are located.

The Housing Executive, where necessary, seeks to ensure that proposed schemes are located within easy reach of appropriate facilities and services. Planning Service, through the development plan and planning application processes, ensures that all housing schemes, both private and social, are sited in appropriate locations and meet the infrastructure requirements laid down in planning policy. However, social housing schemes cannot always meet the particular expectations of everyone, and expressed preferences for a specific area of choice cannot always be realised. For example, in areas of high demand, such as north Belfast, applicants to the common waiting list will have to accept that they may need to move to areas in which other houses or schemes are located. I am aware of cases in which tenants have been made multiple offers, sometimes in double figures, all of which have been turned down. Such tenants may have to accept that it is simply not possible to accommodate their very specific area of choice and that, if they really want alternative accommodation, they will have to move to a place where there is available accommodation, which may not be exactly in their very narrow area of choice.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that comprehensive reply, which I listened to with interest. Will he comment on the fact that housing associations, unlike private developers, do not have to make a contribution to improving the infrastructure in areas where they build social housing? I am talking about simple things, such as play parks etc. Some have contributed on a voluntary basis, but would it not be better to have something to lead them into contributing to local communities in that way?

Mr McCausland: The role of the Department is to provide the housing association grant to enable housing associations to build new properties. We also have a role in governance and certain other areas of oversight. The Member raises a valid point in that it is important that housing associations, when developing areas for social housing, take account of the need in the area, the likely social mix, the age profile and other issues to ensure that the development is suitable for the needs of those who will come into the area. That does not just apply to newbuilds. I have seen at least one glaring example of a housing association purchasing an existing complex for social housing and discovering subsequently that it was unsuitable for so many families with small children. There was also no opportunity for it or anyone else to provide a park locally. There are issues that need to be taken into account. That is why I welcome the role of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations. We engage with that body to make sure that all the relevant issues are taken into account, including conversations with local representatives at an early stage. Often, they are the folk with the local knowledge on the ground to advise on those matters.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister advise the House whether he is aware of any manipulation of waiting lists designed to justify the provision of social housing in certain areas?

Mr McCausland: The complexities of the calculations by which the Housing Executive determines its social housing development programme are remarkable. Along with some others, I asked for an explanation of it, and we spent most of a morning. You would have needed the most advanced computer available to even begin to understand it. I am sure that the Member would have the opportunity to approach the Housing Executive and have all of it explained to her at great length, as I did.

How it actually works in practice on the ground is very much in the hands of the Housing Executive. I said or I should have said that PEDU is doing some work with the Housing Executive. That area needs to be looked at, so that we can understand it. Some of the decisions that are made are bizarre. I remember one example — I think it was with regard to Rathlin; I have not got the exact figures off the top of my head — saying that, under the executive's calculation, you should build six houses this year and two the next. If you are going out to Rathlin and having to transport everything out to the island, why do six? Why not just do eight when you are there?

It is a very rigid — I think, at times, overly rigid — calculation.

As regards the other issue of the nature of the waiting list and how the Housing Executive does its calculations, among the key things it needs to take into account more and more are the implications of welfare reform and the fact that half our housing waiting list are singles, yet there has been a pattern of consistently building nothing but family housing. There is a lot of work still to be done on that, and we will return to it.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire fosta as ucht a fhreagra, agus seo í mo cheist air. Will the new housing and planning package announced by David Cameron apply in Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: The situation in Northern Ireland is different from that in Great Britain in a number of ways, and the Member's own party has made that point about housing. The point has also been well made by his party in terms of taking account of it when developing welfare reform in a way that is suitable for Northern Ireland. So, I am sure that the Member will share my view that Northern Ireland is very different from GB. We will certainly look at whatever is good in GB proposals. However, the benefit of devolution is that we can look at things, pick out the good things, learn from other things and make sure that we do it right. We will certainly do that.

Red Sky

7. **Mr F McCann** asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive or housing associations have retained any contracts with Red Sky, given the company's record on the quality of workmanship and double charging. (AQO 2461/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There has been a long track record of concerns about the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's contract management regime that stretches back to the previous Administration and culminated in the then Minister commissioning a review of governance in the Housing Executive on 7 October 2010. So, the issues that are identified are nothing new.

Red Sky Group Ltd is currently in administration. The Housing Executive has not retained any contracts with Red Sky — Housing Executive contracts with Red Sky ended on 14 July 2011 — and none of the 29 housing

associations has retained any contracts with Red Sky.

3.00 pm

However, Red Sky is not alone. I have considerable concerns regarding, for example, the quality of workmanship and double-charging of other contractors, and I await the results of the forensic examination that I instigated. We have had the PAC hearing on the Audit Office report. We have had sight of internal Housing Executive papers that identified major problems, and I think that, when we see the final results of the forensic examination, which simply looked at a substantial number of other contractors in the same way and to the same level of scrutiny as Red Sky, it will be interesting to see the issues emerging there as well. They were not unique.

Assembly Business

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As you know, I have frequently raised the point about Members walking in front of others who are speaking in the Chamber. I saw the worst example of that today, when Mr McKay walked in front of an individual who was making her maiden contribution in the Assembly. It was extremely distracting for her and for all concerned. I know that there are quite a few new Members in the Chamber, although the individual who carried out that particular act is quite an experienced Member from North Antrim. Will you, once again, emphasise to Members that they simply cannot do that and that, if they see someone on their feet, they should wait at the seats beside the door or somewhere that is not obtrusive to those who are speaking?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for raising that point. Members should have regard for other Members, particularly when they are on their feet. There is a clear direction that no one should pass in front of them. I remind Members of that and ask them to have due regard in the future.

Private Members' Business

Ulster Covenant: Centenary

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly recognises the signing of the Ulster covenant on 28 September 1912, in its centenary year, as an historic and significant event in the history of Northern Ireland; notes the availability of all the digitised signatures of the covenant via the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland website; and affirms the importance of Ulster Unionists Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon and their legacy, which remains in place today. — [Mr Copeland]

Mr Byrne: Let me say at the outset that the signing of the Ulster covenant certainly was an historic event. There are many sentiments expressed in the motion that I could agree with, but the last section of the motion, which:

"affirms the importance of Ulster Unionists Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon and their legacy, which remains in place today"

is the issue of primary concern to the SDLP.

What was the Ulster covenant? What did it mean to the signatories? It is generally recognised by historians that it was a solemn and binding oath to oppose home rule, but, as someone who has always espoused constitutional nationalism and political democracy, I think it is fair to say that the covenant was a major campaign organised by Carson and Craig. It was a mass movement exercise. It was very impressive, but it was also very threatening. In a historical context, we can now look back and see that it was a powerful, strong message, but it was also threatening to democracy.

The context, of course, was the home rule process. When Gladstone returned as the Prime Minister for a second go, his first statement was:

"My mission is to pacify Ireland."

In other words, Gladstone recognised that there was a great political issue that had to be dealt with, particularly after the famine, when there was such unease on this island of Ireland about the way governance had failed the people. We know that the first home rule Bill was defeated in 1886, and the second was defeated in 1893, but, in 1910, the Liberals and Irish Nationalists combined into a coalition under Asquith, with a

programme of government policies and initiatives, one of which was to bring in a third home rule Bill. We know that the third Bill was defeated in November 1912 by a vote of 228 to 206, but, within two months, serious negotiations had taken place, the Irish Nationalists had agreed to support the Government and their Budget, and there was also a trade-off in relation to reform of the House of Lords. Therefore, in January 1913, the third home rule Bill was passed.

The political significance is still with us today. It was a strong political resistance movement. The question is this: was it a subversive movement? We had the setting up of a resistance army in January 1912; the setting up of the Ulster Volunteers. That became the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913, when it was agreed that 100,000 men between the ages of 17 and 65 would be trained in weaponry. That unfortunately led to the development of other subversive organisations. The Irish Volunteers were subsequently replaced by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who were then replaced by the IRA.

There were street riots and pogroms as a result of the signing of the Ulster covenant. There were pogroms in Belfast. Many Catholic businesses were put out of business and many people had to emigrate from the North as a result. Unfortunately, the chant became "home rule is Rome rule". That was a highly emotive, sectarian term, and it fuelled the anxiety and sense of torment.

I know that we have moved on 100 years, but unfortunately, some of the relics are still about. Some of the recent disturbances reflect the angst and pain that was endured as a result of what happened when normal democratic politics was resisted in the way it was. At the end of the day, it was the British Government who brought forward the home rule Bill. It led to the 1916 rising and the war of independence. It led to an election in 1918, in which Sinn Féin got over 80 MP seats and the Nationalist Party was reduced to a handful. It took Sinn Féin from 1918 to 1998 to realise —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Byrne: — that normal democratic politics was the way forward.

As a result of the 1920-21 settlement, two Parliaments were set up; one in Dublin and one in Belfast.

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

Mr Byrne: All I can say is that I hope we have learned some lessons. The subversion of normal political democracy is a very dangerous phenomenon.

Mr McCausland: The Ulster covenant is, I believe, one of the most historic documents in the history of Ulster; indeed, in the history of Ireland and of the British Isles. It has been rightly described as the birth certificate of Northern Ireland, and it is a document that highlights very clearly the distinctiveness of Ulster. It has embedded in it certain core, fundamental principles. They are the founding principles of unionism. They were good principles then, I believe, and they are good principles today.

The document known as the Ulster covenant identifies the Britishness of the signatories. They saw themselves as subjects of their sovereign. They also saw themselves in a regional context as Ulstermen and Ulsterwomen in this region of the United Kingdom. They stressed very clearly in that document the material benefits and wellbeing that flowed from the union, because under the union, Ulster had prospered. The City Hall was completed in 1906 and was a very visible expression of the vitality and prosperity of Ulster. We also had the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church, which, again, was an expression of that local Presbyterian identity and particularly the Ulster-Scots identity. We had the biggest shipyard in the world, and even the wee yard was in some years building more ships than any other yard in the world. We had linen works, rope works and tobacco works: this was an industrial powerhouse.

The document spoke of equal citizenship. Sometimes, people today think that they have discovered the concept of citizenship, whereas citizenship was, in fact, talked about in that very document. It is remarkable, too, to consider that, before the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, the Young Citizen Volunteers (YCV) had been formed as an interdenominational organisation that included in its membership not only Protestants of various denominations but some Roman Catholics and some members of the Jewish community. The Young Citizen Volunteers grew out of the Belfast Citizens' Association, which was set up to promote the concept of good citizenship. Indeed, at that time, the YCV gave lectures on the importance of being good citizens to its young folk in the Belfast Technical College.

As well as the word "citizenship", there is the word "equal", because the concept of equality is embedded in the Ulster covenant. The concept of equality before the law is a very important principle that reaches right back to the Bill of Rights at the time of the Glorious Revolution — the Williamite revolution. It is a concept that I believe has been embedded in the thinking of Ulster people down through the years.

It is interesting to look back at the historical links between the Ulster covenant and some preceding events. In many ways, the person whom I find most interesting is a man called Major Frederick Hugh Crawford, whose direct ancestor Rev Thomas Crawford came across from Scotland at the beginning of the 17th century. You can visit his grave at Donegore Parish Church, close to the former garden centre. There, between the graves of Thomas and Fred is that of another descendant, who was a member of the United Irishmen. Fred Crawford's ancestors were Scottish Covenanters who had signed the covenant in their blood and were United Irishmen. Fred then signed the Ulster covenant in his own blood. Interestingly enough, he was very proud of the fact that he was of a liberal unionist tradition and that he had ancestors who had numbered among the United Irishmen. However, he also said that his greatest pride was that he was an Ulster Scot.

Also, from a local angle, there is, in north Belfast, a double connection with the Ulster covenant. The proposal for an Ulster covenant based on the Scottish covenant was made by a Belfast businessman called BWD Montgomery, who lived, at that time, on the Antrim Road in Belfast. He was the man who proposed to Sir James Craig that they model their new document on the old Scottish covenant, because he traced his ancestry back to the Montgomerys who came all the way across to Newtownards at the beginning of the 17th century. So the covenant was proposed by a north Belfast man, and, when it came to finally crafting it, the person who put the document together was, of course, the great Thomas Sinclair, a leading layman in the Presbyterian Church of his day.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to draw his remarks to a close.

Mr McCausland: He was also the leading liberal of his day and became the leader of the Liberal Unionists. He is one of the great Ulstermen who deserve to be remembered on this occasion of the centenary of the Ulster covenant.

Mr Allister: There is no more seminal event in the evolution and history of Northern Ireland than the Ulster covenant. It is the veritable cornerstone upon which Northern Ireland was built. Today, I would like to reflect on the determination and valour of our covenant forefathers. Faced with a British Government determined to push them out of the kingdom and contriving all sorts of devices to that end, they did not limply say, "Oh, what can we do? We better go with it because there might be a terrible plan B". No — there were no pushover unionists in 1912; there were no "roll-over" unionists in 1912. Thank God that there were not, because if they had had the quality of today's main leadership in unionism, there would never have been a Northern Ireland. Some excuse would have been found to reach an accommodation other than the creation of Northern Ireland.

Often, as I sit in the House, I ask myself what Edward Carson would think of this place. I think of that in the context of looking at core declarations in the covenant, such as:

"our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom".

The core and heart of the covenant was the retention, preservation and defence of that position. Today, as I compare that with the quality of citizenship evidenced and epitomised by the House, I find that, far from there being equality of citizenship on basic democratic values, such as the right that exists everywhere else in the United Kingdom to have an opposition and vote a party out of government, we have the very opposite. We have drifted and been prised so far away from the basic core values of equal citizenship that it is quite astounding.

3.15 pm

It is all the more discomfiting and disheartening to think that that was done by a successive generation of unionists and that they came to the point of saying that they would reward the terrorism of the IRA by guaranteeing those who are associated with it a permanent place in government so that they can continue to try to shuffle us out of the United Kingdom. Some who sit in this House today should reflect carefully on the great tradition and example that Carson laid down. Pushover, rollover unionism was no part of that.

I salute the memory of Lord Carson and Sir James Craig, and record appreciation for the stand that they took and the example that they

set. I express the hope that, even yet, some might seek to emulate and follow the valour and determination of their covenant forefathers.

I pay tribute to a number of the events that have been organised to celebrate the covenant. I visited and was particularly impressed by the Orange Order's covenant exhibition at Schomberg House. It is an extensive and very balanced presentation of the whole covenant period. I would urge anyone who has not visited it to do so. As we look forward to celebrating all that, we do so with our heads held high and with a sense of pride in the traditions that have been handed on.

I will finish with one word of regret. On this momentous occasion of the 100th anniversary of the covenant, we have not seen the declaration of a public holiday in Northern Ireland. When the fiftieth anniversary of the covenant was marked, there was a public holiday. Why not now?

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

Mr Allister: I think that I know the answer, but it is worth reflecting on. I apologise; I am going to a meeting with a Minister and cannot stay for the rest of the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr John O'Dowd, the Minister of Education, to respond on behalf of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As you said, I am responding on behalf of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Perhaps it is appropriate that the Minister of Education responds to the debate because much of it has been a history lesson about the covenant. It is interesting, all the same. I have enjoyed listening to the debate and to the various views and sometimes differing opinions on the history of the covenant.

The events of 1912 and 1922 shaped identities in Ireland and had an impact on relationships in the North of our island and on those between the North and the South and between Ireland and Britain. Those events resonate to this day, and that period in our history is an important touchstone.

The period provides some of the context for the journey that we have all shared and the new period of peaceful evolution out of the conflict that is now being diligently forged as the agreed basis for our future development. History, by its

very nature, is complex and infinite; it is not neat or ordered. Often its development is spontaneous, and its outworkings are chaotic. Tough decisions are frequently forced at the expense of more desirable choices, particularly in times of conflict.

History is a bundle of organic actions and evolving events, each consequential on another. To begin to examine history as we have done today in examining the history of Ireland during one decade one century ago is merely to look at a snapshot of the relationships between these islands that can be traced back eight centuries to Strongbow's invasion in the 12th century.

No one, however, should be under any illusion. The commemorations in the next decade of centenaries are important and interesting and significant, but history did not start with the Ulster covenant in 1912, the Easter rising in 1916 or Britain's partition of the island in 1921. It did not stop with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 or the St Andrews Agreement in 2006. Adopting a thoughtful perspective is just as critical as understanding the situational context when we consider the historical importance of centenary commemorations over the next 10 years.

Central to the republican political philosophy in Ireland for the past 200 years, promoted by leading Ulster Presbyterians in the Society of United Irishmen, have been the twin values of unity and equality. Aside from my personal commitment to those values as both inspiration and aspiration, I am pleased that they are essentially at the core of the Executive's broad principle framework for how we deal with commemorations over the next decade. The Executive are united around an inclusive and respectful approach that recognises that equality is at the core of our new dispensation and must be the basis of relationships and remembrance between us all. The Executive will continue to examine the options for a more detailed and pragmatic approach as and where appropriate. However, agreement on those broad overarching points a positive way ahead.

The composition of this Chamber reflects the different experiences, journeys and decisions that citizens and groups in this society have undergone. This power-sharing Assembly also represents the will of the people across the island, especially the unity of that society around a common framework of equality and the new political institutions, including the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. The seminal changes of the past 14 years provide a peaceful and democratic

alternative to the conflict of the past. They also permit the active pursuit of various long-held and legitimate historical objectives, even when those are diametrically opposed.

There is a long way to go until we fulfil the promise of a society on an island that can truly say that it is the champion of ultimate unity and substantive equality for all people. However, looking back over the decades to 100 years ago, we can see how far Ireland, particularly the North, has changed.

Some will be concerned about what they might view as an unhelpful focus on the past, especially in the light of challenges that we face today. Some will understandably say that the Assembly should focus on the socio-economic hardships facing families and communities instead of turning our attention to the canvas of our history. I point out that addressing socio-economic inequalities and wider deprivation is at the core of the Executive's current programme. However, as we work together, across all parties, to build, develop and promote a new stable structure founded on sustainable economic, social and equality progress, we must also consider the importance of history lessons to ensure that we never repeat the conflict of the past.

Others, particularly the British Government, promote the false notion that reconciliation in the present can be accomplished without recourse to consideration of the past. We, as locally elected and democratically accountable politicians, recognise that such a philosophy is deeply flawed. Ultimately, full reconciliation in the broadest sense that unites all the island's people on the basis of equality can be delivered only by recognising and exploring our shared historical journey; by reflecting on the various twists and turns and, most of all, tragedies of our ancient conflict; and by resolving that principles of mutual respect and inclusivity be at the heart of developing and building a new body of relationships.

Genuine reconciliation does not require anyone to give up their past or their politics, nor can it be founded on humiliation or hostility. Ultimately, genuine reconciliation must see us all engage in meaningful conversations about our past and our future, especially when we might instinctively find those conversations uncomfortable. Leadership demands no less. Our children's futures demand no less. The fractures and divisions in our relationships are healing, but some scars do not fade and some wounds can easily be reopened. For many, even the events and disturbances of recent weeks highlight the importance of respectful

relationships and remembrance to help build an inclusive and tolerant society. Equality and mutual respect must be the watchwords for the weeks to come.

There is a diverse range of significant historical events from the distant and more recent past that are important to many people. The key issue is not whether those events are remembered but how and why they are remembered in the context of a society committed to promoting rights, respect, equality, participation, inclusion and an unbreakable peace.

Significant centenaries and anniversaries in the decade ahead provide all on this island with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of our shared past and how it shapes British and Irish identities and relationships today. The signing of the Ulster covenant is one such historic and significant event. Centenaries in the decade ahead will include those of the First World War, the battle of the Somme, the Easter rising, the rise of the labour movement, the extension of limited voting rights to women, the Tan war, the civil war and partition. No doubt, some will be surprised when they compare what they think they know with what actually happened and when they openly consider the different insights and perspectives from that period.

Many have referred to the unionist leader Edward Carson. Mr Copeland referred to him as a Dubliner, and he was a reputed hurler. He was certainly no nationalist, but he considered himself Irish and saw partition as a failure. I again refer to his Irish-speaking cousin, Mary Butler, who coined the name of my party, Sinn Féin. A diverse range of revealing and surprising perspectives from the period exists, such as the UVF eyewitness to the Easter rising who wrote a graphic account of the rebellion on Gresham Hotel notepaper. As has been noted, the Ulster covenant was signed by nearly a quarter of a million men. It is telling of the times that it was distinctly a male-only affair, although a similar number of women signed a parallel declaration. Even then, the main signatories at Belfast City Hall were men. I could not imagine or tolerate such separation today, but it is insightful to note that the original draft of the covenant was changed as a result of advice from some Church leaders, so the obligations of signatories were confined to the crisis of the time as no one could predict what circumstances could arise in the future. That is some wise counsel.

The events of recent decades show the extent to which circumstances, opinions, people and

communities change and evolve. Those insights can be uncovered by the wealth of resources and information that are available today, many of which are supported by the Executive. Foremost among them is the digital resources archive. As has been referred to, the Public Record Office online database contains the signatures of nearly half a million people who signed the Ulster covenant and declaration against home rule. I have not checked for my own relatives, but I will later today.

A Member: They are not there.

Mr O'Dowd: I am glad that someone has checked. That is an outstanding resource that can throw up some interesting contrasts between then and now. I find one example very interesting. If it were possible, I would like to know the reaction of one those signatories, a Mr George Shanks of 3 Bedford Street, Belfast, to the fact that his former home in central Belfast is now the departmental headquarters of my Sinn Féin colleague Carál Ní Chuilín, Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. I doubt that that could have been foreseen 100 years ago.

Amusing aspects aside, this shows the human stories and connections of our shared past. It also demonstrates the role that our culture and creative sector can play in discovering and sharing those stories. Arts and culture and the creative industries can provide innovative ways to remember the past, and they have done so many times. They can bring the past to life and tell the stories behind these significant historical events in ways that stir the heart and, most importantly, broaden the mind. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure oversees a wide cultural landscape, including museums, libraries, the arts, and public records and archives. The exhibits' knowledge and resource in the creative sector can be harnessed to help the people to remember our past. They can support the already strong links between the arts and, indeed, my own sector, education. It is much more inspiring and interesting for young and old alike to read about the Ulster covenant when you see the signatures of your ancestors — or not — or to visit the museum to see the pen that Carson used on the day or to have the events and people of that period brought to life on stage or on screen. That is the context in which the Executive agreed an inclusive and respectful framework for commemorations, and it will be developed over the next decade.

A wealth of resources and events are planned by a diverse range of organisations. By having a collective unity around an inclusive and

respectful framework on the basis of equality, the Executive can and will continue to help to maximise the impact and reach of such opportunities, both in learning about the past and, most importantly, living for the future.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his contribution.

"Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the Empire, we, whose names are underwritten, men of Ulster, loyal subjects of his Gracious Majesty King George V., humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves in solemn Covenant throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland. And in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority. In sure confidence that God will defend the right we hereto subscribe our names. And further, we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant."

3.30 pm

Those are the words of the covenant that we have been debating here today. The recognition of the women involved in suffrage must not be left out, and it has been mentioned. The women's declaration read:

"We, whose names are underwritten, women of Ulster, and loyal subjects of our gracious King, being firmly persuaded that Home Rule would be disastrous to our country, desire to associate ourselves with the men of Ulster in their uncompromising opposition to the Home Rule Bill now before Parliament, whereby it is proposed to drive Ulster out of her cherished place in the Constitution of the United Kingdom and to place her under the domination and control of a Parliament in Ireland.

Praying that from this calamity God will save Ireland, we hereto subscribe our names."

Those covenants were signed by 237,368 men and 234,046 women across the nine counties of Ulster and in the places that my party leader described earlier.

Why was the covenant significant? With a total of 471,414 signatories, it exemplified unionist protest against the third Home Rule Bill. It stressed that home rule was detrimental to the liberty and prosperity of Ulster and, indeed, to all of Ireland. As some have mentioned, such was the conviction of some people — one being Frederick Hugh Crawford — that they famously signed the covenant in their own blood.

The Minister, in responding, said that he had not checked for his ancestors, but when we debated the decade of centenaries, I remember that Members from all sides of the House said that they had. It is important and significant for the history of this place that the record of all signatories from that time is located in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. It is an essential piece of history, and it should be cherished by the Assembly. It allows us to recognise ancestors who put on record their opposition to Ulster being ruled by a Dublin Parliament against the wishes of the majority of the people of Ulster.

The digitisation of the Ulster covenant during Michael McGimpsey's tenure as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure was a highly important step in consolidating a part of the Province's future and is of huge significance. The historical value of the digitised records of signatories of the covenant and declaration should not be underestimated either by our party or in the history of Northern Ireland.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: I will.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that coverage of the centenary of the Ulster covenant should be properly reflected by our local broadcasting organisations, especially the BBC and Ulster Television, in their output? Will he further agree that the localised parades issues at St Patrick's and other places, not to trivialise them, are beginning to be played out in the media by some in a way that gives the impression of an attempt to undermine or detract from the centenary, which would be deeply unfortunate if it were allowed to happen?

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for his intervention. As he knows, I cannot agree more with the two points that he has raised. There

has been a failure on the part of our local media in celebrating and further promoting what has already happened. The Balmoral review received very little media coverage, and those who attempt to influence the covenant parade on 29 September should take a step back and reflect. As has been mentioned, these events will set the tenure and the tone for the decade of centenaries that lie ahead, and if we start off on the wrong foot, things will only get worse, and the situation will deteriorate as we go along the line.

As regards the digitisation of the Ulster covenant, I have been lucky enough to be able to trace great-grandparents. I encourage every Member in this House to look at that — Trevor already has — because I was able to see the signature of Robert Swann from Crevilly-Valley, and I know in my heart that he was my great-grandfather and the traditions that he held that encouraged him to sign it 100 years ago are still part of my blood and my DNA. As a Presbyterian, an Ulster Unionist and somebody from north Antrim, not a thing has changed, and I would sign that same document today.

As we, as a party, look forward to our conference this weekend, it is significant that 100 years ago, nearly to the day, on 23 September, the Ulster Unionist council adopted and approved the wording of the Ulster covenant, and the Minister said earlier that it was changed and amended by the Presbyterian Church at the time. Those suggestions were made at the very beginning, and when Thomas Sinclair drafted the original document and sent it to Sir Edward Carson for approval, his main comment was — and I can be backed up on this — "I would not change one word". Those were the words that I read earlier.

Although its legacy is important to us, as the party of Carson and Craig, we should never lose sight of the great endeavour of our previous leaders in ensuring that the wishes of the people were not ignored by Westminster. In this centenary year, it is vital that the legacy of individuals such as Carson and Craig is kept alive and the presence of the memorials to them in Parliament Buildings and the surrounding grounds maintained. Sir Edward Carson's great standing in Westminster was vital in ensuring that the voices of unionism were heard in Parliament, and such was the esteem that Carson was given at Westminster, he held several Cabinet posts, including Attorney General during the First World War, and is, notably, one of the few non-monarchs to receive a British state funeral.

Historian John Brown said:

"His larger than life-size statue, erected in his own lifetime in front of the Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont, symbolizes the widely held perception that Northern Ireland is Carson's creation."

However, that was not what he wanted, as has been maintained throughout the debate today. Carson's true aim and true love was that Ireland remained as one as part of the United Kingdom, and, as has already been said, he saw it as a failing that the break-up of Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland was necessary.

Lord Craigavon's role in the anti-home rule movement was different to Carson's but no less influential. His role in mobilising the unionist population and organising the Ulster Volunteers, some six months after the signing of the covenant, was just as necessary as Carson's influence in Westminster in ensuring that home rule was not imposed on Ulster, and that is why, as an Ulster Unionist, he stands foursquare at the top of the stairs in the Great Hall and his life-sized statue is central to every tour of these Buildings today.

In my maiden speech, which seems a long time ago, I said that a life-sized statue of me would not require as much bronze, but I can assure everyone that when we reflect on the contribution of Carson and Craig, not just to Northern Ireland but to the Northern Ireland Parliament, I never feel that my contribution to this place will measure up to the legacy and contribution of those two men. As a proud Ulster Unionist, I am humbled to be a member of the same party as those men, and I am proud to stand here today to highlight the importance of our history. I look forward to the positive contribution that this party will make in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the signing of the Ulster covenant on 28 September 1912, in its centenary year, as an historic and significant event in the history of Northern Ireland; notes the availability of all the digitised signatures of the covenant via the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland website; and affirms the importance of Ulster Unionists Lord Carson and Lord Craigavon and their legacy, which remains in place today.

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

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Parades

Mr Speaker: Two amendments have been selected, and up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed 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. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are selected to speak will have five minutes.

Mr G Kelly: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the leadership of the loyal orders to become involved urgently in direct dialogue with residents' groups to resolve the issue of contentious parades, which still affects entire communities during the summer.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I would like to put the debate into some context at the start. Everyone in the House understands that we come from a series of diverse cultures. I understand that the unionist culture is one that contains a lot of marching, parades and a particular type of music. There are, as I understand it, 3,600 of those parades every year and most of them pass without contention. The Orangefest has been talked about a lot, and I would even say that I wish it well, where it does not cause offence.

What is hard to understand is that in respect of the handful of contentious parades — it is only a handful — the cost last year was over £6 million. That £6 million could be used to deal with other policing issues and community safety right across our community. The bigger cost of the contentious parades is that they are toxic to policing. It is hard to quantify, but I would say that policing has been slowed up for five, six or seven years because of those parades and the image that they give. Also, all the work on neighbourhood policing, the good policing that goes on throughout the year, and community relations, especially in north Belfast, which is sometimes described as a microcosm of the problems in the North, can be demolished in moments during one of those parades.

It is worth saying that the scenes outside St Patrick's Church, which were caught on camera, are only the manifestation of the difficulties. I wish I could say that it was an isolated incident, but, unfortunately, I have witnessed this for years. I have seen that in many other circumstances and, indeed, on a

continuous basis outside St Matthew's in east Belfast.

That is not to say that all Orangemen, all the loyal orders, those who march from the lodges or even the supporters are all involved in sectarianism. However, it is fair to say that there is a culture of sectarianism in those contentious marches, which has been seen very much this year and before. What happened this year, at St Patrick's in Carrick Hill, is the straw that broke the camel's back.

It is also worth putting the record straight. The Carrick Hill Residents' Association did not ask for a rerouting or call for a ban on the march. It understood that this was a cultural way of moving ahead and that there were many parades. Something like 30 parades go past Carrick Hill every year. What the residents' group called for was a simple thing. As the group explained, it called for respect. I have heard over the past few days a number of loyalists, unionists and others talking about mutual respect. Who can disagree with that term? Of course, there has to be mutual respect. Surely, however, mutual respect comes from mutual conversation and from direct dialogue between two people or two groups. Is it too much to ask that the loyal orders get involved in that, even at this late stage?

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I absolutely agree with him on the issue of mutual respect. On that issue, I am pleased that Sinn Féin has come some way to accept that the concept of mutual respect is something that is to be embraced by your party. Your leader let slip, in his speech in Athboy, that there will be as many contentious parades as Sinn Féin wants there to be. Was that policy wrong and have you walked away from it?

Mr G Kelly: Our policy has always been mutual respect; it has never changed. Our policy is non-sectarianism and that goes right back to the beginning of republicanism.

Let us talk about dialogue and mutual respect. I will give an example. I do not know whether Members have seen it, but a statement was made by the St Patrick's parish priest, which has been quoted many times by unionists over the last few days. If you want an example of how not to use dialogue, this is it. The parish priest took his pastoral duties very seriously and spoke to the Orange Order. He thought that there was a willingness and a beginning of conversations that might sort this out. However, that was squandered, used and abused. During the talks, he said that the

orders should talk to the community of Carrick Hill and that he was not an alternative to the community of Carrick Hill. In statements over the past two days, they tried to use him to undermine the idea of talking to the residents, who are also, by the way, parishioners, and to refuse dialogue. In other words, they used that discussion to try to undermine other discussions and to say that they do not have to talk to other people because they have talked to the parish priest. Why would you take someone in good faith and then undermine him in that way?

3.45 pm

As we have just had a debate on signing the covenant, we all know that a parade is coming up on 29 September. I understand, as many Members have said, that that is hugely important for the unionist population. There are different estimates, but it will bring between 20,000 and 40,000 people into Belfast. So, mutual respect becomes more and more important in those circumstances. If there is self-respect, because self-respect is part of mutual respect, why does the Grand Lodge not speak for itself? Why do we hear loyalists speaking for it? Why do we hear politicians speaking for it? Why does it not come out and speak for itself; and not only speak for itself but go to talk to the residents of Carrick Hill? If it wants to do it quietly, all the better. Let it set an example and make a scene-changer, because a scene-changer is exactly what we need to move the process forward.

I am told by people in the unionist community, indeed by some Orangemen, that it was the habit — a tradition — that, when you had an Orange parade anywhere and you passed a place of worship, whether it was Catholic, Protestant, Presbyterian, Methodist or whatever, music was not played. The phenomenon of these blood-and-thunder bands has taken over during the past number of years. It might be worth asking a question about this. It used to be that a parade organiser or a lodge would engage — I think that that is the term used — a band to come to their parade. It now looks like the bands are in charge and they are the ones who engage the orders and ask them to come along. The behaviour of the bands leaves much to be desired.

There is still a window of opportunity. This is 18 September, and we have up to 29 September. I would argue that a lead needs to be taken to confound the critics. Mike Nesbitt wanted to know where the Carrick Hill Residents' Association came from. I do not know where Mike has been for the past 20 years.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: No. Let me finish the point and then maybe you can come in.

It has been around for at least 20 years. The residents' group has done massive work in Carrick Hill, and people come from all over Europe to see the type of houses that have been built for working-class people, because that is the type of work that it normally does. It was not created for the parades issue. In fact, even though it has to face that number of parades every year, it made a point of not going to the Parades Commission because it did not want the issue to be raised to a different level. It is ironic that all the unionists, all the spokespersons in the Orange Order and all the loyal orders who speak out say that they hate the Parades Commission so much, yet they have forced the residents' group to go to the Parades Commission because that is the only way that it can get a determination and stop the type of abuse that happens.

I had better move on. I have just been advised that I do not get any extra time, Mike. I know that you will be speaking later, so I will let you do it then.

I will bring this to some sort of a conclusion. We have learned that dialogue is the only way forward. It is not as if this is the worst or the biggest mountain that we have ever had to climb in terms of dialogue. People across the House talk to each other all the time. Why can the Grand Orange Lodge not talk to the residents? What is the difficulty? It says that there is not time. There is plenty of time. We have had conversations in less time in the past than eight or 10 days.

I know that there is a unionist amendment. All I can say about it is that it is self-contradictory. I will leave it at that. On the other hand, I think that we can live with the Alliance Party's amendment. It may not say it exactly the way that we say it, but it deals with the issue that there needs to be conversations and dialogue, and we still have an opportunity to deal with this. For what it is worth, I appeal to the loyal orders, and I do not think that it is too late at this stage. There is an ability to have a new scene-setter here, and they can take the initiative. Let them take the initiative and move the process forward. I commend the motion.

Mr Elliott: I beg to move amendment No 1: Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert

'recognises the positive community contribution by the loyal orders; and calls on everyone in leadership roles within the community to ensure that their actions promote positive outcomes from all parades and other events organised by community groups that could be deemed contentious.'

Obviously, I move amendment No 1 on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party. I am grateful to Members for having this discussion on the matter. I trust that the discussion will have a positive effect on parades and events that could, in any way, be deemed contentious. It is not only parades that are deemed contentious; many other events are deemed so. However, we must recognise that people will have differing views and outlooks on what happens at parades and events, in the lead-up to those and, indeed, in their aftermath.

It is also important that we recognise that such events should be afforded respect by those who are unhappy about them or have a different outlook. Yes, we heard about some of the events at St Patrick's chapel on Donegall Street, but I believe, and I am told, that we did not hear about everything that happened there. That was not in the public domain. We did not hear of what happened in other places deemed contentious. We did not hear of the verbal attacks —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I will give way in a minute. We did not hear of the verbal attacks on those who were on parade and those participating. A few minutes ago, during the previous debate, I listened to my colleague Danny Kennedy highlight the fact that some members in political institutions and political parties have used the opportunity to ratchet up the situation and make it worse.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member not accept that the sectarian behaviour and abuse from the bandsmen, and some of the Black Preceptory and their supporters on 25 August, was so outrageous and appalling that it marked out that event as so unacceptable that we have the present contentious situation that you described and that we, therefore, need to address that sectarianism, which, unfortunately, has manifested itself through Orange and other loyal order parades?

Mr Elliott: Thank you for that intervention, long as it was. I disagree with all of the sectarian harassment there has been, regardless of

whether it was mentioned in the media. I am led to believe that there were many issues in the run-up to that event, as there were at other events that I have attended. I have witnessed those issues in such places as Newtownbutler, Rasharkin and Bellaghy. Those are just some examples of where there is significant harassment, intimidation and sectarian provocation against those in the loyal orders who are on parade. We must try to curtail and, effectively, cut that out.

Many of these events take place at parades that have been notified. I listen to many of my constituents who ask why they should bother putting in an 11/1 and going through the whole process, when many other parades and events take place without even having an 11/1. When you go to the Parades Commission, it says, "That is nothing to do with us. We can look only at what has been issued or submitted to us." When you go to the police, they say, "We need hard evidence." They say that even though there are, on many occasions, eyewitnesses to say what did happen and photographs to establish that illegal parades and events took place. I am not for one moment suggesting that people should have illegal parades, but I have to say that some people have a very strong perception that others can get away with it and so ask themselves why they should bother doing it properly.

The Ulster Unionist Party amendment references the positive work and contribution to the wider community of the loyal orders and its members. Its members are involved in not only providing support and leadership in communities throughout Northern Ireland but in wide-ranging charity work. I recall the charity work that has gone on for many years in the Orange Order, the Royal Black Institution and the Apprentice Boys. All that work goes unnoticed. In 2003, one major fundraising effort by the Orange Institution raised £121,000 for Cancer Research in Northern Ireland, and shortly after that, £45,000 was raised to buy a community bus in Togo, west Africa. The local loyal orders have helped other charities as well, including Open Doors and a multiple sclerosis charity. That goes unrecognised by much of the community, but people need to appreciate it.

We need to look at the role of the loyal orders in recent times. I recognise the fact that the Royal Black Institution issued an apology regarding what happened on Donegall Street in August. That was followed up by a very positive statement from the Orange Order, which included its decision not to proceed with a parade past Ardoyne on 29 September. When

we talk about Ardoyne, I think that we need to look at some of the incidents there, in particular the hooligan element that protested against the people who were on a legitimate parade in the area. People actually go out of their way to be offended on occasion. I do not believe that that has been recognised. I fully appreciate the fact that the Orange Order put out a very positive statement again yesterday, saying that only hymns will be played by the bands when passing St Patrick's on Donegall Street on 29 September. Again, that is a positive move. I can tell you that it takes two to tango, and the loyal orders cannot do all this on their own. There has been some reciprocation and response from the congregation and minister at St Patrick's, which is positive, but it needs to go much wider than that. I challenge the politicians on the opposite Benches. I would like to hear something positive from them. I would like them to recognise the effort that the loyal orders are making to ensure that we have marches and parades that are not only positive but peaceful and that pass off with the dignity and respect that we require.

Many years ago when there were difficulties in Newtownbutler, some people went out of their way to stop the parades there, and I am told that the same happened in Bellaghy. Members of the loyal orders in Newtownbutler went to all residents on the route and spoke to them to find out whether they had any difficulties. Any of the difficulties could have been resolved by the loyal orders, but was that enough? No. That was not enough for certain people, many of whom were not from Newtownbutler or the surrounding area but were bused in from places such as Monaghan and Clones to protest against the loyal orders. There was pure and clear sectarian provocation against the loyal orders and the Protestant communities. That is why we need balance in this debate. We need to recognise the work that has gone on. Let us not forget that the Orangemen of Portadown offered to hold discussions with residents, but was that accepted? No. That is why there is huge and deep suspicion about any suggestion that they want much more intensive and, in particular, very open discussions.

I understand that there are deliberate attempts ongoing behind the scenes to ensure that we have a positive resolution to this entire process and situation, which I welcome. Along with my party leader and other colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party, I met the four main Church leaders quite recently. Again, that was a positive meeting, and it can be built on. However, I stress and reiterate that this cannot all come from the one side. We cannot continue to have apologies, proposals and

suggestions from the loyal orders without reasonable reciprocation from the nationalist communities —

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

Mr Elliott: — and particularly from the politicians who sit on the opposite Benches in the House.

4.00 pm

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert

'affirms the right to peaceful assembly, parade and protest within the rule of law; condemns violence without equivocation; believes that local dialogue offers the best way of resolving differences over parades; and recognises that the contentious nature of parades may, where necessary, require an independent process.'

The Alliance Party believes that there is a need and an opportunity for the Assembly to send out its clear agreement on the principles that we believe must govern any solution on the issue and, indeed, society; namely, the right to peaceful assembly and protest, unequivocal opposition to violence and support for the rule of law. Our strong belief is that local dialogue is key to resolving disputes, and where that is not possible, an independent process may be required.

I recognise the positive elements of the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment. However, I believe that it falls short of exactly what we need to set out in the Assembly. Years after the Good Friday Agreement, the continued tension that surrounds some parades demonstrates that we are still some way off achieving that truly shared future that we are working towards. The Alliance Party believes in the right of freedom of assembly and the right to peaceful protest. However, it is important that neither of those rights be absolute. With any right comes a recognition of responsibility. Everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to live free from sectarian harassment and violence. I do not think that anyone in the Chamber would disagree with that principle.

It is crucial that all parades and protests be carried out in accordance with the rule of law. The Alliance Party opposes all the recent violence in north Belfast, which cannot and should not be justified by anyone. Not only were many police officers injured in the recent violence — it is important that we put on record our recognition of the courage that those police

officers show in upholding law and order in extremely difficult situations — but it caused serious damage to the community. It has had lasting impact on community relations and development in an area where many people have been working hard for many years to achieve those things.

We hoped that images of rioting and violence being beamed into televisions around the world would be a thing of the past. However, scenes of violence continue to penetrate the consciousness of potential tourists and investors, who are vitally needed in Northern Ireland. That has the potential to undo much of the hard work to develop and promote Northern Ireland, which has been achieved successfully in 2012. The recent successes of the MTV awards, the Titanic Belfast Festival, Land of Giants, the Irish Open golf tournament and, even in my constituency, the East Belfast Arts Festival show that we are a vibrant and peaceful society. This type of violence sets us back significantly.

An economist recently estimated that the violence could have cost the economy as much as £7 million in lost tourism revenue. It is therefore vital that we seek long-lasting solutions to the contentious issue of parading. The Alliance Party believes that the best solution to parades will be found at local level, when communities, parade organisers and political representatives engage in dialogue together to find a resolution that works best for their area and recognise that there is ongoing dialogue, hard work, inclusive action and talks being undertaken to achieve those solutions.

However, given the contentious nature of some parades, we realise that it may not always be possible to reach that solution. In those instances, it is important to note that an independent process may be required. At present, that task falls to the Parades Commission. We understand that people disagree with and have been angered by some of the Parade Commission's decisions. However, its determinations are legally binding and should be obeyed by all involved, in accordance with the rule of law.

Our society relies on the upholding of the rule of law. Where it is broken, the consequences of violence are clear for everyone to see. We need people to demonstrate mature leadership and dialogue with others if possible. I call on all leaders to diffuse tension rather than fan the flames of frustration and hate at this difficult time.

However, the issue is symptomatic of ingrained segregation and separation in the community. It cannot be addressed in isolation. The Alliance Party proposed that the parading issue be included in any good relations or shared future strategy. That proposal was dismissed. We proposed that any document that is aimed at creating a shared future should also tackle the issue of intimidatory demarcation of territory. No public space in Northern Ireland should be marked out as territory for one group; it should instead be shared space.

Five years after the original shared future strategy, the Executive's good relations strategy sits on that Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) shelf of delayed initiatives along with the parades and protests proposals. However, the Parades Commission and the Chief Constable reiterated the need for political leadership and a holistic approach to providing a long-term solution to parading. So, although the legislation and regulating body can be changed, the key issue of how to resolve contentious parades will remain. Until there is political leadership to deal with the issue at a strategic governmental level, I fear that we will find ourselves in the same position in the future, having the same debate in the Chamber and the same crisis talks behind closed doors.

The onus is now on leaders, namely political representatives, our Church leaders, from whom I recognise the strong statements that came forward in a united manner over the summer, residents and loyal orders to act together and engage in dialogue to resolve disputes, tackle division and deliver a shared future in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, I ask the House to support our amendment and to send out a clear message of the principles that we believe should govern any solution in this area, and, indeed, on which our society should be based.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am mindful of the comments that you made at the opening of this morning's business. I am also mindful of the duty on all of us to declare an interest whenever we participate in debates. Would you agree, Mr Speaker, that that is particularly important whenever we are participating in debates such as this and that membership of an organisation, loyal order or other marching organisation should be declared?

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

Mr Speaker: Let me deal with this point of order first. It is really for Members to declare their membership of any organisation. The onus is very much on individual Members to do that. I will once again remind the House that that is important if they belong to a particular organisation. At the end of the day, however, it is really up to the individual Member.

Was there a further point of order?

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As the Member will be well aware, members of loyal institutions will, as you said, indicate their membership of those institutions when they declare their interests on arrival at this place. However, what about those people who take part in protests, some of whom protest habitually for years against loyal order parades? Should they then record their membership of organisations or their continued participation in such protests?

Mr Speaker: Order. We are getting away from the debate. Once again, I would say that it is really up to individual Members to decide on whatever organisation they want to declare their interest in.

Mr Craig: Just to keep some people quiet, I will declare my interests. I am a member of the Orange Order and proud of it. I will also declare that I am a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, and I am proud of that as well. So, there we go; there are two points of interest declared.

I find it interesting that when the Parades Commission came into inception under the Public Processions Act 1998 we — when I say "we", I am talking about the people of Northern Ireland — were promised that there would be greater understanding of parades by the general public and that mediation would resolve all disputes around parading. If that was the case, why do we find ourselves here today debating a motion that calls for more mediation and dialogue?

The motion actually condemns the Parades Commission, which I find totally believable. In an extensive article in the 'News Letter', Drew Nelson, Grand Secretary of the Orange Order, states that the existing and recent determinations by the "secret court" of the Parades Commission are bewildering and have brought frustration and created deep anger amongst loyal orders.

I do not think that there is anyone in the House who would defend some of the decisions that have been taken by the Parades Commission. I have taken careful note, down through the years, that there has been condemnation of its decisions from all sides of the House and even from those who sit on the fence. It is a bewildering organisation that sits in secret and deliberates over issues. The thing that I find the most frustrating is that when it is supposed to take evidence from elected Members, organisations and others, that information is treated with total and utter contempt by that organisation. Whenever you see the determinations that come out of it, I do not understand why any one of us in the House is surprised in any way, shape or form that it leads to further frustration on the street and ultimately leads to violence in many cases.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: The Member is criticising the Parades Commission. Will he tell the Assembly what he proposes to put in its place?

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

Mr Craig: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My answer to that is a very simple one: we all need to respect the law in this land, and we also need to respect those who are put on the front line and who put themselves in danger on our behalf, and that is the police force of Northern Ireland.

There is one thing that I will condemn across the board — and I do not care what side it comes from: when I sat and watched on television, and witnessed up in Carlisle Circus, more than 60 officers being injured and maimed, probably by both sides in that dispute, it was a disgrace, and I condemn it outrightly. No one in our society should attack those who try to uphold law and order.

What would I propose as an alternative? I will say this to the honourable Member: the one thing that I will not take is lectures from yourselves. In the past, this party put the issue of parades back on the agenda. We worked very hard on an alternative, but the secret to any successful alternative to the Parades Commission is buy-in from all sides. Unless we get buy-in from the loyal orders on this issue, there will not be success. Unless we get buy-in on the solution from all of the community

groups, the Church and others out there, we will not get success.

The one thing that I will not accept is the continual demonisation of the loyal orders on the issue of parades. We have heard from the honourable Member Mr Elliott about the good work that the order does. It goes unsaid and unrecognised year in, year out all because others try to demonise the organisation. That is not acceptable. Others need to stop that and get back to the table and start talking to the loyal orders and not talking at them. Mutual respect works two ways. We cannot have mutual respect when others try to move the goalposts every time the loyal orders make an effort to enter into dialogue.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Mr Craig: I respect that, Mr Speaker. I take this opportunity to confirm our support for the amendment from the Ulster Unionists.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for proposing the motion. I am sorry that I was not in for the beginning of his remarks. Central to this issue is the position of the Parades Commission. The Member who spoke previously attempted to answer my question: what do you put in its place? Of course, he said that there should be buy-in from all parties.

I accept that there should be buy-in from all parties — and I think that Mr Kelly said that there should be buy-in from all parties — in the sense that the loyal orders should engage with communities that are fundamentally affected by contentious parades. That is what you call buy-in.

4.15 pm

If you get rid of the Parades Commission, what do you put in its place? I have not heard from any colleague on the opposite Benches —

Mr Craig: I thank the honourable Member for giving way. I will ask the honourable Member this: what is dialogue with these communities?

Will the Member accept that there have been community associations, etc, that have represented communities for years. I accept that. But look at the case in Crumlin, where the loyal orders entered into negotiations with all the existing community groups in the area, and there was an agreement. Five weeks before the parade was due to take place, an alternative community group manufactured

itself and came up with opposition to that parade. So, who are the loyal orders meant to negotiate with?

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

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In relation to the present case — the 29 September and Carrick Hill and St Patrick's Church — we have a genuine residents' association that is very concerned about the future of its community and its safety and security and about trying to resolve this particular problem that has arisen as a result of the parade on 25 August. I can tell you that these people genuinely want to resolve this issue.

I and another colleague met representatives of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland. Yesterday, I met with the Grand Master, the Grand Secretary and their brethren. I have to say, I was received courteously. There was good humour at the meeting, and they listened carefully to what I had to say. My basic message was, "Talk to the local community, because they want to talk to you. They want to resolve this situation."

I believe that there is time for that dialogue to take place and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland has nothing to lose by entering into a dialogue. I can reassure the House, the Member and the grand lodge that the local community group, the local residents, will be flexible if a dialogue is commenced. I have been impressed by them and by their sincerity and by the approach that they have taken. They have not said that they want this parade rerouted; they have said, "We want respect".

Within that principle of respect, there is plenty of room for us to devise an accommodation in relation to this particular parade. I believe that it is incumbent on all of us in this House to work hard to achieve that dialogue. The Orange Order commenced a dialogue with the church and some parishioners. Achieving that dialogue was a good step, but it was insufficient to fulfil what we require, which is a full dialogue with the community that is intimately affected. I believe that, within that dialogue, there is the context in which we can achieve an accommodation.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I cannot, because I am running out of time.

Let me say this: the Parades Commission is the only show in town. It is the only lawful organisation that can regulate independently these parades in the absence of local agreement. If there is local agreement, you do not need a determination by the Parades Commission. All of us in this House should show leadership and support the Parades Commission in its determinations. Whether we like those determinations or not, it is incumbent on us to show responsibility and political maturity and to support the police in the administration of those determinations.

I believe that it is a dereliction of duty for Members of this House, some of whom may hold high office, to encourage those who seek to disobey the determinations of the Parades Commission.

That is irresponsible politics. That does nothing but damage the rule of law and damage the police, as they exercise their duty of maintaining the peace in this community.

Mr McNarry: I declare an interest as a proud member of the loyal orders and a member of the Grand Lodge centenary parade organising committee.

This motion is unhelpful and unnecessary. It is divisive and serves only to drive a wedge, impact negatively and ratchet up tensions. Even if we were to pass the motion, what authority would it deliver? What legal imperative would it create? The answer is none.

Those who tabled the motion could have done otherwise, by assisted in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to comfort zones in which cultures could be freely expressed. However, Sinn Féin has chosen the adversarial route by trying to enforce its diktat and face down those who belong to the loyal orders and their supporters. Would they consider an atmosphere in which protests against Orange feet walking would be stopped for the next three years and in which they would make an apology for the lives taken by the Provisional IRA, including those of over 300 Orangemen? Will they manage a period of respect for those who wish to continue a tradition of walking legitimately and peacefully and in an expression that embraces civil and religious liberty for all? To do so would be a revelation and would be a serious act of sincerity. It would be more than the simple gesture they think is all they need to make. It would be an event that, I can assure them, would be greeted by unionists with an equitable response.

Is it possible for Sinn Féin, with its undoubted mandate, to show leadership in the House today and show a way of taking us out of, and away from, protest areas that it has constructed, organised and perpetuated, even to the extent that in areas where it has lost control to more extreme elements in its community, it would try to reclaim support for tolerance?

I do not get it. I cannot comprehend why the movement of Orange feet along public roads incurs the wrath and hatred of people who are primarily concerned with a minimal disruption that lasts as little as 10 minutes. It is turned into an all-day affair by a bunch of lawbreakers who provoke violence, direct hatred and display intolerance. That intolerance is etched on their faces and portrayed by their physical contortions, as if the world is coming to an end on that day, or on the 29 September, and is about to turn Orange in every street and every town.

On 29 September, thousands of peaceful people belonging to the loyal orders and their supporters will participate in what is, for most — undoubtedly, nearly for all — a once in a lifetime opportunity to walk from Belfast city centre to these grounds in Stormont to commemorate the 1912 convention. Who on earth, in this House or outside it, would really want to disrupt the movement of feet on the roads on that journey? Who would want to turn their objections into violence? Who would wish to show disrespect to the numbers coming together in one long parade? I suspect only those who have concocted this motion with precisely that in mind would want to do so. Where are the calls for dialogue in areas where Orange feet have been put off the road? Where are these calls today to enter into talks about parades that, through disruption, were stopped? I think that what we are in and what I take offence at in this —

Mr Speaker: Time is almost gone.

Mr McNarry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What I take offence at in the motion is that "direct dialogue" is Sinn Féin speak for negotiations. That is where the motion falls.

Mr Storey: It seems that Members are declaring interests. Following convention, I declare an interest as a member of the Independent Loyal Orange Institution. I am sure that Members on the Back Benches will be delighted to hear that.

Some 40 years after a terrorist campaign, Sinn Féin has, all of a sudden, found a new word in its arsenal: dialogue. It had no desire for dialogue when ensuring that Protestants were ethnically cleansed, as we heard in the House last night. All of a sudden, it became popular to talk and to engage in dialogue. Over the past number of years, I have been lectured on leadership by the Member for North Antrim Daithí McKay. He told me that I should step up to the plate and show leadership in my constituency. This afternoon, I want to look at the leadership given by Sinn Féin in my constituency on parades. I am no johnny-come-lately to the parades issue. Since being elected in 2001, I have worked tirelessly, and I have seen the antics, shenanigans, doublespeak and all that republicans do to do the one thing that is summed up in correspondence that I will refer to in a minute or two.

Let us look at what Sinn Féin has done in North Antrim. Let us go to the village of Dunloy and look at the issue of parading there. For 11 years, there has been no parade to allow the loyal lodge in Dunloy to march. That lodge is made up of about 18 or 19 people, most of whom are senior citizens, and is led by an all-Ireland championship accordion band. It does nothing that could be described, in any way, as distasteful or offensive, nor could it, in any way, be seen as being aligned to any illegal organisation. What have republicans done in the village of Dunloy? They have consistently, under the leadership of Sinn Féin, said, "No parade".

Mr Speaker: The Member should not point across the Chamber.

Mr Storey: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

It does not matter how often attempts were made to engage in dialogue or how much we hear about that dialogue. Republicans are now quite content to accept the Parades Commission's determinations, which say, "You are not allowed your parade".

Mr Anderson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Member for giving way. I also declare an interest as a member of the Orange Institution. Does the Member agree that the Parades Commission has become totally discredited? It cannot make determinations that suit all the people involved. One has only to look at the Garvaghy Road in

Portadown, which is in my constituency. As mentioned in the House today, the residents and district lodge there have offered to have talks. Can I —

Mr Speaker: Interventions should be short. [Laughter.]

Mr Anderson: Thank you. Does the Member agree that all the Parades Commission does is rubber stamp a refusal for a loyal walk at that location each and every week?

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

Mr Storey: Thank you. I agree, and I will give an example of how discredited an organisation the Parades Commission is. It should never have been formed, and we have seen repeated determinations that are riddled with inconsistencies.

We will leave the village of Dunloy and go to the village of Rasharkin. What has gone on in Rasharkin, led by republicans, is nothing short of disgraceful. In 1970, the Protestant population of that village was somewhere in excess of 75%; today, it is less than 10%. What happened? There was a concerted campaign by republicans, through murder and intimidation, to ensure that the Protestant community was removed from the village. However, despite all that agitation, republicans in the village cannot get the majority nationalist community — the Roman Catholic community — to support them. I am quite convinced that the majority of people in the Catholic community in Rasharkin, as is clearly set out in comments by the local parish priest over the past few weeks, do not want to continue to be led by the nose by those who have destroyed and tarnished the name of the village of Rasharkin.

4.30 pm

Let me read what a republican, not a biased DUP Member, said about Sinn Féin on a website. I will not name him or the individual whom he names, but he is a senior republican. He names that senior republican, an adviser to Members in the House, as:

"the person whom started all the trouble in Rasharkin and who stated at a public meeting 7 years ago that he would have the Ballymacconnelly parade stopped within 5 years".

That happens to be the same person who tells me and the community that what he wants is dialogue, and he does not want the parades to be stopped. We want to see you having —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Storey: We want you to have your parade and respect. It is time for leadership to be given. For republicans, it is time that the truth was told. Stop hiding behind doublespeak and double standards.

Mr McKay: That is timing, Mr Speaker. I will go back to one or two of Mervyn's points. Across the community, people are fed up with the situation in Rasharkin. They want it resolved, which requires leadership across the board. We cannot continue to kick the can down the road. The issue must be addressed. He referred to the parish priest. This year and last year, the parish priest said that we need direct dialogue between organisers of parades and residents. That is central to the motion and vital to resolving the entire situation.

It is not only the community impact that we should take into account. Chris Lyttle referred to the economist John Simpson's comments in a 'Belfast Telegraph' article, stating that the recent three nights of rioting in Belfast could cost the economy £7 million. Gerry Kelly referred to last year's policing costs of £6 million. When that figure is multiplied by the past 10 or 20 years, we realise how much we are losing economically. This week, we debated job losses and the need to build a tourism product in our respective communities, rural and urban, in the North. When these images go out across the world via RTÉ and the BBC, they make people think twice about visiting here. That is one heck of a good reason for us to put as much effort as possible into resolving those issues.

Every year, traditionally, in Catholic communities, there has been what has been known as a Twelfth exodus. People take their holidays around the Twelfth. The Drumcree dispute also played into that because people just did not want to be about during that season. That applied to Protestants and Catholics because of the conflict about parades. We need to undo all that, because totally uncontentious unionist parades do take place in Rasharkin. Uncontentious unionist parades take place across the North, and they can be accommodated. That is frustrating, because there has been direct dialogue, for instance, in Crumlin and the city of Derry. The

Member for North Antrim referred to the issues in Rasharkin going back 10 years. In Crumlin, the issue came up four or five days before the parade, there was direct dialogue, and the problem was resolved. That is how simple it is. That is why everyone needs to take a fresh look at the parades issue and how we approach it.

If we are serious about inward investment, tourism, job creation and the ensuing economic growth, we need to be serious about resolving the parades issue. We have these debates every year, and people get their hopes up every September because they think that we have another year to resolve the parades issue, and perhaps there could be talks. The frustrating thing for residents is the fact that they hear whispers that the organisers of parades may talk next year. When next year comes around, they hear that there will not be any talking and that it will happen next year, and so it goes on. That is fair enough, but the fact of the matter is that the longer that that goes on, the bigger the impact on community relations in certain areas and the bigger the impact that it has on policing in particular in those areas. If people are serious about supporting the police on the unionist side —

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Member share my concern and outrage that in five months last year, the cost of policing parades totalled over £5 million? Does he agree that that money could be much better spent in a time of bad recession? Over £5 million. *[Interruption.]*

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

Mr McKay: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I totally agree with the Member that that is unsustainable in its current form. It is not rocket science: across the community, political parties, Churches and all main social groups are engaging with one other and making significant progress. We make progress from September to June, and then it is like taking a step back in time, because everybody falls out over parades. We need to ensure that there is no longer any excuse for people not to sit and talk directly to their neighbours and to the people who live in these areas —

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Mr Hussey: I also declare an interest as a member of Gillygooley Sons of William LOL 339. What is the Member's opinion of rent-a-mobs that are brought to various protests who prepare petrol bombs to throw at the security forces?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: He knows all about those.

Mr McKay: I hear the Member for North Antrim chirping away in the corner, there. What he did, quite irresponsibly —

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the Member about his language.

Mr McKay: The Member for North Antrim recently said that we should try to get as many loyalists into Rasharkin as possible for the Ballymacconnelly parade. That exacerbated that situation totally unnecessarily. It unnecessarily raised tensions as well as the possibility of violence occurring on the night. What happened on that night was that members of bands carrying UDA and UVF flags — and, what do you know, some of those people are actually members of those organisations — were marching down the streets.

The fact is that unionist politicians refuse to recognise what we see in front of us: loyalist paramilitary displays. They refuse to recognise some of the behaviour —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Reference has been made to bands carrying paramilitary flags on the evening of the Ballymacconnelly parade. I want that comment to be referred for a ruling because there was no breach of the determination on the carrying of illegal flags on the night in Ballymacconnelly. I want that inaccurate and untruthful statement removed and for the Member to apologise.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has replied. It is on the record now, Mr Storey. Let us move on.

Mr Humphrey: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, during the contribution of the previous Member to speak, the deputy leader of the SDLP got to her feet and made a point about the cost of parades. *[Interruption.]* You did.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is not —

Mr Humphrey: The cost of parades and the cost of protests, Mr Speaker —

Mr Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mrs D Kelly: Sit down.

Mr Storey: You are not the Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. Order. I call George Robinson.

Mr G Robinson: OK, Mr Speaker. I will take the heat out of it. *[Laughter.]* This topic is one that, in many ways, is a local one, as each area has unique difficulties to overcome. There is, however, a central issue, which is why republicans want to curtail unionists' celebrations of their culture, while doing everything that they can to promote their own. Recently, in my area, that included children masquerading as terrorists at a re-enactment hunger strike commemoration parade that had no visible policing or Parades Commission determinations. However, two weeks earlier in Limavady, police were very visible, and local band organisers had to submit their 11/1 in order to parade. Where is the justice towards the unionists?

I have witnessed numerous loyal order parades pass off peacefully in recent years and have seen many of our Roman Catholic neighbours come out to enjoy the spectacle. Therefore, I believe that the parading issues are caused by republicans working to their own anti-British agenda. Remembering that, to lead a call for:

"the loyal orders to become involved urgently in direct dialogue"

rings hollow when we see parades being subjected to the abuse and, in some cases, organised violence that are directed at them during their parades. It is those individuals who attack the parades who need to show greater tolerance and respect for the unionist culture.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way, and I am glad that he mentioned parades. I mentioned Sinn Féin's tactic of deliberately creating residents' groups across Northern Ireland to make many parades contentious. Of course, that is now being aped by its dissident replacements. The Member should also be aware that there has been a concerted campaign against the Orange Institution across Northern Ireland since the 1980s in which some 320 Orange halls have been attacked and 336 members of our institution murdered by republicans.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I remind the House that interventions should be short. They should not be statements. Mr Robinson, you have an added minute to your time.

Mr G Robinson: Thank you. I agree entirely with my colleague; what he said is completely true.

If parades are contentious, it is as a result of political agitators seeing an opportunity to attack the unionist culture and tradition for political advantage. The loyal orders are demonised to suit a political agenda, and that has to be condemned. That can be witnessed by events in various parts of the Province. When I see loyal order parades being allowed to pass off without bomb scares, verbal abuse and, sometimes, physical attacks, I will feel that equality between traditions is more of a reality than it is at present.

I am sure that all Members wish to see the parading issue resolved satisfactorily, but that must be done in a fair and equitable manner to ensure respect for unionist traditions, which appear to be trampled on due to poor and unfair determinations by the Parades Commission.

Mr Swann: To continue the tradition, I declare an interest as the past master and lecturer of Fernisky LOL 115; past master of Ballylurgan Royal Black Preceptory 1192; member of Kells and Fernisky Royal Black Preceptory 271; member of the Antrim Club of the Murray Club of the Apprentice Boys of Derry; and chairman of Cromkill pipe band. However, as has been pointed out, all those details are available on my declaration of interests. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Point of order, Mr Kelly

Mr G Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Might I suggest that it may be easier and faster if only those on the Benches across the way who are not members of the Orange Order actually declared it? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Continue, Mr Swann.

Mr Swann: I know that you will not be declaring any interest, anyway. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Swann: Mr Speaker, the valid point was made that every Member on the Benches on the other side of the House should declare their interest in the protests that they attended or the

community or the residents' groups that they became involved in when those protests were developed and enhanced.

It should not go without notice or comment that the President of Sinn Féin said in 1991:

"Ask any activist in the north, 'did Drumcree happen by accident?', and they will tell you, 'no'. Three years of work on the Lower Ormeau Road, Portadown, and parts of Fermanagh and Newry, Armagh and in Bellaghy ... Three years of work went into creating that situation and fair play to those people who put the work in. They are the type of scene changes that we have to focus on and develop and exploit."

Those were the words of Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Féin.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to Drumcree. I happen to be a member of Drumcree Parish Church, and we have never, ever had an issue with parading. Does the Member agree that the issue is the protest on the Garvaghy Road and not Drumcree Parish Church?

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

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was going to go on to what he said about having to:

"focus on and develop and exploit".

Mr Speaker and Members, we now have the new scenes of Rasharkin, Crumlin and north Belfast that we have rehearsed here today already. The Members for North Antrim have already started the conversation about what is happening in Rasharkin at this minute.

4.45 pm

Mr Speaker, I will take you back to the Ulster Unionist amendment, which:

"calls on everyone in leadership roles within the community to ensure that their actions promote positive outcomes from all parades and other events organised by community groups".

The Member for North Antrim talked about Ballymaconnelly Flute Band. Earlier, the other Member for North Antrim — and this is going to lead to confusion — referred to posts that were

made on the internet from the Rasharkin residents' coalition on the same evening as the Ballymaconnelly Flute Band parade:

"To all attending our road hurling event tomorrow night, don't forget to bring your hurls with you."

There was no condemnation or action or comment from the Members of Sinn Féin or the Members of the SDLP who were there, taking part and standing on the side of the protestors that night at the Ballymaconnelly Flute Band parade. There was no condemnation of the agitation of a group that was actively calling on others from outside the area to come to Rasharkin with hurls in hand to take part.

Mr Storey: Will the Member accept that the sad reality is that senior dissident figures were encouraged to travel to Rasharkin by those very comments? It was very sad to see some very senior dissident republicans in the village. They certainly were not there to be observers of the parade.

Mr Swann: I could not agree more with the other Member for North Antrim. However, what also went on that night? Two formal protests were put in; one by the Rasharkin Residents Association and one by the Rasharkin residents community, or RRC, or whatever they call it. Both were restricted to 50 protestors apiece.

There was a spillover — where those members of a dissident republican movement went into a third protest group at the bottom of the village — which was not controlled by the police and for which there was no formal notification. There are photographs and video evidence of that third protest group, which stood with their hurls, but there has been no mention of that today.

Earlier, my party colleague Tom Elliott referred to the fact that no action or recourse has been taken in relation to that photographic and video evidence of the threats and intimidatory activities against unionist and loyalist parades.

Mr Copeland: Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: I will.

Mr Copeland: Will the Member agree with me and underscore Mr Storey's earlier comments about the display of standards in Rasharkin on the evening of Ballymaconnelly Flute Band's most recent parade, and contrast that with those presented some time ago when a band from a republican background carried a drum

displaying two masked men with two AK-47s, seemingly firing shots over a rather badly painted Celtic cross? Will he agree that the fundamental problem is that the law is not being applied equally, fairly or justly, which has left a bad taste in the mouths of the parading community?

Mr Swann: Again, the Member supports what I am saying. There was a reference to Dungiven earlier on. In the previous debate, Cathal Boylan started to refer to what had happened in Dungiven, but that was neither the time nor the place to do so. It is a pity, because he was trying to defend what happened at that time in Dungiven when that standard was displayed. It is a pity that he is not here to try to defend those same actions, which are indefensible.

On the Twelfth in Crumlin, we witnessed a classic —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Swann: In Crumlin, as elsewhere, the demand was for the institution to talk, but to talk to whom? It was to talk to Sinn Féin, whose singular drive is based on its narrow and sectarian agenda of no Protestant feet in these villages.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone. I call Mrs Dolores Kelly. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mrs D Kelly: You will be aware, Mr Speaker, that the SDLP tabled an amendment to the motion, but, unfortunately, it was not accepted. However, we are happy to support the Alliance Party's amendment, given that it closely follows the sentiments of our proposed amendment.

This is a debate about asking for dialogue with residents. Nevertheless, it would seem that some parties here have very short memories. It was only two years ago that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister backed the plan for a parades Bill that was put forward by the DUP and Sinn Féin working group. They stated:

"We will promote and support direct dialogue with, and the involvement of, representatives of the Loyal Orders, band parade organisers, local residents' groups and other stakeholders".

Perhaps Mr Peter Robinson, the First Minister, might get his party back in line again and on the same page as himself when it comes to talking to residents' groups.

From listening to this debate, one would believe that disputed parades and violence around Orange parades have happened only in the last two or three decades. It was back in 1832 that the Party Processions (Ireland) Bill was brought to the Houses of Parliament by the British Government — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mrs D Kelly: — who recognised the violence and sectarianism that occurred around parades here in Ireland. It was the British Government — Her Majesty's Government — who banned Orange parades at that time. Unfortunately, that ran out in 1845. Then, there were the events at Dolly's Brae in 1849 —

Some Members: Hear, Hear.

Mrs D Kelly: — when 10 Catholic houses and a Catholic church were burnt to the ground and five Catholics were murdered and nine others injured. Let us not persist with the myth that violence around Orange parades has happened only in the last 10 to 20 years. It has been there for centuries.

Unfortunately, the two big parties have failed to deal with community division. Their efforts to stoke up sectarian tension, particularly around election time, are playing to the gallery. In the last few weeks, I listened in amazement to radio interviews in which so-called community activists said that they wanted more money and that the violence was around there not being enough funding in some of the areas. That is because of a failure of their political representatives to deliver for their own constituency. Many Members on the Benches opposite have to examine themselves in relation to how they have delivered for the people who put them into this place.

Let me say this: last year, the Parades Commission made 3,962 parade determinations. Of those, only 195 were deemed to be contentious, 50 of which were the weekly Drumcree parades. So we are down now, thankfully, to 145 contentious parades, the contention around which could be resolved if we had some respect across our community, better tolerance and some leadership and recognition that the issue of parading is something that many people who live in the interface areas feel very strongly about and about which there is a lot of historical record in respect of what happened in the past.

Many people have suffered personally. Only in recent weeks, we heard how 47 police officers

were injured in north Belfast. There is a financial cost. I also contend that there is a cost that we will never know, namely the cost of people who would have come across the border to visit Northern Ireland — the people who would have come from elsewhere to visit Northern Ireland as tourists —

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Oh yes, I will.

Mr McCausland: The Member referred to the cost. It is not the cost of parades on its own. It is also the cost of policing the rioters who burned a vehicle in Ardoyne, attempted to murder a policeman and threw petrol bombs at the police. Will the Member confirm whether or not she includes the republican cost: the cost of republican rioters and those in republican ranks who attempted to murder policemen? Is that part of the cost as well, or is she ignoring that?

Mr Speaker: The Member will have a minute added to her time.

Mrs D Kelly: The Member knows well that the SDLP stood against all forms of violence over 40 years at huge personal cost. Some of our elected representatives and party chairmen lost their life as a consequence of that. I do not think that we need to examine our credentials. Of course we condemn all acts of violence from whatever quarter, whether in the last 40 years or the last two years.

It is worth nothing that, of all the parades that were determined on last year, 66% came from the broader unionist community. Over 49% of those were from the Orange Order, loyal orders and bands. The primary cost of parading comes from the unionist/loyalist tradition. I wonder whether Mr McCausland on the Back Bench will criticise the leading members of paramilitary —

Mr Speaker: Your time is almost gone.

Mrs D Kelly: — organisations who led from the front in the riots in north Belfast in recent weeks.

Mr D McIlveen: I rise as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I want to say straight up that attacks on our police officers are never justified. They were not justified in the 1970s, the 1980s or the 1990s, and they are not justified in 2012. I want that on record, and it is very important that all of us put it on

record that a situation where over 60 officers are injured must not be repeated. I hope that, if nothing else is achieved in today's debate, a message will go out very clearly that that is not the type of behaviour that we want on our streets. However, we have the issue of the fundamental right to freedom of assembly and the freedom to parade. Those are important rights to be equally enjoyed by all. There is where we have the issue of respect. We started the debate around the question of respect. We may have veered off that a little bit, but the right to parade is an equal right. We are certainly up for that debate, and we feel that that should be respected. To the Members on the opposite Benches I say, as someone who has paraded with the loyal orders and a loyalist flute band, you have nothing to fear from these parades. We come in peace, wishing to display our culture and our right to express it. We hope that, in this day and age, that can be respected and tolerated without any obstruction.

The issue of the cost of parading has been made very clear today, and we have to come back to it. Last week, in our Policing Board business, we had a comprehensive briefing by Assistant Chief Constable Will Kerr. He made it abundantly clear that the cost of parades that are unobstructed is virtually negligible. Therefore, we have to get back to where the problem lies. If 145 parades have been deemed contentious and over 3,000 take place without obstruction and without any problem, we have to come back to this question: where does the problem lie? The problem lies not in the parades but in obstructions to parades. That is where we have to get back to, and, until we get to that point, it will be very difficult to take the debate to the next stage.

Mr Storey: I thank my colleague for giving way. Will he agree that, in our constituency of North Antrim, we have seen a continuing demonisation of Ballymacconnelly flute band? The Member opposite from Sinn Féin continues to refer to that band as the "controversial" Ballymacconnelly band. Not one issue has ever been raised in the law, with the police or any other organisation, about Ballymacconnelly band; yet the demonisation continues. That shows little respect.

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

Mr D McIlveen: I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague. Further to that, in relation to the said Member for North Antrim —

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am sorry; I will keep going.

The Sinn Féin Member for North Antrim mentioned parades that could confine themselves to non-contentious routes. However, my understanding is that, when a so-called contentious route in Rasharkin was looked at by the Parades Commission, the parade was moved on to the Main Street of Rasharkin and — surprise, surprise — there was another protest on Main Street in Rasharkin. That is where we come back to the issue of respect, which clearly is not forthcoming from the opposite Benches.

We have to come back to the crux of the matter. The motion calls for the loyal orders to come into direct dialogue with residents. Looking back a couple of weeks to the terribly unfortunate scenes on the streets of our city, we have to be honest and say that that was not the result of non-dialogue with local residents. It was the result of a dysfunctional, inconsistent, incoherent Parades Commission, which made a horrific, bad decision. All that it sought to do was to heighten tensions and to create unnecessary pressures by basically saying that the tradition of one group would be looked on in a much more lenient way than the tradition of another group. Ultimately, that is what this comes down to. This was a bad decision by the Parades Commission, and we have to call it —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am sorry; I cannot.

We have to accept that. That said, we come back to the issue of mutual respect. If there is to be mutual respect, it must be on the basis of an open mind. On 30 August, the Member of Parliament for West Belfast said that the Orange Order needed to reroute itself away from Donegall Street. If the view of Sinn Féin is "Reroute or nothing", what is the point in having dialogue? Clearly, minds have already been made up on those Benches. If there are those in the party opposite who have yet to speak, I would be keen to hear whether that is still the view of Sinn Féin, given that its Member of Parliament for West Belfast was very vocal on the matter.

We have had a very broad debate today, but I do not believe that we can support the motion tabled by the party opposite. However, I support the amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party.

5.00 pm

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I will follow tradition and declare my interest as a member of the Apprentice Boys. I am proud to say that I am a member of the Apprentice Boys and a former member of Dunamoney flute band in Magherafelt. I proudly walked the streets of Northern Ireland, and I did so not to offend anybody — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Let us not have the debate across the Chamber. Make your remarks through the Chair.

Mr I McCrea: I did so with the desire and intention to enjoy the culture and tradition that I grew up knowing. There have been a lot of references to the Sinn Féin Member for North Antrim and his dislike for the Ballymaconnelly band. That is a shame because, if he were to sit back, close his eyes and listen to the music, he would probably, like the rest of us, enjoy it.

Sinn Féin caused the problem and the difficulties with parading. It created the beasts, as it were, known as residents' groups. Sinn Féin needs to accept responsibility for that and, in realising that it caused many of the problems —

Mr Sheehan: Will the Member give way?

Mr I McCrea: I will.

Mr Sheehan: There was no contention at all around the parade in Donegall Street until the Young Conway Volunteers decided to circle round outside the church and play a blatantly sectarian song. You cannot blame Sinn Féin for that.

Mr Speaker: Mr McCrea has a minute added to his time.

Mr I McCrea: I think that the Member is looking at this with his eyes closed. I have marched in parades across Northern Ireland. I have been spat on, and stones have been thrown at me and at colleagues from the loyal orders and bands. If that is not contention —

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. As the tradition has started today, I will declare that I am treasurer of Randalstown District Loyal Orange Lodge No 22, and my private lodge is 1105. The previous Member cited Sinn Féin's involvement. Maybe you would allow another intervention by Sinn Féin to explain the Crumlin parade. The Crumlin residents' group was set up only two weeks before 12 July.

Previously, to the best of my knowledge, the Twelfth had been celebrated in Crumlin with no problems. Sinn Féin might claim that no one from its membership was involved, but one of the organisers was a canvasser for the party during the recent elections.

Mr I McCrea: Again, the hypocrisy knows no bounds. When Sinn Féin comes to accept responsibility for creating many of these problems, it should look at itself as part of how we move forward. Sinn Féin should realise that, if it wants people to enter into dialogue, the first thing to do is to admit responsibility. It needs to take note of that.

I proudly walk the streets of Northern Ireland, along with many other men and women, and it is a sad reflection on our community when they are not allowed to walk the Queen's highway.

Mr Lunn: I am happy to support the Alliance Party amendment, and I am glad to see that, unless I say something wrong, the amendment will be accepted by Sinn Féin and the SDLP. We do not so much have a motion and two amendments as three motions, and it is really a choice of one out of three. They do not amend each other. We could have lived with the Sinn Féin motion, but we are even more happy that it can live with our amendment.

I want to touch on a few issues that were mentioned today, notably the Parades Commission, the notion of local dialogue and the position of the police. I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board. You will be pleased to know that that is the only interest that I have to declare. The Parades Commission does not want to exist. If it had nothing to make determinations about, nobody would be happier than the Parades Commission itself. As long as the loyal orders will not speak to the Parades Commission, there is not much hope of putting it out of business. On that side of the House, perhaps you could think about that. We could arrive at a point at which there is no need for a Parades Commission. I certainly hope that we do.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Go on.

Mr Storey: As I said, I am not a member of the Orange Institution, but here is the crux of the matter. Year after year, I have repeatedly gone to the Parades Commission to discuss Rasharkin and other parades in my constituency. I have been open and honest. What have I got in return? I have been treated

with absolute contempt in the Parades Commission's determinations. So dialogue does not work with the Parades Commission.

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

Mr Lunn: The way to get rid of the Parades Commission is — not for you, Mr Storey, because apparently you are not a member of a loyal order, which surprises me — for the loyal orders — *[Interruption.]* Sorry, I thought that that was what you said. I take it back. What you meant was that you went to the Parades Commission as a private citizen rather than as a member of a loyal order.

The way to dissolve the Parades Commission is to have local dialogue, which we have heard a lot about recently. We are in the mouth of a parade on 29 September that will go down Upper Donegall Street and Carrick Hill. I was listening to the radio today and heard Winston Irvine, who is a local community representative, talking about quiet conversations between the order and the parishioners and dialogue with the priest. I hear that, as a sign of goodwill, the Young Conway band will not parade past the church and that the bands that do parade past will play well-known hymns. That is all good stuff.

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: No.

I welcomed the apology from the Royal Black Institution for the band's behaviour on whatever date it was in June or July.

Mr Kennedy: August.

Mr Lunn: Whatever — there are so many of them.

Why do they stop short of speaking to the residents' groups? Mr Kelly and Alban Maginness, who has gone, said that there is a perfectly valid residents' group of 20 years' standing in the area, which has been constructive and said that it wants respect and not rerouting. I have heard a lot about respect today. Mr Elliott mentioned it. He wants respect for the events that will be held, and I could not agree more. However, we should be talking about mutual respect, not one-sided respect. After all this time, 20 years after Drumcree first erupted, the loyal orders will still not speak to residents' groups.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way; I very much appreciate it. Mr Storey said that he talked to the Parades Commission and got nothing out of it. In some areas — I highlighted Newtownbutler — the loyal orders talked to residents and provided everything that they asked for on that route, but it was still not enough. People still wanted to change that and stop the parades. I hope that the Member can appreciate that.

Mr Lunn: I am starting to appreciate that. I do not live anywhere near Newtownbutler, so I might not have known that, but it is good to hear and is exactly what we need to happen.

Mr Anderson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: No. I have very little time.

I want to say a word about the situation with the police. Gerry Kelly said that the cost of policing the parades was £6 million, but we will not go there, as there is a difference of opinion. However, the £7 million in lost tourism should focus all our minds. Furthermore, injuries to policemen have been mentioned on the other side of the House many times. I do not know how many of you heard Assistant Chief Constable Will Kerr speak after the events of a few weeks ago. He spoke with great feeling to the effect that it could not go on and the police could not continue to be the meat in the sandwich time after time. Therefore, I make a plea on behalf of the police, and I am sure that other Policing Board members here will concur —

Mr Speaker: Your time has almost gone.

Mr Lunn: It just cannot go on. I hope that the House will unite behind our amendment. I have my doubts, but I hope that it will.

Mr Nesbitt: I am the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. I am not a member of any of the loyal orders.

I want to be positive today, as I was yesterday in the debate on the apology from the Irish Government. We are in a better place today than we were a couple of weeks ago, thanks to some statements, particularly from the loyal orders and the bands. I do not want today's debate to be divisive. I want it to be positive, but there are some inconvenient truths, and they need to be spoken. People are listening to this debate and thinking thoughts that need to be articulated. I will articulate them.

Mr Kelly talked about where the Carrick Hill residents' group came from. I will be positive: perhaps he misheard me this morning. I questioned where it came from with its intervention on parades, because I was told that it had never before been associated with them. Other groups appear to have come out of the woodwork to take an interest in parades. Mr Kelly talks about a culture of sectarianism as if it were a one-way street. I was here yesterday for the debate, and I listened to my colleague Mr Kennedy talk about Kingsmill, where workers were taken out of a van and separated by their religion. Roman Catholics were asked to move away, and Protestants were asked to remain to be slaughtered. Sectarianism is not a one-way street. I talk about Mr Kelly. I heard him say that £6 million was spent on policing. There will be those out there — it is an inconvenient truth for Mr Kelly — who will have heard that and thought about how much it would have cost to repair the Old Bailey if the IRA had managed to bomb it as it planned.

Mr Kelly asks for a scene-changer. Did the Royal Black Institution not offer a scene-changer with its statement and apology? I know very little of the institution, but I know that it has four aims, the fourth of which is to "develop social and responsible citizenship". I believe that that statement is true to what it says on the tin. This week, I heard a statement from the Orange Order and the bands that is potentially a scene-changer. They came out offering a spirit of generosity and said that they would play a hymn as they passed St Patrick's. They await the response, and they will have listened carefully to the response that they heard today — not just in the House but this morning on BBC Radio Ulster, when Alban Maginness of the SDLP said that the statement did not go far enough.

You do not need to have been in the room for the discussion to know the sort of fears, concerns and debate that will have preceded the statement. There will have been those who would have said, "It is all give, give, give from our side. There is nothing coming back our way". Others would have said, "Making a one-off gesture is dangerous, because it will be used as a stick to beat us with next year, and the year after, and the year after". Others would have said, "What if the Parades Commission think, 'They have given us a gesture, so, if they are prepared to go that far, how much further can we push them with our determination?'". Still others would have feared that the response would be, "Not enough". That is what Mr Maginness said, and I do not think that that advances the situation. Were he here, I would like to give way so that he could

tell me what he means by calling for dialogue with those:

"most fundamentally affected or intimately affected".

Those were his words, not mine. I do not wish to belittle the feelings of the residents, but when I hear the expression "fundamentally affected", I think of someone who has lost their job or home, so I would like to know exactly what he means by that.

I listened to Mr Storey talk about the need for the end to doublespeak and double standards from Sinn Féin. The next Member who spoke, Daithí McKay, said that the TV coverage and publicity surrounding the contentious parades is bad for tourism and puts people off coming here. It is an inconvenient truth for Mr McKay that, as far as I can remember as a radio news reporter in the 1980s, I covered a murderous bomb attack on a fishing festival in County Fermanagh. That did not do much for our tourism industry, Mr McKay. Neither, by the way, did blowing up members of the Irish rugby team on their way back to Belfast from training in Dublin. The team included people such as Nigel Carr, who could have been one of the all-time greats — he was one of the all-time greats — but was denied his full potential by an IRA bomb on the border.

We are entering a decade of centenaries. We have done so with a great start at the Balmoral review. It was lawful, respectful and peaceful. September 29 is a one-off. We have had the statements that give us hope for better for the future.

5.15 pm

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Elliott: Does the Member appreciate that he has covered quite a lot that is coming from one side of the community? We all appreciate that there are difficulties in both arguments, and I have said that. However, does he appreciate that there needs to be reciprocity from the other community, particularly from political representatives? Just in case there is any doubt, I am a member of the Orange Order and the Royal Black Institution.

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

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention and for the shock revelation at the end. I agree. There are many players, not least in north Belfast, including the loyal orders, the bands, the supporters, the residents, the church community and the Parades Commission. The loyal orders and the bands are now being called on to take a second step. I think that they have already taken the first step, and, in our community, once you have taken the first step, it is up to somebody else to reciprocate by taking the second.

The question is this: is it reasonable to object to a band playing a hymn while walking down a street? If the answer is "No, it is not reasonable to object", is it then reasonable for the Parades Commission —

Mr Speaker: Time is almost gone.

Mr Nesbitt: — to impose any further restrictions? My answer is "No, it is not".

Mr Speaker: I call Mitchel McLaughlin to conclude on the motion. The Member has 10 minutes.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. If we consider the events outside St Patrick's on 12 July with the Young Conway band, we should not indulge in the "whataboutery" that, I think, has damaged the debate. There have been some useful conversations. We should consider, perhaps, a lost opportunity for the marching orders to take their own initiative. It cannot be denied that that was an unacceptable episode. It is not, by any means, the worst that has happened over the past number of years; nevertheless, it was an opportunity that the marching orders could have seized to say that it was not up to their standards of behaviour and that they regretted it and would take their own initiative, which could be that, any time that they passed St Patrick's or any place of worship, they would play hymns. They might have got a different response. Of course, they did not take that opportunity. They did not take the many opportunities that are shown by the examples of local resolutions emerging as a result of dialogue to resolve outstanding contentious issues. I completely endorse Trevor's comments when he discussed that and offered those up as opportunities that the marching orders could have taken.

I have heard the pain and frustration from Members opposite, but it is all "whataboutery",

paranoia, schemes and conspiracies. You take away their —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Sorry, I do not get any extra time, so I will not give way to anybody.

Mr Storey: Will you give way on that point?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: No, I will not take any interventions. I make that clear. I do not get any extra time. I am sorry about that.

The point that I would like to make is that perhaps we should ask ourselves this question: why is there not dialogue or negotiation with the view to finding agreement? It is not taking away from anybody's culture. I have heard quite extravagant language used to describe the Parades Commission determination on the Black Preceptory march on 25 August. What exactly did it do? The Young Conway Volunteers were singled out for their behaviour, and they were debarred from marching. They marched anyway, and they played anyway. They were not disowned. Every other band there, with very few exceptions, followed their lead and played outside the church.

That in itself raises a question: where exactly was the assault that occasioned that behaviour? It was described by some as civil disobedience and by others as an example of intolerance and sectarian abuse. The abuse and the offence were very well described. People could not claim that they did not know about it, that they were unaware that there would be such emotions or that such offence would be caused. They went deliberately to give that offence. We should come at this from the point of view of trying to find solutions, not to create more problems.

It is my contention that the Orange and other marching institutions have demonstrated that, where they are acceptable within the local community, there is absolutely no difficulty. That goes for the vast number of the parades, marches and band parades that they organise. However, there are areas where the host communities have difficulty with it. To get into arguments about why there should not be dialogue perhaps reflects an arrogant sense that they do not have to talk to anybody. There are opportunities to help the process of mutual understanding. I accept that we on the nationalist and republican side do not appreciate or fully understand the Orange or marching culture and how important it is in the unionist community. I accept that it is

important, because I have heard it in the comments.

When the Crumlin parade, which was a county mobilisation, was mooted this year, I approached two unionist representatives in the House and said that we could have a problem in Crumlin and that I thought we should work together. I got a very fair hearing, but, in my view, I did not get a fair response. I do not mean that I did not get a fair response from them individually, because I think they made representation, but they did not get a response. However, at the eleventh hour, literally in this case, the local lodge agreed to meet the residents' group. To be honest, I am not going to get into an argument about where they emerged from. I can tell you, and I will put it on the record, that they emerged because of the announcement that there was going to be 7,000 Orangemen and associated bands and supporters marching through an overwhelmingly — 80% — nationalist village, and they were not going to talk to anybody. They were not going to negotiate. That is why they formed. They did not form a fortnight before it; they formed some considerable time before that, because my approach to the two unionist representatives was more than a fortnight before the march. I approached them before the Orange Order formally notified its intention to march, so there was a good lead-in and an opportunity that was not recognised. That is as negative as I would like to put it. There was an opportunity for dialogue, it was not taken, and I regret that very much. However, I welcome the fact that the local lodge and its local master took leadership and negotiated with the residents' group, and that agreement and a peaceful and enjoyable day resulted.

Those are examples of how you can reduce the tensions and what we can do on behalf of wider society, because I think our wider community — nationalist, republican and unionist — wants to see agreement being reached. They have seen many examples of contentious marches being resolved because there was dialogue.

Sometimes, there are quiet conversations. I do not want to name individuals, but there are people in the Chamber who played a very honourable role in helping those agreements to emerge. They did not do it for publicity purposes or for political purposes; they did it in the interests of the wider community. The result of that is an example that we should pursue in the remaining contentious marches.

Trevor described very well how we can take forward the Parades Commission, or any body

that will replace the Parades Commission, because some body will have to be set up if the Parades Commission goes out of existence. We can do it by ensuring that the marches are not contentious. I am not saying that it will be easy — far from it — but the evidence is there that it can be done.

We should not start from the basis of pointing the finger across the Chamber at each other; of megaphone diplomacy; or of talking to people as if they have no rights. Residents' groups who have a problem should be listened to. Let us see whether we can address those issues, and let us look for opportunities to take initiatives.

I heard the MP for West Belfast being misrepresented in this debate. He pointed to the role of the UVF. He pointed out that it was uncontrollable. In other words, he was not blaming the march organisers. He suggested that the way for the marching orders to deal with the problem in their community was, in fact, to voluntarily reroute. That was not a demand, and it was not Sinn Féin hyping up the situation. He pointed out the core problem within the groups that organised the march. He also pointed out that the UVF had its own agenda, which resulted in mayhem and in issues spinning out of the march organisers' control, and spoilt the event, I am quite certain, for many marchers.

Let us take our responsibility. We are the elected representatives. We are the people who are supposed to give leadership, to come up with initiatives and to sit down in a calm, rational and adult way in order to work things out. We do not have to do that in the Chamber. We can meet privately at a constituency level to identify the issues and encourage dialogue. One of the slogans that emerged from the Crumlin discussions was "respect and dialogue harm no tradition". I think that we could do worse than to adopt that slogan when we are addressing the outstanding matters.

I recommend the motion to the House. I have to say that I appreciate the effort that went into the Alliance Party amendment in order to find a balance between the positions: the predictable opposition and the predictable support, which we each offer from our perspectives. The Ulster Unionist Party's amendment cannot be supported, but not because it did not try to come up with something that could win support. It did not succeed on this occasion, but at least it tried to address the issues. If we do not give leadership in the House, we cannot blame people on the street for acting accordingly.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if the amendment is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording of the original motion will have been changed to such an extent that it would not be in order for the House to vote on amendment No 2 as well.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided.

Mr Speaker: Order. Can I have the attention of the House? There are some problems with the Division, so I am going to call the Division again. There are some technical problems, and I want to announce that to the House. Let us have some patience around this.

Order, Members. I am going to run the Division again.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 50; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCreagh, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Copeland and Mr Kennedy

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A

Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr G Kelly and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Speaker: As amendment No 1 has been made, amendment No 2 will not be put to the House.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 50; Noes 48.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Kennedy and Mr Nesbitt

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr G Kelly and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the positive community contribution by the loyal orders; and calls on everyone in leadership roles within the community to ensure that their actions promote positive outcomes from all parades and other events organised by community groups that could be deemed contentious.

6.00 pm

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Health Provision: Armagh City and District

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and all other Members who are called to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis an díospóireacht thábhachtach seo a chur os comhair an Tionóil inniu. I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this important topic in the Chamber today. I thank the Minister for taking the time out to attend, and I look forward to his response and the contributions of other Members, who are well aware of the issues around the health sector in Armagh city and district.

I remind those in the Chamber of the significant impact of the reduction in health service provision in the Armagh city and district area over the past years. As many people know, Armagh has not had the major private investment that other areas of the North have had. It is not an industrial hub. It has been known primarily for its public sector jobs, its array of niche shops and its tourism product, with its cathedrals, Emain Macha, which is Navan Fort, the observatory and its links to St Patrick, to name but a few.

Ceantar agus cathair Ard Mhacha. Armagh city and district has long been recognised as a centre for public sector jobs, be it in the administration of the local government authority, education, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and health, especially as it includes the St Luke's Hospital site, which contains the Mullinure and Longstone hospital facilities. Over the years, that led to the building-up of a highly skilled pool of workers in the health sector. Unfortunately, a review of health and social care has seen the services provided decimated, which has had the knock-on effect of

employees being relocated, job losses and service contracts being made void. That has had an impact on the local economy.

I will briefly outline some issues that have arisen in this sector over the past four or five years. The St Luke's hospital complex is one of the oldest in Ireland, and has provided psychiatric care for many years.

Mr Brady: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: I certainly will.

Mr Brady: Does the Member agree that when we had meetings with the trust and the Department about the scaling down and eventual closure of St Luke's as a psychiatric hospital, we were told that the new Bluestone unit at Craigavon Area Hospital would cater for approximately 80 patients, which would solve the problems? I know, because of the number of people in Newry with queries, that that has not been the case. That unit has not been able to cope with the number of cases. St Luke's was always a mainstay in the constituency, particularly for those from the Newry area. It was recognised as a very good facility, and, unfortunately, that was taken away, without any rationale given.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for his intervention. He knows only too well that that is exactly what has happened. Maybe the Minister would like to respond to that intervention.

Also on this site, Longstone Hospital provided long-term care and an assessment and treatment unit for adults with a learning disability. Thirdly, Mullinure Health and Wellbeing Centre provided patient care for people with dementia in the Gillis Centre and a one-stop elderly assessment clinic.

As far back as April 2008, I asked questions of the previous Minister about the complex. Given the proposals under the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability, concerns had been raised about the long-term care for those in the hospitals and about the staff. So after care had been provided at the complex for years, the then Minister implemented changes that included ward closures and left only skeleton services, mostly administration, at St Luke's, Longstone and Mullinure. Services and patients were relocated to Craigavon, and vulnerable patients were placed on the care in the community programme. Since 2008, services have been moving out of the city and district. All this took place despite thousands of

people in the Armagh city and district, supported by all parties in the local council, all the MLAs, the constituency MP and the trade unions opposing each and every proposal and putting forward suggestions that would have had the desired efficiency savings. This was all to no avail. Changes were forced through, and the people of Armagh city and district had to endure the changes that they were united in opposing.

The next major overhaul of the health system was the relocation of the minor injuries unit at Mullinure Hospital to Armagh Community Hospital, which, in itself, was not a major bone of contention. What shocked people was the reduction in the service provided. Health provision in the area — a mixture of GP, Armagh Community Hospital and out-of-hours at Mullinure — reduced from a 24/7 service to one available to 7.00 pm, five days a week. Now, people in the Armagh area who find that they need health provision that is deemed non-emergency but is severe enough to require urgent attention must travel to the closest A&E, which is at Craigavon Area Hospital, a location that requires patients to have a car because, as we all know, the transport system in Armagh city and district does not exist in the evening.

Once again, this review was opposed by all the political parties, unions and the public, 9,000 of whom signed a petition. However, once again, the views of the majority were ignored. At that point, the people of Armagh city and district really believed that they had become second-class citizens in the eyes of the health service. Now, we are in the midst of another review; this time of the GP out-of-hours service that was transferred from Mullinure to Armagh Community Hospital at Tower Hill. Although assurances have been given, you cannot blame the people of Armagh for being sceptical and thinking that, once again, a service will be hit in a way that will be of no benefit to the local community.

I welcome the Minister being here, and, on behalf of the citizens of Armagh city and district, I appeal to him to personally look at the minor injuries unit in Armagh. Look at the proposals put forward by the local council as a corporate body, which would have extended the unit's opening hours to midnight, with services such as X-rays and diagnostics provided, while still making efficiency services. Those proposals would give an effective service to Armagh city and district, while relieving the burden on an already overstretched Craigavon A&E department. I also urge him to ensure that the current GP out-of-hours service is retained and personally prove to the good people of Armagh

city and district that they are not second-class citizens and that they are entitled to the same standard of healthcare that befits other areas throughout the North.

Before I conclude, I want to talk a wee bit about the consultation process for GP out-of-hours services. I hope that the Minister will give us an assurance that the consultation will be a proper participatory process in which all the people affected by the changes can get involved and that any suggestions that they bring forward will not just sit on the shelf but will be deemed appropriate for change if necessary.

I will also put on record that Mairead McAlinden from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust has offered to meet me, and I will take up that opportunity.

In closing, I ask the Minister to outline plans for future healthcare provision in Armagh city and district and give some reassurance to the public and the workers that all will be done to provide the best care for the community and that resources will be given to the staff to provide it.

Mr Irwin: Healthcare provision in the Armagh city and district area has been a topic for discussion in the Assembly and, critically, at local council level. I am a member of Armagh City and District Council, and I have been actively involved in the council's collective efforts to maximise the potential for services in the city and district area and to try to consolidate the services that are provided there.

That has not been without its difficulties, as representatives from the area can testify. However, our current Health Minister, with his forthright views, his extremely hands-on attitude to his departmental duties and his focus on getting things done, has meant that we have a clearer picture of the vision for services in the city and district area. I am sure that the Minister will mention that in his response.

I am also pleased that a local council-led campaign to ensure that Armagh remains a hub for public sector employment, including health sector jobs, remains on track. Indeed, the Minister announced recently that a human resources centre for the sector in Armagh has been secured, which is a welcome boost not only for the people directly employed in the service but for the local economy.

There has been some concern locally about the changes to the minor injuries provision in the city and district area. I know that the Southern Trust fully briefed our local council about its

future plans and was rigorously questioned by elected representatives. Not all the recommendations have been met with approval from local representatives, but any service decisions have to be based on solid facts. Although some concerned people expressed great anger in the local press at the changes, some pointed to statistics that illustrated that only one patient every three hours was using the service at Mullinure Hospital.

The extension of operating hours at Armagh Community Hospital at Tower Hill from 9.00 am to 7.00 pm can be viewed either as a cut in services or as a consolidation of existing services. Obviously, people are concerned about out-of-hours provision and the distance from Armagh city to Craigavon or Dungannon. However, I feel that the distances are not beyond acceptable in the majority of circumstances. Make no mistake, this is an emotive issue, and the people in the district have responded to it. I will be keen to see how the service copes after bedding in, and I will be interested to see performance reports to gauge how well the changes have been received and the statistics on the use of the service at Tower Hill following the extension of the opening times.

The Assembly, and the entire community, is better off with a Minister who is prepared to roll up his sleeves and tackle difficult issues. That is a very welcome change from what went before. I will continue my efforts to ensure that Armagh remains a location for healthcare services and public sector employment, and I urge all parties to do likewise.

Healthcare provision across the Province is changing, and we need not only to prepare for change but to ensure that any such changes meet the needs of a changing population. No major decisions have yet been taken about overall future provision in the Southern Trust area, but I know that consultations will be carried out on any proposed changes, and I have no doubt that people will fully engage with those consultations.

Indeed, I feel that the response and engagement of Armagh people has been tremendous to date and shows exactly how seriously people in the area view their health services. Coupled with a very proactive local council in Armagh, I know that future proposals will be scrutinised at a very high level. The lion's share of the Budget in Northern Ireland is spent on healthcare. Therefore, the greatest consideration must be given to how that money is spent in order to achieve the maximum benefit for the patient.

6.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I thank its sponsor and acknowledge the attendance of Minister Poots in the Chamber. Many of the points have already been covered, including the historic position of Armagh as an important location not only in that region but in Northern Ireland generally.

Armagh does not have a lot of what might be called heavy industry. It is very reliant on the public sector. Over the years, the significant number of jobs in local government, education and particularly health have been so welcome and necessary. Historically, health provision in Armagh has been excellent at the various locations through the medical services and dedication of staff. I want to place on record my appreciation for the quality of healthcare in Armagh in all its respects and responsibilities. We have been very well-served as a community.

It is regrettable that the trust did not respond to the petition that was signed by 9,000 local people seeking to save the 24-hour service. Out-of-hours services play a crucial role as the first point of contact and provide urgent care and treatment at times when other services are closed. Instead of the provision that was previously available all day, every day, seven days a week, the trust has now moved to a pilot scheme that offers the service on a more limited basis of 9.00 am to 7.00 pm, five days a week.

Of course, that decision can be traced to the backdrop of reduced resources in the face of, it might be said, growing demand. The Member who introduced the Adjournment debate might want to reflect on and detail what action his party colleagues in the previous Executive took to support the former Health Minister to secure additional resources at a very critical time. I recognise the challenges that are faced by Minister Poots, other Ministers and, indeed, the trust. However, it is regrettable that anyone who requires the services of a minor injuries unit outside the hours that are now provided for will have a considerable distance to travel, either to South Tyrone Hospital in Dungannon or to the A&E in Craigavon.

We are a fairly diverse and far-flung constituency, much of which is rural. This will put a strain on the service provided to that rural population. I ask the Health Minister to give an undertaking that there will be no further dilution of the remaining services, such as the out-of-hours service; that he will look closely at the

results of the pilot study and the ongoing service that is being provided; and that he will ensure that the trust has carried out all necessary procedures in arriving at this decision. I have no doubt that —

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for giving way. I did not want to interrupt Mr Irwin while he was eulogising the Minister; he was in full flow. I absolutely agree with Mr Kennedy, but one of the points that my colleague Cathal Boylan made was that, after closing time in the minor injuries unit, people have to travel to Craigavon. More so than most of us, you are in a position to realise the public transport difficulties. I am not trying to be facetious, but would that be factored in to any long-term planning? Under Transforming Your Care, there may be other changes about which we do not know. Is that in your vision and on your radar? People who do not have access to cars have a genuine difficulty.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will draw your attention to the fact that Mr Kennedy is here as a private Member for Newry and Armagh, not as a Minister.

Mr Brady: With respect, Principal Deputy Speaker, I accept that, but it is hard to divorce him from his position.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: It may be hard, but he is here as a private Member, not as a Minister.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the advice from the Principal Deputy Speaker. The Member has put his views on the record. Clearly, I have other responsibilities outside this debate, and, if a thing is to be called joined-up government, I can accept the Member's point. However, what he is talking about is not without its problems or its challenges either. We are all in a challenging situation, but I think that it is essential that the maximum amount of healthcare is available at the point of need to our constituents in Newry and Armagh, and, particularly in this case, Armagh city and the surrounding district. I very much hope that the Minister will listen closely to the points that were made and to the concerns about ongoing support and service to those people who want to make sure that their representatives are speaking for them in a debate of this nature.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, agus tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht thábhachtach seo faoi chúrsaí soláthar leighis i gceantar agus i gcathair Ard Mhacha. Go

deimhin, do thugais féin rún chuig an Tionól sa bhliain 2009. Ar an drochuair, níor éistíodh liom an lá sin; tá súil agam go bhfuighidh mé éisteacht níos fearr sa lá atá inniu ann.

Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate, and I thank Mr Boylan for securing the time in the Chamber. Indeed, we debated this topic previously when I secured an Adjournment debate back in 2009. Unfortunately, on that day our pleas were not listened to, nor were the pleas of the people of Armagh. The Minister's predecessor decided to close and relocate services out of Mullinure Hospital to Dungannon and Lurgan. I hope that today's time will be spent more fruitfully with the present Minister.

As Mr Boylan said, there have been more changes to the services with the relocation of the minor injuries unit from the Mullinure site to the community hospital at Tower Hill. In itself, relocation of services is not an issue. Co-locating the minor injuries unit, the GP out-of-hours services and community hospital services on the one site makes very good sense. However, it does not make sense in my mind, nor in the minds of the people of Armagh and district, to reduce hours in, for example, the minor injuries unit in Armagh. In March, I attended the Southern Trust's board meeting to try to persuade it against its decision that has meant that Armagh city and district is left with no evening or weekend cover. If local residents need access to a minor injuries unit after 7.00 pm or at the weekend, they will have to travel, as was said earlier, to Dungannon or to one of the emergency departments in Dungannon or Newry. That does not make sense because our emergency departments are already under pressure, and we should not further pressurise them with minor injuries.

Health provision does not begin or end at the community hospital or minor injuries unit. I rise to express concerns about the condition of the health estate across the greater Armagh area. Armagh goes beyond the primate's wall, and that is the crux of the matter in my view. Beyond Armagh, there are rural communities in Clady, Granemore, Derrynoose, Madden, Middletown, Killylea, Tullysaran and in many other hamlets and villages in between. It is a very rural part of Northern Ireland, and the view of the community in those areas is that health services do not stretch beyond Craigavon. Indeed, at one time, Armagh had numerous hospitals such as St Luke's, Mullinure, Tower Hill and the City Hospital. However, in recent years, those hospitals have been closed, one

by one, and with their closure came the withdrawal of services.

In time of need, our first point of contact is quite often the local GP surgery. However, if you look at the GP accommodation at Willowbank in Keady or at the Richhill health centre, you will see excellent GPs offering an excellent service in what can only be described as substandard, cramped conditions and out-of-date accommodation, yet a £300,000 centre for adults with learning difficulties remains unused and empty in Keady five years after it was completed. Is that a good use of resources for Armagh?

Today, I take the opportunity to ask the Minister to review health provision in the Armagh area. We need a strategic view and a plan for the future that will build on and invest in the services offered at Armagh Community Hospital and support the services at Daisy Hill in Craigavon. As I said earlier, we need investment in the GP surgeries in Keady and Richhill and increased hours at the minor injuries unit in Armagh to recognise the rural hinterland that that unit serves. As Mr Boylan pointed out, we also need maintenance of the GP out-of-hours service.

I have already indicated the feelings of the community, and several Members have referenced the well-supported petition on health. Many people in the Armagh area believe that their services are not funded to the extent that is needed. They have witnessed those services crumble in recent years at a time when the population of the Southern Trust is growing. It has both the youngest and oldest population in Northern Ireland, yet the Southern Trust is underfunded by the Department's capitation formula. I appeal to the Minister to protect the services that are left in Armagh, keep them close to the community and bring forward proposals to address the very serious inadequacies in health provision in the greater Armagh area. Sin a bhfuil le rá agam anois. Go raibh céad maith agat as an deis cainte.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am grateful for the opportunity to hear the views of Members on this issue. As Health Minister, my vision is to ensure that services provided by health and social care providers meet the needs of patients, clients and local communities, and my aim is to continue to support the development of high quality integrated and responsive primary and community care services that will benefit all those who live in Northern Ireland. The people who work in health and social care services — the doctors, nurses, therapists,

administrators, ancillary staff and managers — are the true determinant of high quality services. It is they who deliver the high-quality service for patients and clients. I am strongly committed to the principle that health and social care services should be driven by, and be responsive to, the needs of patients, clients and their carers, and I believe that truly high-quality health and social care services can only be delivered when they are resourced and designed around the needs of people who use them.

6.30 pm

I realise that some people are anxious and concerned about the future of our services, especially in the present financial climate. I understand and share their concern, but with strong leadership involving people and effective planning, I believe that the challenges we face can be met.

The vision that I have for health and social care is one that will drive up the quality of services and outcomes for patients, improve outcomes and enhance the patient experience. I want to ensure that service users are at the heart of everything we do. Patients are entitled to receive the right care in the right place at the right time. They are at the centre of our policy developments and our planning assumptions. The design and delivery of services that meet needs and expectations is what really matters to patients.

One of my key objectives, which I frequently refer to, is the development of an enhanced role for primary care, working hand in hand with healthcare providers and patients in designing and delivering consistently high-quality safe and needs-based care in community settings.

In relation to the minor injuries unit, the Southern Trust has recently made changes to services in Armagh with the centralisation of services at Armagh Community Hospital. The service at Armagh Community Hospital had its opening hours extended to 7.00 pm. The minor injuries unit at the Mullinure site, which provided a service overnight at weekends, has closed. Unfortunately, that service was not well utilised, with one patient attending every three hours. In times of financial constraint, we cannot afford to spend money on staff waiting for patients to come to a facility. We need to have the patients to justify it.

Decisions relating to the provision of local minor injuries services are matters for the local health and social care trust to determine in consultation with local people. Indeed, I

understand that the pilot scheme, extending the opening hours of Armagh Community Hospital to 7.00 pm, was the result of discussion with the local council, prior to public consultation. I know that the Mullinure minor injuries unit was greatly valued by some of the local population; however, it is essential that we make the appropriate use of health service resources. Mr Kennedy indicated that the previous Minister struggled somewhat with resources, and the truth is that we have to take decisions like this to properly utilise the resources that we have, otherwise somewhere else suffers. We simply cannot afford to spend money on a service that the public are not using, for whatever reason.

I understand, too, that some people are fearful that Armagh is losing a safety net of sorts by not having access to the unit overnight and at weekends for minor conditions. There is no question of Armagh being left without access to urgent and emergency care because of the closure of Mullinure. Emergency care is available from Craigavon Area Hospital, and the 999 service is available for serious emergencies. The GP out-of-hours service will provide urgent care, and the South Tyrone Hospital MIU provides minor injuries services seven days a week.

The Health and Social Care Board launched a public consultation in the strategic framework for GP out-of-hours services in June. The purpose of the framework is to facilitate the development of future provision of GP out-of-hours services across Northern Ireland. The framework focuses on how access to GP out-of-hours services can be simplified and where opportunities to align those services with other healthcare services can be maximised and made efficient. At the same time, it also ensures that safe and effective GP out-of-hours services are available to all our population.

GP out-of-hours services are a vital component of the health and social care system. As a first point of contact for the public, they provide urgent advice, care and treatment at a time when GP surgeries are closed. The consultation on the strategic framework reflects the need for GP out-of-hours services to evolve and develop in order to accommodate the changing healthcare system in Northern Ireland. The recently published report 'Transforming Your Care' (TYC) proposes changes to the way in which health services are delivered in local communities. The need to provide the right care in the right place at the right time is a key principle of that change, and the development of GP out-of-hours services across Northern Ireland will be an essential component.

The public consultation will enable Health and Social Care staff and public and key stakeholders to contribute their views to the future design and configuration of GP out-of-hours services. The consultation period will run for 13 weeks from June 2012 until Friday 20 September.

TYC implementation will mean bringing health and social care services closer to people in their home and their community — moving services out of hospitals where it is safe and appropriate to do so. That shift left will include a more personalised approach to care and an emphasis on moving resources towards prevention and health promotion. As part of the process, draft population plans were produced by local commissioning groups in liaison with the health and social care trusts and others. The population plans provide a basis for taking forward a number of TYC proposals, particularly in respect of the service configuration and the shift left of services from secondary care into primary and community care and the configuration of acute services.

The population plans have been based on criteria and guidance to ensure that the proposals put forward meet our needs for safe and resilient services and quality outcomes. The draft plans have been subject to quality assurance work over the summer period. The quality assurance work on the draft is being concluded. It is a critical process, involving input from a range of stakeholders. It will ensure that the population plans and the strategic implementation plan provide a sound basis for how our health and social care services are delivered in the future.

No decisions have been made on the final shape of services in the southern area. However, it should be said that I cannot undo decisions that were taken in 2008 and 2009 on St Luke's and other facilities. Those decisions are long past the post and are not something that I can change at this point.

Reference was made to transportation issues. Again, that is not in my bailiwick. Perhaps Members may wish to have a debate on that on another occasion.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I had an opportunity to attend the presentation on GP out-of-hours services. Although all of us in the House recognise that there is a reliance on cars, especially in rural areas, that matter came up in discussions about how the consultation would go forward. The discussion said exactly that: there is a requirement for cars

in the countryside. Part of the process is that there will be access to services. However, I want to see a proper service provided, and that should be the starting point as opposed to the notion that it is OK because people in rural areas have cars and, therefore, they will be able to access services. If you take the district itself and the people out at the Derrynoose end, which is right on the border, who have to access services in Craigavon or 999, that is a long way away. I am sure that the Minister will take on board the fact that it is about the provision of service, and the tools to deliver that service are key.

Mr Poots: I am very well aware that public transport is not great in the Armagh area. When we looked at relocating office jobs in the health service to Armagh, one of the objections that came from members of staff was the poor public transportation linkages. However, that is not something that I have any control over. It should be noted that, as regards business services, we have put 80 jobs towards Armagh, and that will be happening quite soon. We decided to have those jobs in Armagh and utilise the vacant facilities left in the health estate by previous decisions.

A consultation document is being prepared to assist the consultation process that will issue with the revised draft strategic implementation plan and population plans. The consultation process should be launched within the next month. The consultation will be supported by a wide range of engagement events that will allow patients, service users and the wider public to have their say. Any decisions on the future configuration and provision of services will be informed by the consultation. Any major service changes will be the subject of a separate consultation. As outlined earlier, my aim is to bring about change in our health and social care system to deliver better prevention and early intervention, so that that care is more patient-centred, closer to home, resilient and safe, and delivers the best possible outcomes well into the future to meet the needs of citizens in Northern Ireland.

Adjourned at 6.40 pm.



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