

Official Report (Hansard)

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Contents

Assembly Business

Budget (No.2) Bill: Royal Assent	1
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill: Royal Assent.....	1
Ministerial Appointments	1
Resignation: Mr Conall McDevitt	1

Matters of the Day

Seamus Heaney.....	2
HRH Prince George of Cambridge.....	6

Assembly Business

Committee Membership	8
----------------------------	---

Committee Business

Plant Health and Tree Disease.....	9
------------------------------------	---

Private Members' Business

Ministerial Pledge of Office/Code of Conduct for Members	19
--	----

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development	21
Social Development.....	29

Private Members' Business

Ministerial Pledge of Office/Code of Conduct for Members (<i>continued</i>).....	38
--	----

Written Ministerial Statements

Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Dental Hospital Inquiry Report

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland
2011-21

Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the Editor.

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

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 9 September 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we proceed to today's business, I welcome all Members back after the summer recess. I also have some announcements that I want to make to the House.

Budget (No.2) Bill: Royal Assent

Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: I wish to inform the House that two Bills have received Royal Assent. The Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 became law on 8 July 2013, and the Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 became law on 18 July 2013.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Speaker: Members will know that two new Ministers took up office during the recess. Following Mr Attwood's resignation, Dr Alasdair McDonnell nominated Mr Mark Durkan to hold the office of Minister of the Environment. Mr Durkan affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office in the presence of myself and the Clerk to the Assembly on 16 July. I therefore confirm that Mr Durkan has taken up office as Minister of the Environment, and I wish him well.

Following Mr Wilson's resignation, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson nominated Mr Simon Hamilton to hold the office of Minister of Finance and Personnel. Mr Hamilton affirmed the terms of the Pledge of Office in the presence of myself and the Clerk to the Assembly on 29 July. I therefore confirm that Mr Hamilton has taken up office as Minister of Finance and Personnel, and I wish him well with his portfolio. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Resignation: Mr Conall McDevitt

Mr Speaker: I advise the House that Mr Conall McDevitt resigned as a Member of the Assembly on 4 September. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Matters of the Day

Seamus Heaney

Mr Speaker: Mr Patsy McGlone has been given leave to make a statement in tribute to Seamus Heaney, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. As Members will be aware, the convention is that, if they wish to be called, they should rise in their place and continue to do so. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. Members will know that the convention is that I will take no points of order or any other issue until this matter is dealt with. If that is clear, let us move on.

Mr McGlone: Mo bhuíochas leat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you very much indeed, Mr Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to pay this tribute. I stand here today in my own personal right but also on behalf of my party to pay the sincerest sympathy and to extend that to the Heaney and Devlin families from the original Anahorish, Bellaghy and Ardboe areas — areas that I know very well, as I am from there.

Seamus Heaney was a poet of huge renown but, importantly, a man of the people who drew inspiration from the people. His humility, connection with and respect for people saw many of his neighbours, friends and those who knew him through his poetry — his well of inspiration — turn out in huge numbers for his funeral service and burial at Bellaghy.

My early memories of Seamus Heaney are from when I, as a young lad at my late father's filling station in Ballyronan, recall him dropping in to get some petrol and have a chat on his way through, usually to Ardboe. He always had a word for me, just a young lad, asking about my father and my uncle, whom he attended school with. Subsequently, there was the introduction of a local poet's literature at Ballymaguigan primary school by my principal there, Felix Mackle. That connection with and respect for people was the same 40 years ago as it was just six years ago, when I sat beside him and chatted at a fundraising event for Anahorish Primary School — his, and our, place of clear water. Our sincerest sympathies go his family. He is now back to his place of clear water.

Ar láimh dheis Dé go raibh a anam séimh. May God rest his gentle soul. Go raibh maith agat.

Miss M McIlveen: Unlike the previous speaker, I did not have a personal connection with

Seamus Heaney, but there are few of us who have attended school in Northern Ireland in the past 30 years who did not have the privilege of having read at least one of Seamus Heaney's poems. I had the pleasure of being introduced to 'Death of a Naturalist' while at school, which led me to be able to appreciate his many other works.

The announcement of his death and the subsequent coverage of his mourning and funeral are testament to a man whose talent was recognised and celebrated in his lifetime: a Nobel laureate, a visiting professor at Harvard and a T S Eliot, Forward, David Cohen and Whitbread prize-winner. He received an Order of Merit from the French Government in recognition of his contributions to art and literature. He even managed to turn down the offer of becoming the Queen's Poet Laureate.

Despite moving to the Republic of Ireland, Seamus Heaney continued a long association with Queen's University in Belfast, where he studied English literature before graduating in 1961 with a first-class honours degree and where he returned to lecture in 1966. The university honoured him by opening the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry and bestowing on him an honorary doctorate. Seamus Heaney showed his great love for the university by writing 'For Alma Mater' and 'Centenary Stanza'. His passing will mean that we will no longer enjoy new works from him, but he has left us a veritable treasure trove in his published collections. He will be sadly missed as Northern Ireland's poet laureate.

W H Auden, writing after the death of W B Yeats, put it succinctly:

*"By mourning tongues
The death of the poet was kept from his
poems."*

My sincerest sympathies and those of my party colleagues are extended to his wife Marie and their children, Christopher, Michael and Catherine Ann, who, while we mourn the loss of a literary giant, suffered the loss of a loving husband and father.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo chomhbhrón a thabhairt do Chlann Uí Éanna. I, too, add my sympathies to the Heaney family and to all who knew him. Seamus Heaney was a giant among figures, particularly on this island. He was a Derry man of honour, humour and humility. Anybody who knows County Derry knows that being called "a Derry man" is unique in that we have three distinct designations: south Derry,

north Derry and Derry city. Seamus Heaney crossed all three. He was born in south Derry, where he said all our eyes were equal. He was educated in Derry city at St Columb's College, and, during that time, he met many day boarders, particularly from north Derry, including two of my former teachers: Dermot Beatty, who taught me in primary 6; and Francie Brolly, a former Member of the House, who taught me in primary 5 and introduced us to the works of Seamus Heaney.

I talked to Francie over the weekend that Seamus died and I asked him, "How much influence did Heaney have?". He said that there were people he had taught back in the early 1970s and introduced to Heaney who might never have read a poem before that and might never have read one since but could quote a line, a verse or, indeed, an entire poem. Late on the Monday evening, I met one of those people. I had never marked him down as a literary person, but he quoted verbatim, with great accuracy, 'Mid-term Break' up to the final punchline:

"A four foot box, a foot for every year."

He had tears in his eyes. That demonstrates the local importance of Seamus Heaney.

Of course, Heaney went on to stride the world stage in academia, with his various professorships and the Nobel prize. His funerals recognised the two Seamus Heaneys: his funeral in Donnybrook was attended by presidents, politicians, poets, professors and pop stars; by contrast, perhaps, his funeral and interment in Bellaghy attracted neighbours and friends of all religions and maybe the sons and grandsons of those with whom his grandfather cut turf in Toner's bog. The most poignant moment, which was not missed by many who were there, was when Liam O'Flynn, his old friend who played with him at the all-Ireland fleadh in Derry just a couple of weeks previously, struck up with the uilleann pipes and a single swallow flew out of the large ash tree that shades his grave. People looked at that as somewhat symbolic.

People have talked about various tributes to him, including naming bridges and whatnot. Perhaps the best one, which Seamus would have loved, would be a bursary, summer school or something of that nature. Seamus Heaney, giant that he was, will never be forgotten. Ar dheis Dé go raibh anam uasal.

Mr Speaker: Members need to rise continually in their place if they want to be called.

Mr McGimpsey: On behalf of my party and myself, I share in the remarks that have been made. I begin by offering our sympathy to his wife and his family. He was, first and foremost, a husband and a father, and it is appropriate that we recognise that. It is also important to remember that very few people from Northern Ireland rise to such a stature, in whatever profession they pursue, that they walk the international stage. Heaney was one of those people, and, in poetry, which is, by definition in the modern age, a very difficult discipline, he had stature not just in Northern Ireland and the British Isles but throughout the world. The fact that he won a Nobel prize for literature speaks for itself. The Nobel committee talked about his:

"works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past."

He was very much a man of the people and a man of his environment and birthplace, and he carried that through his poetry. His poetry had huge integrity, and he was a man of huge integrity and honesty. He said that poetry could:

"fortify your inner life, your inwardness."

That sums it up. His translation of 'Beowulf', the Anglo-Saxon epic poem, was in itself an academic achievement that would take him to the top rank. His professorships at Oxford and Harvard indicate the regard in which he was held throughout the world.

12.15 pm

The former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion talked about Heaney's exceptional grace and intelligence. Frank McGuinness talked about his being:

"the greatest Irishman of my generation."

His biographer, Blake Morrison, made the point that he was both highly regarded by academics and critics and popular with the common people. It is exceptional for a poet to be known as widely by ordinary people. Ordinary folk, general humanity, know his name and works. It will be a long time before we see his like again — the greatest poet of his generation. He came from our small Province. All of us can take pride in that and take comfort from reading his works of literature, which are among the finest of this century and the last.

Ms Lo: I was saddened to hear of the sudden passing of Seamus Heaney. On behalf of the Alliance Party, I would like to pass on our condolences to his family and many close friends.

In the days since his passing, we have heard many times the quote that Heaney was the most important Irish poet since Yeats. We have heard of the many awards that he won for his work. One has only to look at the number of publications and the critical acclaim that they received to see the success that he achieved as a poet.

As a mature student in the 1980s, I undertook O and A levels in English literature, which were my introduction to the poetry of Seamus Heaney. I remember falling in love with his poetry immediately. I loved his style. From there, I went on to attend readings of his poetry, all of which were not only very enjoyable but inspiring. His warmth and down-to-earth manner came across so well that it seemed as though he had been a lifelong friend. I remember going up to talk to him on one occasion after his reading, and he was just so encouraging to me as a new reader of his poetry that I absolutely fell in love with him again immediately.

Seamus Heaney was a big icon in the field of poetry. He leaves a huge legacy in his contribution to literature worldwide. His words will stay with us for many generations to come.

Mr B McCrea: I offer our condolences to the family and friends of Seamus Heaney. Considering prose and poetry I have heard it said that prose is the language of managers while poetry is the language of leaders. Certainly, Seamus Heaney was a leader. Look at what was said by the Nobel committee when he was awarded the prize. It said that his work had:

"a lyrical beauty and an ethical depth".

That is testament to what the man contributed to our lives.

Of course, the important thing about Seamus Heaney is that he was one of us. We were proud of him. We are proud of him. It is right and proper that we should say a few words in the Chamber about his passing. When all is said and done, however, I think that he will be remembered long after we have been forgotten.

Mr McNarry: Regrettably, I did not have the pleasure of knowing Seamus Heaney. I knew

his work. Thankfully, it was close by me as I was growing up. That work is what he has left for future generations and for us, so that we do not forget either.

I listened to Michael Longley say that, a fortnight before he passed away, Seamus and he had had a few drams together. I think that I would like to have been at that little gathering and would have been the better for it. Heaney seemed to me to be the type of guy whose company I would have enjoyed.

After the little bit of discomfort that I had during the summer, I could not help but smile, as everybody did, when, at the funeral, another poet referred to Seamus Heaney's quote "Blessed are the pacemakers". I thought to myself, "Well, blessed be all who put us together". I thought that that was a nice way to sum it up that you can get fixed.

We will miss him, but, as I said, his works are there, and they will continue to be there for as long as we want to read them. New people have discovered him because of his sad demise, and they, too, will be better for it. It has been said that he was one of us. He really was one of the globe — one of global attraction and attention. That sums him up very well.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the proposer Patsy McGlone for giving the House the opportunity to make a fitting tribute to someone who has left these shores. It is only right that, as we conduct our business in this session, we might look at some of Heaney's verses to see whether we can calm down on some of the issues, but I am sure that we will get through them all. I thank the House for bringing this forward.

Mr Campbell: First of all, I join other Members in passing on our condolences to the wife and family of Seamus Heaney.

Seamus Heaney was a big man. I did not have the privilege of knowing him on a personal level, but he was a big man. He was a big man because of his outstanding literary achievements and because, even after those achievements had been recognised locally, nationally and internationally, he had a sense of humility. That is a particularly Ulster characteristic. While it may be shared by others across the globe, people in Northern Ireland who achieve greatness and remain humble are significant in their field and are recognised as such. That is what Seamus Heaney did. He was a County Londonderry man and an Ulsterman, and he regarded himself as an Irishman. We should recognise

and acknowledge his standing in the wider world.

From time to time, public representatives meet in a particular hotel in Londonderry that has a room called the "writers room". In the writers room — you will be aware of this, Mr Speaker — a number of famous writers from Northern Ireland are honoured, one of whom is Seamus Heaney. A few months ago when I was in that room, I was delighted to sit under his portrait. I said to one of my nationalist friends, "I am delighted to sit under Seamus Heaney's picture". They asked, "Why is that?", and I said, "Because he is a big enough man that, even in the middle of the flag protest, he said, 'Let them fly the flag, because there is never going to be a united Ireland anyway'". He was a big man; he was prepared to recognise where he came from and to state it as he found it.

We should pass on our condolences to his family, to his community and to all who recognised a great man from Northern Ireland.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As a Bellaghy man, I would just like to put on record the sense of local pride that Seamus Heaney brought not just to the people of Bellaghy but to the people of County Derry and Ireland. I extend my sincere condolences to the Devlin and Heaney families and say, "Thank you for your great work".

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá áthas ormsa — le fírinne, is onóir é — a bheith ábalta cúpla abairt a rá i gcuimhne duine de na filí a ba mhó a mhair sa tír seo, Seamus Heaney.

It is indeed a privilege to have the opportunity to say a few words in memory of the great poet Seamus Heaney. I am sure that many Members here will have read the obituaries in the newspapers, the appreciations and so on. Some of the things that stand out from them include the fact that many people noted, first of all, Seamus Heaney's human qualities. He had a warmth of personality that appealed to everyone. He had that human touch, and, no matter what a person's background was, Seamus Heaney made them feel comfortable when speaking to him. He lacked any form of intellectual snobbery, and that is, I suppose, unusual in this day and age in some literary circles. Despite what my colleague Mr Campbell says, Seamus Heaney steadfastly refused to be a mouthpiece for any group, even though pressure was put on him to act in such a role. He refused and remained independent.

I had the privilege of meeting Seamus on several occasions, and I was very impressed by his human presence, his warmth and his intellect. I recall from my own school days reading poems from his earliest collection, 'Death of a Naturalist', but, of course, he has written many collections, including 'Field Work', 'Station Island', 'The Spirit Level', 'District and Circle' and his latest collection 'Human Chain'. In all of those collections, he excels as a poet. The first poem by Seamus that I encountered was 'Digging', in which he declared that, unlike his father, who dug with a spade, he, in the future, would dig with his pen. He did that: he dug, probed, searched and delved, and he explored the human heart, human relationships and the human condition. His findings had application not just to Anahorish, County Derry or Ireland but to the whole world. He was a universal poet and is acknowledged as such. His passing leaves a huge gap on the island of Ireland and in the literary world. We can console ourselves that he has left us with a marvellous collection of poems and prose, and I join others in expressing my condolences to his family on his passing.

HRH Prince George of Cambridge

Mr Speaker: Jim Allister has been given leave to make a statement on the birth of His Royal Highness Prince George that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. Once again, the convention is clear: for Members to be called, they should rise in their place continually. All Members will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject matter. Once again, no points of order or any other issue will be taken from the Floor. If that is clear, I call Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: I join in the condolences to the Heaney family.

We move from marking the death of a leader in the arts to marking the birth of a future leader of the house of Windsor and a future monarch of this nation. The birth of any child is generally a most joyous occasion, and those of us who are parents and grandparents have personal experience of that. However, when the birth involves the coming into the world of one who is likely to be the future monarch of this nation and this Commonwealth, it is indeed a matter worthy of national celebration. Since the House was not sitting when the young prince was born, it is fitting that, as a devolved Assembly of this United Kingdom, we should mark that occasion at the first opportunity and send our good wishes, though somewhat belated, to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

I trust and pray that the young prince will be blessed with good health.

I pray that he will mature into a notable and much-loved leader and head of state of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, something that is likely to happen well beyond the lifetime of most of us in the House. However, those of us who take an interest in the affairs of the House of Windsor are entitled to, and do, take an interest in the posterity of the monarchy, and so we rejoice in this birth and send our good wishes to the young prince and his proud parents.

12.30 pm

I have but one regret, and it is that, yet again, this Building distinguished itself adversely by failing to fly the flag on the occasion of the birth of the prince, whereas other civic buildings did. I trust that the Assembly Commission will get on with fixing that so that we will not be embarrassed again.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for bringing the matter to the House. As Mr Allister said, the

birth of any child is a source of great joy for the parents and wider family, and the private moments that Their Royal Highnesses had with the prince before the world had a view of him were, I am sure, very important. Indeed, the manner in which his parents have dealt with the huge event has been most remarkable.

Of course, this is no ordinary child; this is a child who is third in line to the throne, behind his grandfather and father, and as I watched and waited for the doors of the hospital to open so that we could get a glimpse of Prince George, I felt that we could all appreciate the public and constitutional significance of the birth of this beautiful little baby. For me, it shows the continuity of our constitutional monarchy, a monarchy and a system that is coveted the world over. That is why there is such interest in what happens to our royal family, and the interest from around the world really shows the tangible benefit of our monarchy and the way in which Her Majesty The Queen shows her duty towards the entire country.

On a side note, my son predicted that His Royal Highness would be called George. That was because he is called George, and he wanted the future king to bear his name. He got his wish, and I am very happy for that. As a royalist and a loyal subject, I rejoice in the continuation of the royal family, and long live Prince George.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Dr McDonnell: I endorse some of the views held. It is no secret that the SDLP has a distinct limit to its enthusiasm for matters pertaining to the monarchy and the aristocracy, but we do recognise that a substantial number of people in Britain and in Northern Ireland have an enthusiasm for the monarchy and the associated arrangements.

We are not begrudging or mean in our outlook. Those of us who have met the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on their visits here were taken by their sincerity and by their genuine interest in and engagement with all the people whom they met. They earned so much respect in their own right. Quietly setting political considerations aside, many with a republican and nationalist outlook were spectators at the wedding, albeit via a television screen. I warmly congratulate the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on the birth of Prince George and wish all three of them every possible good wish in the years ahead. We hope that the media, the paparazzi and all those other disruptive influences give them the space and the peace to enjoy the pleasures of a family life together.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on the birth of George Alexander Louis, His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge. On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I again send my congratulations to the parents. Not only has the royal family grown a little but the mother and father are enjoying the unique feeling of becoming parents for the first time.

At the time of the birth, my colleague Sam Gardiner MLA wrote that it demonstrated that the royal family were more than just an institution. He said that they were:

"a real family, with real people in it sharing all the human emotions, feelings and concerns of family life that every family in the country shares."

He went on:

"People and families adapt as life changes while institutions often do not."

I can do no better than pay tribute to Mr Gardiner for those words.

Whether or not you agree with a constitutional monarchy and welcome the existing royal family, we all like continuity, whether we are royalists or Irish republicans. It is a fact that the present royal family traces its origins all the way back to 1688. Now we have confidence that that continuity will continue through three more generations. Who knows, we may now know who will be king when the 21st century comes to its end.

The royal birth also demonstrates that it has been 11 years since the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 was last updated. With every birth, it is clear that we are becoming more out of date and out of synch with the list regularly updated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in London. On two occasions, before the birth and immediately after, I asked the Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, to add the birthday of Prince George to the list of designated days for the flying of the Union flag here at Parliament Buildings. I am sorry to say that, on both occasions, she declined for fear of the lack of cross-party support in the House. On that basis, I invite — I do not demand or call, I simply invite — the SDLP and Sinn Féin to consider, in the spirit of generosity, offering cross-party support for the flying of the flag to celebrate the birth of Prince George.

I wish William and Kate well, and, most importantly, I welcome the birth of Prince George, the future constitutional monarch of 16

Commonwealth realms and head of the 54-member Commonwealth of Nations — our future king.

Mr Dickson: Thank you for the opportunity to add congratulations on behalf of the Alliance Party and particularly on behalf of my constituents in East Antrim, not least those from the town of Carrickfergus, which is delighted that the parents of Prince George hold the titles Baron and Baroness Carrickfergus. We wait, not only for Kate and William to visit us in the town but to bring their infant son with them at some appropriate and suitable time. If the influence of the House can be brought to bear on that subject, we would be delighted to welcome them to our town and community. There is no doubt that the birth of a future king is a matter of great significance to many citizens of Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party wishes to join them in welcoming the birth and looks forward to the continuity of our monarchy.

It is also worth bearing in mind that Prince George was not the only baby born on that day and, indeed, since or before. We should add to the congratulations to the royal family our congratulations to every parent whose child was born on that day or subsequently. We should also praise the work of our hospitals and medical services, particularly the midwives. Day in and day out, they deliver children safely to loving parents in wonderful households across Northern Ireland. We pray that this child, the prince, will be loved by his parents as many parents across Northern Ireland love their children.

Mr McCallister: As a proud parent, like so many in the House, I am delighted to join colleagues in offering my congratulations. Many of us here know the joy that a baby brings to a home. It certainly changes life dramatically for any young couple, and it will be no different for Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Advice that I will impart to them, given my experience, is that they should keep a steady supply of Calpol or something in a cupboard nearby. Prince William may need to use a set of earplugs at times to make sure that he gets a good night's sleep. Apparently, men are much better at ignoring crying babies than mothers. So, there are things like that.

They will both so much enjoy the rich experience of parenthood. I, like other colleagues, wish them well. I wish Prince George well and wish him a long and happy life. We want to see our monarchy and all the good that its continuity represents across our nation continue for many years.

Mr Bell: It is a joyous occasion for the whole House: our United Kingdom has a new prince. I think that all of us should be mature enough to send our best wishes to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. We give our thanks to God for the healthy, safe birth of a young prince. The Democratic Unionist Party and I share the wish that the child be blessed with good health and the ability to undertake, as the potential future head of state of our United Kingdom, what is a very onerous range of functions. Long indeed may he reign over us.

We should have the maturity, as I said earlier in a point of order about the covenant parade, to fly the flag of the United Kingdom to welcome the birth of a prince of our United Kingdom. We have accepted the principle of consent. Everybody in the House knows in their heart of hearts that the overwhelming wish of the people of this Province is to remain in the United Kingdom. Her Majesty the Queen is the head of the United Kingdom. We saw the tremendous affection for her in the grounds of this Building and beyond that in Enniskillen, and we saw the generosity that was shown from right across our community. We also saw the tremendous welcome that Her Majesty the Queen received in the Republic of Ireland, which shows healthy, I think, community relations from the Republic of Ireland to the head of state of our United Kingdom.

Our prayers are with young Prince George, because he will be called upon to undertake duties and responsibilities to the highest level of integrity. He will be called to take positions of leadership and to give advice and good counsel. It is a huge task. I think that all of us in the House can send the royal couple our best wishes and our prayers for Prince George's future. God willing, we will live long enough to see him take the throne of our United Kingdom.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion, so there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Jim Allister replace Mr David McClarty as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr David McClarty replace Mr Jim Allister as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Committee Business

Plant Health and Tree Disease

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

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the recent increase in instances of tree disease; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to address the issues as detailed in the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development position paper on Plant Health and Tree Disease.

12.45 pm

It is a great pleasure and honour, of course, to be the first Committee Chairman in this new session to introduce a Committee motion, and I commend the work of the Committee Clerk and the staff for working on this matter, even over the summer. When we were out working hard on constituency issues, they were still working on this very important issue. I am glad that we were able to get it to the House today, because it is of utmost importance to us here in Northern Ireland.

I am sure that all Members are aware of the outbreak of a tree disease called Chalara fraxinea, more commonly known as ash dieback. That disease has been steadily making its way across Europe from east to west and, in autumn 2012, was found in Northern Ireland. It is called ash dieback as it causes the crown of the tree to start dying back, and it eventually causes the death of the tree.

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

Why should this concern us so much? The ash is one of the most common trees, if not the most common, in Northern Ireland. It is found in our hedgerows, forests and woodlands, in parks, in household gardens, at churches, in graveyards, and it is commonly used in landscaping around public buildings, hotels and in road schemes. So important is it to our landscape that, if removed, it would devastate

our countryside, our environment and our wildlife.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, therefore, decided that it needed to take a closer look at the disease, at how it found its way into Northern Ireland and what was being done to tackle it. It also allowed the Committee to scrutinise how the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) deals with plant health threats and issues in general. There are lots of diseases and pests out there that could cause serious damage to our potato crops, apple trees or the cereals we grow, and, in Northern Ireland, 17% of our farms produce an arable crop. So, threats from new pests and diseases are a serious fact of life for the arable, crop and horticulture sector in Northern Ireland.

The Committee took evidence from a wide range of organisations, held a well-attended stakeholder event and visited Belfast port to look at biosecurity aspects of plant and timber imports. It also visited Woodburn Forest just outside Carrickfergus to see the impact of a recent outbreak of the disease *P. ramorum*. It then considered all of the information that it had gathered and created its position paper, which contains nine key issues. That position paper has been placed on our website, and all Members should have received a copy of it in preparation for the debate today. The paper has also been sent to the Minister with a request that she outlines how she intends to address the key issues identified both to the Assembly in the debate today and in a more detailed written response to the Committee. We are also encouraged to see that the Minister is also beginning to deal with some of the key issues in the position paper, particularly that of a reconstitution grant for land owners who have had to remove diseased ash trees.

Although not a formal part of the evidence presented in this position paper, Committee members who visited Brussels in April 2013 also drew upon the knowledge gleaned from meetings with EU Commission officials on the plant health regime and proposed changes. I would like to deal with that aspect in my speech today. So, I will start with how the disease came to be in Northern Ireland in the first place as this is a good example of the deficiencies of the current EU legislation. It emphasises how important it is that the Minister and DARD are fully engaged with Europe on this matter. After all, this is new legislation that will affect not only trees but the whole arable and crop sectors.

We are currently sitting with 85 ash dieback outbreaks in Northern Ireland, and most of them

have come from infected saplings that were brought into Northern Ireland from a UK nursery, sold on and planted all over the country. That UK nursery did not grow the saplings from seed; it brought the saplings in from continental Europe. So, we imported this disease, and, in many ways, that might be a blessing in disguise. It has not come in on the wind, and, so far, it is not in the wider environment. If it were, the disease would be practically impossible to control, and we would be like England at present, fighting a rearguard action.

Instead, because it was introduced through imported plants, we have a one-off, time-limited opportunity to control and eradicate the disease. That is why it is so important that the Minister acts quickly and puts in place a control plan.

Plants and trees, timber and wood products have been traded for centuries. Particularly in the past 20 or 30 years, the trade in plants and plant materials has become a massive international system. One figure that was given to the Committee was that there has been a 77% increase in the trade of plants since 1999. Another figure was that, after food and oil, the third largest import into the UK is timber. That trade is a good thing — no one would argue otherwise — but it does create problems that the existing legislative regime cannot tackle because it was never designed to handle the current level of trade.

The increase in disease is not just down to an increase in trade. A change in climate also has a role to play, with pests that, 20 years ago, could not thrive in our environment now making themselves very happily at home here in Northern Ireland, the UK and the British Isles.

As the ash dieback experience has clearly shown, and as practically every witness who talked to the Committee indicated, the checks and balances at ports do very little to prevent diseases and pests from getting into the country. Plants, timber, packaging materials and even the very pallets that goods are stored on come into the EU from all over the world. From outside the EU, they could come into a big port like Rotterdam. If that is the point of entry, it is up to that port to do the checking, but there is no standardised system for checking, and, indeed, not everything is checked. Sometimes only 2% of stuff is checked, so it is very easy for diseases and pests to enter the EU. From that point of entry, the plants or plant material can freely move anywhere within the EU. The material can be shipped and moved to various and many destinations, with no record

of where it has been and no checking of what diseases or pests it might have brought in or picked up on that journey. The onus and responsibility is with the initial port, so we have to put our trust in other ports in other countries to defend our shores.

That also applies to plants and plant materials that come from the EU in the first place. Trees in particular are treated as a commodity, grown in mass numbers and shipped from one location to another to be grown. That is what happened with ash dieback. The imported saplings came from a UK nursery but had not been grown there; they had been grown somewhere else in Europe. The saplings had picked up the disease in European nurseries, were sold on to the UK nursery and then sold again to Northern Ireland stockists. We cannot under EU law examine trees or any other plants for diseases or pests if they originated in the EU.

In Committee, we examined that issue at the same time as the horse meat scandal, and the similarities in the trade system, its structure, and the lack of checks and balances were amazing.

The final point I want to make about the current regime is the ability to react to a new pest or disease. The system simply cannot react quickly enough. The legislative regime favours trade and the single market — no one will argue with that — but there appears to be a requirement for definite scientific evidence before the current legislative regime allows a reaction to a new pest or disease. That scientific evidence can be too late in coming. Although everyone was aware that a disease was attacking ash trees, it took until 2011 before the scientific evidence was available to allow it to be dealt with, so we had the stupid situation whereby certain countries in the EU knew that they were growing diseased trees, freely admitted that they would not plant any such trees on their own land, but continued to sell them to other countries. The science is moving too slowly and cannot keep up.

It is vital that new legislation from Europe takes account of the needs of Northern Ireland. The emphasis in Europe and here seems to be on tree diseases, particularly fruit trees, which will cost Europe billions of euros, but we must make sure that the legislation suits Northern Ireland.

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

Mr Frew: I ask the Minister and DARD to keep the pressure on the Department of

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and on Europe so that it moulds legislation in the coming months and years that suits Northern Ireland.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like to take this opportunity to speak on the motion relating to plant health and tree disease. In line with the Committee's agreement to focus on one of the nine key issues, I want to look specifically at the topic of succession planning for plant health specialists.

In the review, the Committee learned through oral evidence from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and DARD that there has been a loss of traditional botanists and plant pathologists. While we understand that the current level of expertise is reasonably OK, that may not be the case in future years. We understand that AFBI is aware of that and is trying to bring on new scientists by way of succession planning through its studentship programme. While the Committee is content that there is awareness of the need for succession planning for plant health specialists, we call on the Minister to ensure that that is included in the business planning for the Department. We also ask AFBI to include it in its business planning.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this report. I will keep my contribution mainly focused on point 8, which raises the disappointment that the Committee felt about the extent of engagement with stakeholders.

It has already been noted that the first outbreak of Chalara was officially recorded in the UK at the start of March 2012. The fact that it was not found in Northern Ireland until November of that year meant that, in theory, DARD and its agencies, such as the Forest Service, had a six-month period in which to prepare. They could have put in place all the right lines of communication for when the disease was unfortunately, but very likely, going to hit our shores. That clearly did not happen. It was disappointing to hear the stakeholders almost universally say that those communication channels were not established. While I accept that the responsibility of handling the outbreak ultimately fell to the Minister, I believe that the preparations and response could have been much improved had the stakeholders been involved.

I would have thought that the Department would have been falling over itself to pass over some of its monitoring and reporting responsibilities. We can see the responsibilities that other

Departments, such as Education, are passing over to others, often unwillingly. What was different in this case was that DARD was wilfully turning down offers of support. In written evidence to the Committee from the National Trust, it was quite clear that a great burden of work could have been lifted off DARD and the Forest Service's shoulders had the National Trust been trusted to cover its own properties.

I agree that the decision could not have been taken lightly or granted without ensuring that the appropriate skills were in place, but when you consider the sheer number of sites owned by the National Trust, by using its staff and volunteers, DARD could surely have benefited. Of course, not only could DARD have availed itself a lot more of large organisations such as the National Trust or the Woodland Trust, the same applies to commercial wood producers. I would have thought that DARD realised that it was as much in the interests of commercial growers to make sure that they were Chalara-free as it was in its own.

The Committee heard the palpable sense of frustration from those professional growers. They gave examples of how they inspected their tree stock, but that was often followed shortly after by inspection by a DARD official, who probably had less experience of tree disease than them and was under pressure to quickly inspect a large number of sites.

This position paper raised a number of important issues. I acknowledge that the response to the outbreak was swift; however, the preparation for it was not. Not only was there ineffective engagement with stakeholders, there was a raft of other problems, such as having no viable warning system in place.

Minister, to be honest, I do not credit Northern Ireland's response to the disease to you. I do not think that you acted quickly enough or have shown control throughout. Instead, it is only down to the tenacity of the Forest Service staff, DARD officials on the ground and the ordinary landowners and members of the public who have shown such vigilance that the disease has not yet got out of control.

Minister, I believe that your Department should learn a number of valuable lessons from the Chalara outbreak, not only to put right current instances of the disease but so that, when future outbreaks inevitably occur, better procedures are in place to deal with them.

1.00 pm

Mr McCarthy: Like the Chairman said, it is a pleasure to partake in the first debate in this new Assembly session.

I fully support the motion. As a member of the Agriculture Committee, I was privileged to partake in the preparation of the report on plant health and tree disease as it affects us in Northern Ireland. I put on record my thanks to our staff and officials for all their efforts in preparing what is a very important position paper on this topic. Like others, I fully appreciate the contributions from the various organisations that came to our Committee and gave evidence to assist us in our deliberations.

We are extremely fortunate to live in a beautiful part of the world, with a wonderful good, clean environment. It is unfortunate that, due perhaps to human nature, we may be inclined at times to take those things for granted. Yet, it is essential that someone keeps a close eye on the welfare of our trees and plants. The recent unfortunate catastrophe of ash dieback was a wake-up call for everyone, including the authorities. I am glad to see that the Minister is here to listen to the voice of the Committee and to ensure that the disease is prevented so that we can continue to enjoy the very best of our environment.

Other Committee members spoke on various aspects of plant health and tree disease. I wish to concentrate on what is referred to as horizon scanning and the inadequate planning, as it exists today, for tree disease and plant health. We advise the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister to create stronger links with DEFRA across the water, particularly around horizon scanning and early warning systems, to ensure that her officials can adequately plan for, and, more importantly, respond to, any future pests and diseases, not only in our trees but in plant health generally. Like everything else, when any early signs of disease are visible, our Department must act at once. There can be no dilly-dallying. We have seen what the results of slowness to act can be. Our Committee expressed some concern that the response to the crisis by DARD and the Forest Service was too reactive. The disease was officially confirmed across the water in March 2012, yet it was much later, in November that year, that action was taken here. Given the number of ash trees imported into Northern Ireland, it was inevitable but unfortunate that the disease would come here; yet DARD and the Forest Service appear to have done no horizon scanning or forward planning around preventing the disease reaching Northern Ireland.

At an oral presentation to the Committee by AFBI and DARD, it was stated that an advantage for Northern Ireland is the fact that we are on the edge of Europe and have England and Wales as our early warning system. If we had good contacts there, we could and should pick up on any disease early and have prevention methods in place so that we can prevent disease from coming further west and into Northern Ireland. Our Committee is disappointed that, given our western position, horizon scanning and planning for prevention seemed to be dilatory. AFBI officials indicated that work around the disease came as a surprise to them in November 2012, after the disease being formally identified in England in March that year, some eight months earlier.

In conclusion, lessons must be learned as a result of what has taken place. Prevention and early detection have to be the priority for our authorities. The Alliance Party fully endorses the report and supports the motion.

Mr Irwin: I, too, welcome the opportunity to comment in this debate on an issue of great importance to Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I want to direct my comments specifically to the issue of pre-notification regarding the importing of certain species of plants within Europe.

The House will be aware that DEFRA has already introduced legislation that requires the notification of certain types of plants such as ash, sweet chestnut, oak and plane trees. It uses that information to enable a clear picture of place of origin to be established quickly. DEFRA is on record as stating:

“Without notification of intra-EU trade there is no means of monitoring reliably the import of such plants (irrespective of whether they are plant passported). The aims of statutory notification are to: (a) raise awareness about the threats to these species; (b) provide intelligence about the level of trade; (c) facilitate tracing in the event of problems; (d) allow targeted inspections to be carried out by Fera and the Forestry Commission; and (e) generate evidence in support of further measures, if needed. It will not be the intention to inspect every consignment notified, but the information will be helpful in making best use of surveillance resources, to focus on the highest risk plants (in terms of their source and intended destination etc). Also, to help target follow up inspections and/or submission of samples for laboratory analysis.”

The Committee, like many of the organisations consulted as part of our study, felt that the introduction of pre-notification was a very important element of our disease control mechanisms. Indeed, the National Trust, in its presentation to our Committee, expressed its extreme concern that such legislation has not yet been adopted by the Minister. Our Committee shares that level of concern.

The requirement to be able to track, carry out targeted inspections and have a comprehensive picture of the level of trade in high-risk trees is vital for Northern Ireland's biosecurity. Our Committee considered that the pre-notification of EU imports was an issue of extremely high priority. DARD, in response to our concerns, agreed that it was important to have pre-notification legislation in place prior to the next planting season, which is now upon us. DARD agreed that the legislation would assist in providing what it termed as "good intelligence" on the movement of certain species to help to target follow-up inspections.

We must ask this important question: why has the Minister delayed bringing forward legislation, similar to that of DEFRA, around the pre-notification of intra-EU imports of certain species of plants? It is quite clear from our study that delaying this important legislation puts our woodland at great risk. In light of that fact, the Committee advises the Minister to bring forward pre-notification of intra-EU imports of certain species of plant as soon as possible. The House will be interested in the Minister's response and in hearing her reasoning for such a delay in the face of the risk to our woodland that the ash dieback disease presents.

I am also keen to enquire why, when the initial outbreak of the disease was discovered in mainland Britain and DEFRA moved swiftly to ban imports of ash, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development dragged her heels for much too long and indeed, in my opinion, put our woodlands at further extreme risk. It is the Committee's view that DARD's reaction to the dangers of this disease was much too slow. The delay in pre-notification and in the introduction of an outright ban in the first instance is a serious matter of concern for stakeholders in woodlands across Northern Ireland. I, and Committee members, look forward to the Minister's response on these issues.

Mr Milne: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I support the motion. I would like to talk about two

specific issues. First, as part of the review of tree disease, concern has been expressed, both in the Committee and at the stakeholders' event, about the fact that the Chalara action plan remains in draft form, in contrast with DEFRA, which published its action plan in December 2012. Representatives, in their contributions to the review, expressed their view that the contingency plan for serious pest and plant life, which was published in March 2012, while essential in itself is too general to deal with Chalara and that a more specific plan is therefore needed.

The disease affects one of our most common trees, and if not effectively dealt with, the consequences could have a huge impact on our landscape. It is the Committee's view, therefore, that although it may be subject to change as scientists gain a better understanding of the situation, the draft Chalara control plan should be finalised as soon as possible.

Secondly, the Minister's strategy, which is based on an all-Ireland approach to control, containment and eradication, is widely accepted as essential to maintaining our isolation from known sources of infection and for controlling the movement of plants into and around the island. The Minister and her Department, along with their counterparts in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), are to be commended for their work to date. Through that approach, there is the potential to slow down, if not halt, the spread of Chalara. We are advised that it is not yet in the natural environment, and inoculum levels are still considered to be low. Therefore, we must make the most of this opportunity, and I have no doubt that that is being done. Although it is accepted that every effort should be put into containing and eradicating the diseases, it is considered vital that thought be given at this stage to formulating a plan B so that an alternative strategy is prepared and ready to move, should the current approach not be effective, and the disease spreads into the wider environment.

The Committee asks the Minister to take those two points into consideration.

Mr Buchanan: As a member of the Agriculture Committee, and in light of the recent increase in tree diseases, I support the motion calling on the Minister to address the issues as detailed in the Committee's position paper. I will deal with item 9: investment, support and procurement.

The Committee has carried out extensive research into the approach and policies of

DARD and the Forest Service on plant health and biosecurity, with specific reference to tree disease and, in particular, ash dieback. It is obvious that the Minister and the Department have not moved swiftly enough to introduce legislation to ban imports of ash trees. That should have been done as soon as the disease was confirmed in the UK in March 2012. Therefore, confidence is lacking that early-warning systems for tree disease are adequate and fit for purpose, and everyone in the House knows that the EU regulations are in a mess. The delay in bringing forward additional support to assist landowners with restocking — when a reconstruction scheme should have been brought in almost immediately — has not been helpful to stakeholders.

The Committee has also pressed DARD and the Forest Service on a number of occasions on how they are handling the resource implications of dealing with ash dieback, but it has yet to be convinced that the proper plans are in place to deal with the financial and human cost of the outbreak. The Woodland Trust checked the business planning documents of the Department and the Forest Service and found it difficult to unpick what money exists specifically for tackling plant and tree health.

In light of the growing problems with imported timber, I cannot emphasise enough to the House how important it is for the future of the industry to ensure that some capacity exists to grow trees locally from local seed and to develop local nursery capacity. That would allow the Woodland Trust and others to have confidence in the supply chain process. Despite over two million trees being sourced from local usage and fluctuations in demand, the lack of knowledge of what species of tree and of what age or maturity would be required, as well as issues of price and cost, has created a difficult market for many local nurseries. The cost of dealing with disease, as well as the uncertainty of dealing with future losses from known and unknown pests and diseases and the huge investment needed initially, has undermined confidence.

Surely, Minister, there is an opportunity to develop the local economy and local nurseries so that they can provide, and become self-sustainable, for the growing of broadleaved trees. One difficulty is that, if someone is trying to get a large number of trees and the nurseries are small, the procurement system does not allow for supply in small batches. That really has an adverse effect on those who are seeking to get the trees.

At the minute, we import huge numbers of trees, the majority of which come from continental Europe. Contract growing or pre-contracts could be introduced as a means of assisting local growers. The horticulture industry here is fairly weak and could be built on. In the past, many buyers focused on price alone, and, for a variety of reasons, continental growers were the cheapest source of trees.

1.15 pm

The demand for trees fluctuates massively from year to year, as does the amount of seed collected. How, therefore, can local growers predict market requirements? If requirements were identified in advance, it might give local growers the opportunity to try to develop and then meet the demand. That could lead to a consortium of local growers who, together, could go some way to supplying the local need for timber.

As we know, timber is the third-largest import after oil and food, and it is worth many millions of pounds to the economy, but what has been found is a serious indictment of the ability of the Minister and her officials to be proactive in that matter.

Minister, you will have to consider ways in which short-term and long-term support and assistance can be given to the nursery trade to enable local tree stocks to be grown, including an investigation of how current procurement practices can be adjusted to assist local growers through, for example, the breaking of large contracts into lots or providing sufficient notice to allow suppliers to form consortia. In light of this serious issue, I ask you, as Minister, to take on board and begin to act on the issues as soon as possible.

Mr Swann: Reference was made to this being the first debate of the session. I am sure that observers of the House will query the topic, given that we are returning after what was probably one of the most difficult summers that Northern Ireland has seen. However, Mr Deputy Speaker, that does not mean that the topic is not worthy of debate. It contains a number of very important points. The Committee assigned recommendation 6 to me to focus on. I will, therefore, make a few brief comments on the current and future resource implications of tree disease for the statutory authorities.

An outbreak of a disease such as Chalara was, inevitably, going to have resource implications. The Committee heard statements from DARD, Forest Service and AFBI about how they were

coping with the impact. Although some were more convincing than others, the overall picture was bleak. DARD may have available to it the manpower and resources to divert its attention to other things, but it is clear that the smaller bodies, such as Forest Service, do not.

Recently, I received a copy of the Forest Service's annual report for 2012-13. The first thing that should be said is that it was reassuring to read that even though the service faced new challenges, such as ash dieback, and continuing to tackle invasive species from previous years — a lesson that the Department had not learned from — it was, on the whole, still able to meet 13 of its 15 targets for the year. So I congratulate Malcolm Beatty and his team for that. Their commitment and contribution during the fodder crisis should also be noted because it was Forest Service staff and its all-terrain vehicles that were used to deliver fodder across Northern Ireland, especially in areas of my constituency, North Antrim. Their contribution was greatly appreciated by many.

It was, however, concerning to read that the predetermined downsizing of the service's staffing complement had continued. The average number of full-time equivalent industrial and non-industrial staff fell by nearly 3-5% in the past 12 months. Last year's decline follows the long-term policy of previous Ministers to suspend recruitment to Forest Service. My party has raised that issue on several occasions because workers in the service continue to meet us and express their concerns, not only the increase in individual workloads but the refusal to recruit young, new staff to what is a heavy manual occupation. That is having a damaging impact on the service's overall work. Such a decline in staff does not bode well for our expectation that Forest Service will be able to react to a surge of infections. I ask the Minister to tell us today whether the service asked for additional resources in manpower or finance, or is she content that the current staffing levels are sufficient to allow the service to carry on with the planned programme of work, as well as dealing with the Chalara situation?

In an evidence session, the Committee was told by AFBI:

"This disease more or less came out of left field in November."

With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, and with respect to AFBI, that is absolute nonsense. I do not in any way claim to be an expert on trees or the diseases that infect them, but even I

would have assumed that, when the disease was officially confirmed in England on 7 March 2012, it was only a matter of time before it made its way across the Irish Sea. To say that the disease came out of left field was a total negation of responsibility. We are where we are, and now I trust that AFBI has also been given the required level of support from the Department.

We heard that, just like the Forest Service, AFBI too has had to reprioritise work. I would be concerned, however, that, given the vital work that AFBI does not only in research and testing for disease in vegetation but across our agriculture industry, other areas may lose out.

The Committee's investigation, in my opinion, revealed a number of damning findings, and I am glad that we have all-party support for the report. DARD and its agencies were clearly unprepared for this disease despite having, at the very least, a six-month warning. DARD's horizon scanning was and still is totally inadequate, and to date the Department has failed to clarify what level of support will be available for landowners who planted their land with grant aid but who have since seen it uprooted. I have written to the Minister on a number of occasions to clarify those points.

I also note that the Committee had advised the Minister to provide costings and details of any schemes for reconstitution of the trees that were removed because of Chalara. If she could provide those today it would be greatly appreciated. Her answers have been few and far between, and I hope that she will use her speech shortly to respond to every query that was raised in the report and in today's debate.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will start by welcoming the fact that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has had its inquiry and that it has put together the position paper. In my opinion, its review is timely, and it reminds us of the threats that we face and the obligations on us all to control the risks of introducing new pests and diseases that will threaten crops, trees and the native environment. This is a growing risk that we need to deal with in the context of the island of Ireland and within a European framework.

I am grateful for the comments that the Committee Chairperson and Members made throughout the debate. I assure the Committee that I will provide a thorough response to the document in written form. I congratulate the Committee on the work that it has done to

produce its paper. In my view, it has taken a reasonable position on many of the issues that it raised.

Members will appreciate that, as I said, I will respond in detail to the Committee, but today I will take the opportunity to pick up on some of the key issues that Members raised. Before I do that, I will state that my Department is committed to enhancing plant health on the island of Ireland by working with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to implement the all-island plant health and pesticides strategic work programme, including seeking to maintain protected zone status for the most damaging harmful organisms.

We will continue working with DAFM and counterparts in Britain to develop contingency plans for pests and diseases based on pest-risk analysis. We recognise that we have comparatively limited resources on which we can draw and that there is no sense in duplicating work on pest and disease threats that we share in common with others. In addition, we simply cannot focus simultaneously on every one of the more than 700 plant pests and diseases that DEFRA has identified. Consequently, we will work with DAFM and DEFRA to develop a risk register and on the proposed new EU plant health legislative regime. We will also continue to work cooperatively with DAFM in dealing with the current disease outbreaks and to share knowledge and experience with the authorities in Britain on plant health and tree-disease matters.

I will now pick up on some of the key issues that Members identified today, the first of which is horizon scanning and planning for tree disease and plant health threats. Everyone accepts that horizon scanning is clearly very important in helping us to plan for tree disease and plant threats. We believe that the best strategy is to maintain a high level of intelligence so that we are aware of emerging issues and to maintain trade controls and biosecurity measures that reduce the risk that infected material may spread to the North.

My Department has wide-ranging plant health control powers to inspect, detain and destroy infected plant material. DARD will continue to use those powers and to work closely with the industry so that our monitoring of trade in plants, wood and other plant products is as effective as it can be in detecting and preventing the introduction and spread of the most serious plant pests and diseases.

Our experience with ash dieback suggests that one of the main pathways by which disease can reach us is the importation of infected trees. Although it is perfectly legal to move trees between countries in the EU without border checks, and we cannot restrict that trade, my Department has been considering whether additional controls would help us in monitoring any threat that importation creates. We have arrangements in place at the ports to help gather information about the movement of specific plant and tree species into the North and to help with the planning of follow-up inspections. They include the statutory pre-notification arrangements that are in place for seed potatoes, which help maintain our high plant health status.

I plan to strengthen our arrangements by introducing pre-notification legislation for intra-EU imports of four tree species that we know present a particular risk to these islands. These are: ash; oak; sweet chestnut; and plane trees. My Department plans to bring the draft legislation forward to the ARD Committee for scrutiny in the coming weeks.

At this point, I should perhaps make sure that we are all very realistic about what can be achieved through legislation and enforcement. The EU plant health regime is framed in the context of allowing the European single market to function effectively. The regime does not guarantee absolute freedom from the risks of trade, and, indeed, it is framed so that the major responsibility for ensuring good plant health in the Community lies with plant producers and exporting authorities. Therefore, we rely on the integrity of our suppliers to protect us. I also want to emphasise how crucial it is that importers give due consideration to the disease risks involved when purchasing plant material from outside Ireland. I also hope that when my officials exercise the enforcement powers that the Assembly has given them we will give them our full support to protect our crops, our trees and our environment.

During the discussions on ash dieback and ramorum disease, some wondered why we do not impose the sort of restrictions on trade that we see when we visit the USA or Australia. We need to work in partnership with other EU authorities to impose those sort of controls on materials entering Europe for the first time. However, in the case of diseases already circulating in Europe, the prospects of that approach being successful are very limited. We need to trade with our European partners and, although Ireland is an island, the sea is only a partially effective barrier to diseases carried on the wind. The EU allows member states to

maintain controls against pests and diseases by establishing protected zones, provided that we carry out regular, systematic surveys that demonstrate continuing freedom from disease, coupled with eradication programmes when outbreaks are detected.

As far as paragraph 4 of the Committee's report is concerned, some Members picked up on engagement with Europe on the new plant health regime. We will, of course, continue to argue for the best protection that Europe can give us. My officials are actively seeking to represent our policy position throughout the EU process for developing the new EU plant health legislation so that our local needs and priorities are addressed. As well as close engagement with counterparts in Britain and Dublin, DARD also has direct links to Brussels, including with our MEPs, through the Office of the Executive and DARD staff in Brussels.

I want to turn now to the approach that we are taking with ash dieback specifically. On 9 July this year, I was pleased to launch, jointly with the Minister of State, Tom Hayes TD, the all-Ireland Chalara control strategy. It is a comprehensive control strategy that covers joint approaches with the South on eradication, research into breeding for resistance, engaging with the public and other stakeholders and providing advice to woodland owners. The fact that Ireland is an island that is separated by water from sources of known infection in Britain and continental Europe means that there may be some scope to prevent the disease from becoming established here or to slow that process down. The strategy is adaptable to changing circumstances, and we will keep it under review based on ongoing surveillance and the development of scientific knowledge of this complex disease.

Our surveillance during spring and summer 2013, up to the end of August, found only eight new instances of the disease and no evidence that it is circulating in the wider environment. There is a need to continue surveillance, because current scientific understanding suggests that the conditions for spread in the wider environment probably exist on the island of Ireland. However, it is encouraging that evidence of wider spread has not been found.

Some Members picked up on the issue of engagement with stakeholders. DARD will continue to engage regularly with stakeholders who have been affected as a result of plant health issues, including the stakeholder group that inputted advice to the development of DARD's response to ash dieback. This includes representatives of farmers,

landowners, the forestry and horticultural sectors, environmental organisations and local government. DARD also has a dedicated plant and tree health link on its website, a plant health helpline number and an email address to deal with specific enquiries. I also want to point out that we regularly engage with the National Trust. We are also providing it with GPS equipment to record suspect trees so that it can report those to DARD. That is also evidence of partnership working with stakeholders.

In tackling the recent tree disease incidences, DARD has availed itself of additional resources from the Forest Service. That has been very valuable, particularly because of the specialist skills and machinery available to the Forest Service. That has complemented the existing resources that are focused on plant health in DARD.

1.30 pm

The Department recognises that the threat of plant disease and pests appears to be increasing and intends to increase the scale of resources devoted to plant health. The permanent secretary has allocated responsibility for all plant health matters to the chief executive of the Forest Service. That will ensure that policy and implementation are led by a senior civil servant with an appropriate professional qualification. That initiative is still at the planning stage.

DARD will continue to review its emergency response capability needs annually. The Department's need for scientific expertise and testing are specified in the work programme assigned to AFBI, which has a statutory obligation to deliver that programme.

With regard to grant aid, on 26 June 2013, I announced grant support for woodland owners of recently planted ash trees affected by dieback to replant their woodland with alternative tree species. DARD's Forest Service is also continuing to offer support to remove and dispose of ash from affected private woodland sites. I am very sympathetic to the argument that more trees and plants should be sourced locally, although procurement must be carried out in accordance with EU regulations. DARD provides training courses, technology transfer demonstrations and industry events at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise. Advice is available to growers from DARD's supply chain development branch, and we propose to continue support for rural businesses through the rural development programme 2014-2020.

In conclusion, I welcome the Committee's paper and the opportunity to apprise the House of the Department's response to this very important issue. As I said at the outset, I intend to write to the Committee in more detail on the issues that it has raised.

Mr Byrne: As Members have outlined, tree disease is a severe threat to our forests and woodlands. In Northern Ireland, we have the lowest levels of forested land in Europe so anything that threatens its existence needs to be taken seriously. The report reflects the concerns that the timber industry and the agrifood sector have on the issue. The experts need to be listened to, and engagement with stakeholders in the private and public sector is paramount. That has been mentioned by a number of Members.

During the Committee inquiry, all the evidence that was provided indicated that DARD and the Forest Service have done a reasonably competent job of handling the outbreak of ash dieback. However, during the inquiry, it became apparent that relationships and communications with stakeholders could have been significantly better. Furthermore, stakeholders indicated to the Committee that their expertise and vast knowledge had not been utilised by the Department. Some even felt that they were dismissed or not trusted by the Department, which raises a serious question about the competence and willingness of DARD's senior officials to recognise a serious problem when it arises.

The Woodland Trust, the National Trust and private timber forestry companies, which have a lot of practical experience, should have been included in the handling of the outbreak of the disease right from the start, particularly when we were forewarned about six months previously by the experience in GB. The professional bodies advised the Committee that they had been dealing with the outbreak of the disease for a number of months before it became an issue here. That re-emphasises this question: how quickly did DARD react to the warning signals that were coming from GB?

Stakeholders felt that they had the time and the expertise to cover many more tree inspections and report back to the Department. That facility was not used or welcomed by the Department. Stakeholders felt that their expertise was being shunned. All the evidence gathered by the Committee could be interpreted as showing a need for relationships between stakeholders and the Department to be improved and built on to the benefit of both parties.

In particular, the private sector timber companies felt that they were being regarded with suspicion, but they have a genuine interest in making sure that the timber and private forests that they are in charge of are healthy, and that should have been acknowledged. By using the expertise of those outside bodies, the Department could alleviate some of the pressure caused by any future outbreaks of tree disease.

I welcome what the Minister said about the lessons to be learned, but I think that the Department will need to be more proactive and show more urgency and consistency in accepting the outcome of those lessons. Ongoing tree-disease surveillance in the coming months, and even years, could be greatly improved and become more efficient if those stakeholders were involved.

As Vice-Chair of the Committee, I want to refer to the contributions of Members. At the outset, the Chairman, Mr Frew, gave a detailed outline of how the Committee went about its work and the aspects that it addressed. He also spoke about how important it was to be engaged with Europe on this issue, and the Minister referred to that as well.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Declan McAleer called on the Minister to include in the DARD business plan reassurances and plans to maintain an acceptable level of staff at plant-health-specialist grade. AFBI is an ideal body to make sure that we have the required botanists and other plant health experts in position so that they can deal with potential outbreaks.

Jo-Anne Dobson emphasised the lack of adequate engagement between stakeholders and DARD and the Forest Service. It is fair to say that the Forest Service has done a reasonably good job, and Robin Swann referred to that. However, there is serious concern about the downsizing of the Forest Service, particularly its practical staff, over the past 10 years. At the end of the day, those are the guys who can very often help to monitor potential disease.

Kieran McCarthy talked about the need to create stronger links with DEFRA. Given that we are part of an island off Europe, what happens in Europe and Great Britain is crucial, but, obviously, we have to make sure that we are connected to potential EU legislation. The Committee visited Europe in the springtime, and I think it is fair to say that we were concerned about how slow it was to agree

proposed EU legislation at that time. DEFRA has, I think, been more reactive in recent times in trying to bring in legislation that may be more robust and effective. Ian Milne referred to a scientific plan to deal with plant health. He said that the current plan needed to be finalised and implemented to make sure that we have an effective approach.

Tom Buchanan talked about the need to support local industry, which was an issue that cropped up. The importation of saplings and the way in which public bodies purchase saplings are major concerns. Very often, it is only price that matters, and local suppliers of saplings are prevented from successfully competing for public service contracts. Our Department of Agriculture, in consultation with other Departments, should try to address that.

Other comments related to how lessons can be learned. The Minister has very much recognised that there is a degree of urgency. I encourage the Minister, as the policy implementer in the Department, to take this issue seriously. Anybody who watched the hurling final yesterday will know the importance of ash in this country for the making of hurley sticks. It is a native sport involving a native product, and it is important that we protect our ash tree population. Ash is an acceptable hardwood that can grow quickly and provides an important industry on this island, North and South.

The report, and the review inherent in it, is a worthwhile document. Hopefully, DARD will accept its recommendations and implement a forward plan. It is crucial that lessons are learned for a better future and that, hopefully, other potential plant diseases will be tackled in a more proactive way. Forest Service needs to be congratulated for what it did with limited resources. However, the lessons have to be stronger investment in the Forest Service and a better forward planning approach to the development of forestry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the recent increase in instances of tree disease; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to address the issues as detailed in the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development position paper on Plant Health and Tree Disease.

Private Members' Business

Ministerial Pledge of Office/Code of Conduct for Members

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

Mr Buchanan: I beg to move

That this Assembly confirms its continued support for the terms of the ministerial Pledge of Office, in particular, the commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means; further confirms its commitment to the principles of personal conduct contained in the code of conduct for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, in particular, the requirement to promote good relations; rejects the comments of Gerry Kelly MLA at the Castlederg IRA memorial event that will give succour to dissident republican groups and help indoctrinate a new generation down the path of violence; and condemns the use of terrorist violence in the present day, and the past.

I want to make it clear from the outset that we will not be accepting the amendment.

It is not only appropriate but necessary that this debate takes place in the House today. I was somewhat amazed when I listened to the Ulster Unionist Party leader on the radio this morning telling us that he did not believe that we should be raising this issue in the House today. It seems that Mr Nesbitt would prefer that it was not discussed in the House and that we should not state our view on the comments made by Gerry Kelly in Castlederg.

Mr Nesbitt: I very much thank the Member for giving way. As he clearly appears to have heard my comments on the radio, will he confirm that I talked about there being three debates today and tomorrow, which collectively could send out the wrong signal to those who are already disengaged from the processes of this House, that that was not a specific criticism of this debate and that I confirmed that the

underlying principles of your motion were ones that we would support?

Mr Buchanan: The honourable Member did not suggest another more appropriate time for such a debate to take place, so we can only deduce that Mr Nesbitt would prefer that Mr Kelly's comments be simply swept under the carpet. As a party, we certainly do not share those views, and I hope that other Members from the Ulster Unionist Party use the opportunity today to state whether they believe that this debate should be taking place or whether it should be brushed over, as, it would seem, their leader would prefer.

Moving on to the substantive nature of the motion, it is incumbent on all elected Members to adhere to the ministerial Pledge of Office, to commit to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means and to commit to the principles of personal conduct, as contained in the code of conduct for Members. Due to the actions of Sinn Féin Members over the summer months, it is necessary for this House, and especially Sinn Féin, to reaffirm their commitment to the Pledge of Office in this House today.

The motion has arisen because of the events in my constituency, in the town of Castlederg, on 11 August. That day, I stood with the innocent victims of terrorism as they watched republicans take part in an obnoxious parade to glorify two IRA terrorists who were killed by their own bomb. The decision to hold that parade in a town so deeply scarred by IRA terrorism and to march past the locations of two IRA shootings and bombings, where two members of the security forces were brutally murdered, not only had a very serious impact upon good relations in Castlederg but had an impact that has been felt across the length and breadth of Northern Ireland.

1.45 pm

The keynote speaker at that event was a Member for North Belfast Mr Kelly. His role as an Assembly Member was clearly promoted in the advertisements for the event. Therefore, his role as an Assembly Member was linked very directly to the event and to comments which he then proceeded to make at the unveiling of the illegal memorial that was placed in Castlederg. Despite, prior to the event, being challenged to give leadership and to step back from that obnoxious parade, which was the cause of much pain and hurt for the innocent victims and their families in Castlederg, where 29 innocent people were murdered and no one

was brought to justice for that, Sinn Féin decided that it would push ahead with it irrespective of the pain, hurt or anguish that it would cause to the people of Castlederg.

Recently, Gerry Kelly told us on the radio that it was the actions of the IRA that gave Catholics and nationalists the vote. In Castlederg, he stretched the truth even further and claimed that he was there to honour:

"comrades who gave their lives in the struggle for Irish freedom and equality."

Mr Kelly went on to tell the crowd that:

"they were leaders, people who led from the front."

So, here were two individuals who were bringing a bomb into Castlederg, which exploded on the Donegal side of the border, killing them, and Mr Kelly stands up and says that they were leaders — people who led from the front. Those people were bringing a bomb to cause murder and mayhem in Castlederg. Had it come into Castlederg, it would have been unfortunate for anybody who was there on that particular occasion for they, too, would have lost their life. Yet, here were people who were supposed to be leaders — people who were out with one aim and object in view, which was to murder innocent people in Castlederg.

It is impossible to see how such comments can stand against a commitment in the Assembly Members' code of conduct to promote good relations. Indeed, it is as difficult to see how it even stands against the requirements for Assembly Members to uphold the law, given that the glorification of terrorism itself is a criminal offence. The Assembly Members' code of conduct tells us that:

"Members should keep in mind that rude and offensive behaviour may lower the public's regard for, and confidence in, Members and the Assembly itself. Members should therefore show respect and consideration for others at all times."

The people, families and innocent victims, whom I stood with on 11 August were shown no respect or consideration. Those innocent victims of terrorism were re-traumatised and insulted. They were pushed to a point far beyond breaking point. Today, I want to commend them for the dignified way in which they dealt with the pressure of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Gerry Kelly told the crowd in Castlederg that Seamus Harvey and Gerard McGlynn:

"gave their lives so that we could be free."

It is, of course, open to question whether those men engaged in terrorism so that Gerry Kelly could be part of the administration of British rule in Northern Ireland from the Stormont Parliament. However, it is precisely because of that contradiction, perhaps, that Gerry Kelly and other Sinn Féin members make the kind of remarks that were heard in Castlederg. In covering up the absolute failure of the IRA's terrorist campaign to deliver the united Ireland that was its aim, they glorify terrorists all the more.

The remarks of Gerry Kelly, however, are not just about the past: they ring in the ears of those republicans who still believe that Ireland is not free and who believe that they are leading from the front when they go out in 2013 and use the same tactics as Seamus Harvey, Gerard McGlynn and countless other Provisional IRA terrorists did in the past. Mr Kelly's comments tell those republicans that if they believe that they have a vision of equality and freedom, and if they know the risks that they are taking:

"they could not stand idly by or leave it to others."

There are dissident republicans today who believe that they cannot leave it to the "others" of Sinn Féin to deliver their goals and are prepared to use the very same tactics as those of Harvey and McGlynn in an attempt to achieve that aim. That was promoted by Mr Kelly while he was in Castlederg, stirring up young nationalists to get them to do that very thing. That is why Mr Kelly's remarks are so dangerous and why the Assembly must take a united stand against them.

I make no apology for bringing the motion before the House today, despite what others might say, because it is right that we debate the issues. I hope that everyone will join us in supporting the motion.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. The next item of business in the Order Paper is Question Time. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 1.51 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Mr Speaker: It is time for questions to the Minister for Regional Development, and, for the first time, we will have topical questions to Ministers. Those will last for up to 15 minutes, and we will then move on to deal with questions that appear on the questions for oral answer list.

I will call Members who were successful in the topical questions ballot in the order in which they have been listed. Only the Member listed will be allowed to ask a supplementary to his or her question. Other Members should not stand, as they will not be called.

I remind Members that the normal rules and conventions apply to topical questions, and I ask them to study the ruling that I issued last week. However, I would like to be able to chair the first few sessions with as light a hand as possible, until we get a feel for the new arrangements in the House. It is important that I say that. I therefore ask Members for their cooperation.

I hope that Members will make good use of topical questions and that they will bring some life to Question Time. Let me also say to the whole House that topical questions are another way of holding Ministers to account in their Departments.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: Before we move on, perhaps I should also wish the Minister for Regional Development well, as he is the first Minister up for topical questions.

I am sorry to say that the Member whose name came out first on the list has withdrawn his question. I hope that that will not set a pattern, and I ask Whips to ensure that it does not happen in future. Let me say this to the House: this is an issue for Whips, and if Members are going to put in questions, either in oral or topical form and then decide to withdraw their name, that does not bode well for the future. So, I remind Whips of their responsibility.

The first name that has been withdrawn, I am sad to say, is Chris Hazzard's. We shall move on, and I call William Irwin.

A5 Road Project

Mr Irwin: The continued uncertainty over the A5 road project has created great concern, particularly among farmers, who stand to be affected negatively by the work carried out. Although the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Roads Service recently asked farmers to update their agricultural impact assessments, many of those affected believe that the process does not afford them the open and transparent basis on which to thoroughly illustrate the overall impact of the proposed project on their business. Many farmers believe that their views are simply being ignored in the corridors of the Department for Regional Development (DRD).

To alleviate those concerns and to give a voice to farmers affected by the project, can the Minister indicate whether he will undertake a comprehensive review of the process used for conducting the A5 agricultural impact assessment? (AQT 2/11-15)

Mr Speaker: Before the Minister answers the question, I must say that topical questions or oral questions should not be statements. I say that — *[Interruption.]* Order. I say that very firmly. Moreover, there should be one enquiry to the Minister.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I really do feel the hand of history today, being the first recipient of topical questions. What will be more interesting is whether any topical answers will be given.

I was rather puzzled that Mr Hazzard withdrew his question. Hopefully it was withdrawn because of the Member's unavailability rather than his inability to come up with a topical question, but, apart from that, we will attempt to progress.

I know that the A5 issue is among the listed questions for later in Question Time, but I am happy to address the concerns that Mr Irwin raised. This is a red-letter day for the Newry and Armagh constituency: to have me answer the first topical question, which another Member from my constituency posed. The Member will know, of course, that the A5 scheme has not been abandoned; it is a delayed scheme. We continue to work through it, and important work has begun on the appropriate assessment process. That work will be subjected to public

consultation and perhaps, at a later stage, to a public inquiry. I am aware of concerns, and I have had some contact with the Ulster Farmers' Union as well as receiving correspondence from a number of affected landowners. I am looking closely at that and have agreed with my officials to instigate a review of the current procedures. We will attempt to do that as quickly as possible in order to make progress on it.

Mr Irwin: What certainty can the Minister give to farmers that their views will be taken on board if the project goes ahead?

Mr Kennedy: The uncertainty around the project has been caused by legal challenges. I remind the Member that the scheme remains an Executive priority that is clearly supported by his party, unless it has done another U-turn. The important thing is that we will take on board meaningful points of concern held by individual farmers and landowners. That is what we are in the business of doing.

I regard myself as a listening Minister, and I will seek to proceed on that basis.

Knockmore to Antrim Train Link

Mr Craig: Will the Minister confirm that the Knockmore to Antrim train link has been physically closed and that health and safety checks are carried out on a regular basis as was promised when that route was originally taken off the network? (AQT 3/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will know about, and may be referring to, the recent rail inquiry, which was necessary due to an incident on that line. I welcome the publication of the report. It contains five recommendations. I support them, and I wish to see them implemented as quickly as possible. Safety remains the key priority on all our transport routes. Whether by train, bus, bicycle or any other mode of transport, the important thing is that safety is the critical issue.

As transport Minister, I am pleased with the record levels of people using rail in particular in Northern Ireland. The figure is at a record level since 1967. I had the privilege of being at the Titanic Slipways on Saturday night to hear Phil Coulter, Katherine Jenkins and others at a very impressive concert. Phil played 'Puppet on a String' for us, which was a hit in 1967. Of course, it immediately flicked into my mind the fact that we now have record levels of people using trains since 'Puppet on a String' was a hit. For all those reasons, I maintain that rail and

road safety remains a priority for me and my Department.

Mr Craig: I do not know whether to thank the Minister for all that repetition. If he is not a puppet on a string, perhaps he will outline to the House whether the people who were on board that train had their health and safety put at risk through being diverted down that track? More importantly, can the Minister outline why they were sent there in the first place?

Mr Kennedy: The Member raises an important issue. I believe that the actions of the train driver on the day were very effective in ensuring that there were no injuries or injury-related consequences. However, I think that Northern Ireland Railways must, and will, learn lessons from that report. That is why I welcome its publication and agree with its five recommendations, and I want to see those implemented as a matter of urgency.

Public Hire Bike Scheme

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. The Minister made a statement last week and referred to some up-and-coming projects, one of which was a public hire bike scheme for Belfast. Can he give us some more detail on that please? (AQT 4/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. I am a very keen advocate of cycling. I have recently engaged in cycling after a period in which I had lapsed. I recommend it as a healthy pursuit, but also as a way to be environmentally friendly. My Department is pleased, in conjunction with Belfast City Council, that we are bringing forward a scheme for bike hire similar to that which operates in Dublin and other European cities. I am a keen advocate of that and I want to see cycling actively promoted. In fact, I have taken a decision to create a dedicated cycling unit that can coordinate all aspects of cycling within my Department and with other Departments. There are huge benefits for tourism in exploiting cycling. I am keenly aware of Giro d'Italia, which is coming to Northern Ireland next year. We are looking forward to that. I encourage Members to take an active part in cycling and to encourage their constituents, particularly young people, to do likewise because it is very much part of a healthy lifestyle. I think that all of us would do well to remember that and to encourage it.

Ms McCorley: Are there plans to extend the scheme beyond the city of Belfast to other parts of the North in future?

Mr Kennedy: I want to see such schemes extended to other areas but, of course, it comes down to available finance. We are fortunate that Belfast City Council is actively involved in the initiative. If other councils want to bring forward proposals, we will happily look at them and, hopefully, cooperate.

Public Transport Passenger Numbers

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. I do not intend to cycle up here from west Tyrone.

Given the obvious success of the World Police and Fire Games, despite lower than expected participant numbers, and other events such as the UK City of Culture in Londonderry and Tennent's Vital, how have public transport passenger numbers fared over the summer months? (AQT 5/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I understand some of the reasons why he is not keen to cycle from west Tyrone.

As I have indicated, passenger numbers continue to experience unprecedented growth. From April to August, compared with the same period last year, there were 184,000 additional journeys on Metro, 198,000 additional journeys on Ulsterbus and a huge 597,000 additional journeys on the railways. All of that is very good news and represents considerable progress. Some people predicted that that perhaps would not happen. As transport Minister, I am delighted that we have seen those levels of growth and I am determined that we make further progress. I very much hope that Members of the House and the Executive will realise the potential for improving public transport and for the healthier lifestyles and environmental benefits that are evident in the use of public transport and, indeed, cycling.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he think that there is sufficient recognition of the role that public transport plays in tourism?

Mr Kennedy: The Member raises a very good question. I hope very much that there is additional potential for increased use of public transport to attend events. We have had the undoubted success of the UK City of Culture in

Londonderry this year. The Londonderry to Coleraine line is the one that I saved as Minister, despite the previous Minister having wanted to close it. I tactfully remind you of that. We have seen huge numbers of people using that line and flocking to the very interesting and varied events that were part of the UK City of Culture. Other events have also seen an uptake, and that is where exploitation can take place. Greater coordination between the organisers of tourism events and other events is to the benefit of public transport also.

2.15 pm

Belfast to Derry Railway

Mr Dallat: Given that Mr Kennedy is the man who saved the Belfast to Derry railway, does he share my disappointment at the news last week that the second phase of the upgrade has been postponed? (AQT 6/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question, and I also recognise his long-standing interest in the stretch of line from Coleraine to Londonderry. He has rejoiced sufficiently and has given me considerable credit as being the person to have saved that line, and I think that that is a very good thing. *[Laughter.]* On the point that he raised, yes, frankly, I am disappointed that that scheme is delayed. It is simply delayed, and it remains a priority for me, the Department for Regional Development and Translink.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. In view of that, will the Minister agree that it might have been more appropriate if the announcement had been made to the Committee for Regional Development rather than to the press in the first place?

Mr Kennedy: I note the comment made. The Chair of the Regional Development Committee is not in his place. Obviously, there may be reflection on that. Of course, the announcement was primarily made by Translink, which is in charge of the upgrade. I want to stress the fact that although there is a temporary setback, it is, in my view, only a temporary setback. It must only be a temporary setback, and we must proceed as quickly as possible to have that project completed.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for topical questions. We now move to the oral questions that have been listed for the Minister.

Northern Ireland Water

1. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the best model for NI Water governance, including the time frame for its delivery. (AQO 4472/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The best model for Northern Ireland Water (NIW) governance is one that supports and ensures the provision of high quality water services to the people of Northern Ireland. It should be sustainable, affordable and efficient. It should meet our EU obligations, support economic growth and protect the environment. To achieve this, I have initiated some work for the Executive Budget review group to consider in the autumn.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I know that you said that it will start in the autumn, but part of the question was on when it will be delivered. Are you looking, or have you looked, at other examples of governance models in Wales and Scotland and the South of Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Yes, indeed, in the Executive paper that I presented to colleagues, there is a subsequent referral to the Budget review group. That will look at all possible options. Obviously, this is an important decision, and it is right that it is not only undertaken by the Department for Regional Development but that, given the background to it, it should be an Executive decision. So, all the models and governance arrangements will be looked at in close detail, and, hopefully, there will be an emerging consensus.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas chomh maith leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Minister, given that NIW has been without a chief executive officer for quite a while, how effective can the delivery of a governance programme be in the absence of such a senior official?

Mr Kennedy: I am slightly surprised at the nature of the question. My view is that Trevor Haslett was a very successful and competent chief executive of NI Water. Of course, he retired at the end of August and interim arrangements have been made. My understanding is that arrangements are being put in place for the early appointment of a successor. I say in the House and on the record that I think that Trevor Haslett's work stabilised Northern Ireland Water. I think he had the confidence of the workforce and, increasingly, the wider public and consumers. I

think that NI Water is in a better position as a consequence of that than it had been previously.

Mr Copeland: The Minister's predecessor, Mr Conor Murphy, came to the House in October 2007 and made the case for additional water charging. In his words:

"we must not and cannot duck" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 24, p417, col 2].

Yet, at this year's ard fheis, he claimed that he stopped water charging. Will the Minister give us an opinion about whether there is any issue that Sinn Féin will not attempt to rewrite the history of?

Mr Kennedy: I want to make clear that I was not at the ard fheis to hear Conor say that — *[Interruption.]* If he was so worried about leaky pipes, why did he not do more to address the issue when he was in power? I think that his comments could be summarised as this: with a water tap in one hand and a sewage pipe in the other, they are going to take power in the land.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. What assessment has he made of the comments by the former Finance Minister that continually deferring water charges is not sustainable?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. It may well be that she is trying to prise open some of the issues, perhaps of divisiveness, in another political party. I would not make an attempt to comment on that. If there are splits in the DUP over water charging, it is not for me to know about. All I can say is that it will be interesting to see who the winner of that is and whether it will impact in the future, particularly when there is so much speculation that we read about regarding the ambitions of people to perhaps lead the DUP after the present leader has indicated his preferences, but even that becomes uncertain because of things that we read of in today's 'Belfast Telegraph'. So, at the moment, for those who want to be successors, Peter is saying that there is no vacancy, but we will wait and see.

A5 Road Scheme

2. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he will take to remove the blight and uncertainty for landowners resulting from his decision not to

proceed with the A5 scheme. (AQO 4473/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: No claims have been received from affected A5 landowners under blight legislation. In that context, therefore, I do not accept the premise of your question. Where landowners receive 90% advance payment, the Department has agreed to complete the sale if requested to do so by the landowner. Only one of the five landowners who received such a payment has returned the money. Negotiation with landowners and their agents are ongoing regarding the other four. Landowners who did not submit claims have been invited to do so if they believe and can demonstrate that the vesting process has caused them hardship.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his answer. Earlier, he said that the scheme has not been abandoned, and therein lies the problem, because the Minister has yet to come to the House with a statement to clarify the position. He has taken a semi-detached approach to all of this. Will the Minister tell us, so that the farmers and landowners in that area are aware, whether that project is going ahead, or has he just got cold feet at this stage and will wait for his predecessor to push it on?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member. I think it would be difficult for a predecessor to push anything on. I bring the Member back to the point that I made earlier: the position is that it is a delayed scheme not an abandoned scheme. The scheme is a priority for the Executive. As part of that decision, the party that Lord Morrow is part of and represents clearly is supportive of the A5 scheme as an Executive priority. That might not be his personal position. *[Laughter.]* One of the issues about Lord Morrow is that he has danced a merry dance and he has done a minuet, and sometimes he has gone forward and said that this is a worthwhile scheme, and other times he has come back and said that he is not sure about it and there is opposition. So, Lord Morrow had better make up his mind at some point. Perhaps that would be insightful to his party colleagues, and then it could be reflected at Executive level as to whether or not it remains an Executive priority. As of today, unless we get another letter from America that says something different, the A5 remains an Executive priority.

Mr McAleer: Minister — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Minister, just for clarity, will you tell

us whether you are now in a position to make, or have you made, an appropriate assessment in respect of your Department's measures to deal with the EU habitats directive?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. The work on the appropriate assessment is being done, and the public consultation is part of that. It may well be that, in the future, a public inquiry will be required as part of it. All those are factors that will impact on the potential progression of the scheme.

Mr Eastwood: The Minister said that the project has not been abandoned and that the Executive are still committed to it. Will the Minister give some indication to the long-suffering people of the north-west of when the project will ever begin?

Mr Kennedy: I accept the frustration behind the question and understand that. Indeed, over the summer, I had the opportunity to meet various interest groups, including local councils and other local representatives who have been actively campaigning for the scheme, among other schemes. I am in the business, as Regional Development Minister and as transport Minister, of utilising any available funds to improve the strategic road network. That includes schemes in all parts of Northern Ireland and schemes to all areas of Northern Ireland, including to the west and the north-west, but challenges have to be met and dealt with, and things have to be done by process. The Member will understand that. That is what we are working through. So, it is not possible at this point to be absolutely precise. To do so would perhaps be a mistake, so I am not going to tempt fate by attempting to do that, except to say that I am in the business of building roads, and I want to see that happen as quickly as possible.

Mr Elliott: It is always good to get speaking for myself and asking my own question as opposed to other Members of this House having to do it. Given the mess that the Minister's predecessor, Conor Murphy, made of the consultation around the A5, will the current Minister find an appropriate time to bid to the Executive — as this is an Executive priority — for other Roads Service schemes that would benefit the infrastructure of the whole of Northern Ireland, as opposed to just that one area, including County Fermanagh?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. That is something that I am genuinely interested in progressing.

In the past, there has been a tendency to concentrate and to put all our eggs in the basket of big, grandiose schemes, whereas much potential benefit could be obtained by the Executive spending money on schemes that do not have the same expense as the larger ones but that give local benefit to road improvements by doing sections of roads. So, I am keen to meet the Finance Minister to discuss those plans. I think that there would potentially be great benefit, not least to the reputation of this Assembly and this Executive. Presumably, it would not do me any harm either.

On that basis, I think that there is some benefit in looking at what I would call a clutch of fairly small schemes that are relatively inexpensive in road-building terms but would improve the local infrastructure. That is what I would like to explore that actively not only with the Finance Minister but, potentially, with Executive colleagues.

2.30 pm

Cycling Infrastructure

3. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the Westminster Government's plan to provide £94m to boost cycling infrastructure, what finance he will make available to ensure that the cycling infrastructure for commuters and leisure cyclists is improved. (AQO 4474/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As I indicated during the earlier topical questions, I am very much committed to promoting and supporting safer cycling for cyclists of all ages. There have been significant developments in the provision of cycling facilities across Northern Ireland that have mainly been stimulated by the investment made, despite the pressures on public funding, by my Department. As I have indicated, I have directed the establishment of a cycle policy unit in my Department. It is tasked with coordinating all cycle issues better and working with other interested stakeholders to develop robust and sustainable strategies. During the incoming year, my Department is providing £4.3 million to fund active travel demonstration projects in Belfast, Londonderry, Craigavon and Strabane. More recently, I committed £50,000 from my Department to undertake a feasibility study of a cycle/pedestrian footbridge over the River Lagan close to the Gasworks site. Furthermore, my Department's Roads Service plans to implement around 4.5 kilometres of new cycle lanes. Another very recent initiative is the active school travel programme, which will provide a programme of cycle and walking

skills training to pupils in 60 schools across Northern Ireland over a three-year period. The objective of the programme is to encourage school pupils to adopt cycling and walking as their main mode of transport to and from school. We need to support that programme with investment in infrastructure to encourage participation. I aim to bid for £2 million in the October monitoring round to kick-start the programme, and I am keen to develop a long-term marketing campaign to develop behavioural change.

Mrs McKeivitt: I thank the Minister for his reply. Is he satisfied that the investment in cycling infrastructure is sufficient to make a real impact on the healthy lifestyle and change to the environment that he called for in an earlier reply?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question and, indeed, her interest in the topic. I believe that we can make progress. With the will and intention to change behavioural standards, working in conjunction with agencies such as Sustrans, other cycling agencies and, perhaps, with schools and local councils, as we are seeking to do, we can promote and encourage cycling not only as a sustainable mode of travel but as something that genuinely improves people's lifestyles.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I am sure that all of us would agree that the increase in cycling as a travel alternative is something that we welcome.

What examination has been or is intended to be done, either through the new unit or the Department, of cycling infrastructure models in other jurisdictions to see what lessons can be learned for Northern Ireland?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. There are opportunities to look at good practice, particularly on the European scene; I am thinking of Nordic countries such as Denmark, Finland etc. I am very interested in what is happening even closer to home in London, where the Boris's bikes campaign has been such a success. If the opportunity is afforded me, I will and will certainly encourage officials to seek out opportunities and lessons that we can apply in Northern Ireland to see how we can bring forward the issue.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. How much value does he believe there is in a cycle lane that has cars parked all the way along it? What, if anything, is his

Department doing to address the issue of cars parking in cycle lanes?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. He adopted an almost accusing approach, and I felt that I had wrongly parked in a cycle lane. I assure him that it was not me.

We want to encourage people to be careful and give particular consideration to cyclists. There are, sometimes, behavioural patterns that are not acceptable. I accept that not every cycle lane is in prime condition, and we need to address that. One benefit of having a cycling unit is that it can coordinate information of that nature, begin to address some of the infrastructure issues, ensure that the infrastructure is of real benefit to cyclists and exploit better cycling opportunities.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for the work that he has undertaken on cycling and for the support that he has given to the recently established all-party group on cycling. I am glad to be chair of that group, and I encourage all MLAs to work together on it to promote cycling here in Northern Ireland. What plans does the Department have to raise the annual spend on cycling infrastructure in Northern Ireland from approximately 58p per person each year to at least £10 per person each year, as suggested by the 'Get Britain Cycling' report that was roundly endorsed by the Westminster Parliament?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. I acknowledge his role as chairman of the new all-party group on cycling and look forward to working with that group. We are starting at a realistically low base, and we are in economically challenging times, but the very fact that we are creating a cycling unit is a clear indication of our intentions, which are that we want to make progress and exploit opportunities. If there are opportunities for further funding, whether through the Executive locally or through Europe, we will certainly try to explore those. I have no doubt that you and the all-party cycling group will want to encourage and support that.

A26: Dualling

4. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on any discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to securing funding for the A26. (AQO 4475/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Given the delay in the A5 project and the funding that was subsequently made

available, I wrote to the previous Finance Minister in May highlighting other schemes that could commence in 2014-15, including the A26 Glarryford to Drones Road scheme. In July, the Finance Minister announced funding for one of those schemes, the A31 Magherafelt bypass. I wrote to the new Finance Minister in August, within days of his appointment, requesting a meeting to discuss the merits and importance of the A26 project. I am happy to report that the Finance Minister, after initially declining to have a meeting, has now recognised the importance of an early discussion on the issue — the power of an Assembly question — and has agreed to a meeting. We are due to meet in the near future. I assure Members that, in parallel, I have promoted the scheme heavily in the 2014-15 capital budget exercise. I will continue to do so in the forthcoming October monitoring round with a view to securing the necessary funds to allow construction to commence in 2014-15.

Mr Swann: Once again, Minister, I find myself welcoming a DUP U-turn. I am pleased that the Finance Minister will now meet you to discuss the A26. I noted from the 'Coleraine Times' of 14 August that he had met Gregory Campbell, the MLA for the area, before even agreeing to meet you. If the Finance Minister gives you an early green light for funding, when could work on the scheme commence? May I be of any assistance in putting pressure on any other Ministers who are reluctant to meet you?

Mr Kennedy: That is a very kind offer from a very well intentioned colleague. What would you be like trying to get John O'Dowd to promote cycling in schools?

This is a serious issue, and a potential window of opportunity is coming towards us. It is important that I have an early opportunity to meet the Finance Minister. I know that there is widespread goodwill for the scheme to take place because of its importance to tourism in the north-west area, as it leads on to some of the major tourism sites in Northern Ireland. I believe that, for reasons of road safety, this is an important project. So, I do not want the serious issue of progressing the scheme to get lost in the hurly-burly of politics. Therefore, I want very much to indicate that, if we got a clear signal on the finance of the project, we could make something of a start on it in the next financial year. That is how important this is. Therefore, I think that we want to try to exploit that potential opportunity.

Mr Storey: I notice that the Minister made repeated references today to coming to the House, U-turns, the Executive and his

ministerial colleagues. When are we actually going to have this, Minister? I am glad that he has clarified today that he is the Minister for roads. Make a decision on the A26.

[Interruption.] The Minister's colleague was complaining about the meeting with the MP for East Londonderry on the issue: will the Minister step back from the fact that he met the Ulster Unionist representatives and Mr Swann about the A26 without reference to other Members? When will we stop the politicking about the A26 and get the road delivered? *[Interruption.]* Stop passing the buck to the Executive and the Finance Minister and just deliver the project. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: First day back, Mr Speaker. Let me say that I am slightly sorry at the tone that Mr Storey has adopted. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr Kennedy: Clearly, Mr Storey has yet to experience Executive life. He is a very effective Member of the Assembly and very good in the Education Committee, but he clearly knows nothing about the running of the Executive. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: The system is that, for any major project to be given the green light, finance has to be made available. That, therefore, is the importance of the meeting that I will now happily have with the Finance Minister. We will hopefully make progress on that to the benefit of everyone. Let us not lose sight of the objective here. Never mind the politicking, the who-said-what and the beating of political chests. I am not interested in that. I remind Mr Storey and his colleagues on those Benches that I am not just the roads Minister: I am the transport Minister and the Minister for Regional Development. I am interested in seeing roads built and finance being made available to me. When the political crumbs come off the table, the important thing is this: let us get the schemes done.

Mr Ó hOisín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I welcome the Minister's recommitment to strategic road projects. As well as securing the finance, does the Minister not agree that those projects must also be shovel-ready? I ask the Minister how many of those projects are shovel-ready or are in danger of becoming so any time soon?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. As he knows, the system is that it is a matter of making the projects procurement-ready first. The process of road building is lengthy and tortuous, and I do not need to be reminded of that. However, that is the process that we have. In many ways, it is a very democratic process, because it allows for various stages and for landowners and people with interests to put forward their views and to have them dealt with. The important stage is to then move any scheme from procurement to being shovel-ready. The Executive's decision earlier this summer, which moved on the A31 — the Magherafelt bypass — is an example of that. The issue that the Member may be alluding to is the recommendations of the public inquiry, which are still awaited, about part of the A6 scheme and the Dungiven bypass.

They have not yet landed on my desk. When they do, I will give urgent and serious consideration to those issues.

2.45 pm

Mr Allister: Can the Minister confirm that, personally, he views this scheme as of strategic importance and, therefore, as a strategic priority? Can he tell the House whether he has been assisted in his efforts in that regard by the views of other Ministers? Given the number of deaths and serious injuries on that road, does he have any comment on the fact that on the reallocation of funding of the A5, the Health Minister took it upon himself to declare that the A26 was not a strategic priority? Did that help?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am not going to speak for others; I am going to speak for myself. I do believe that the A26 is a strategic project. I do want to see it happen, and I want to see it happen as quickly as possible.

Shackleton Barracks: Road and Water Infrastructure

5. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the adoption of the road and water infrastructure in the former Shackleton Army base in Ballykelly. (AQO 4476/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In this case, as in similar cases, it is the responsibility of the management committee and/or the developer to bring the roads and sewers of the former army base up to a standard suitable to allow adoption by my Department. Thus, it is they who have let down

the householders. As this is a wider social issue for the residents and householders, with whom I have a very strong measure of sympathy, I repeat my call for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to, perhaps, consider allocating funding to this issue from the Executive's social investment fund, for example.

Social Development

Mr Speaker: We again move to topical questions. Pat Sheehan has withdrawn his name, which was listed at question number 7.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Lunn: We are at the start of a new session, and I hope that the question of major legislation held over from the last session is sufficiently topical, so could I ask the Minister to give us whatever update he can on the Welfare Reform Bill? (AQT 11/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Yes, indeed I can. A lot of good work has been done on the Welfare Reform Bill to ensure that we get legislation that is best suited to the needs of Northern Ireland. I think we are in a much better place in that regard as a result of the negotiations that my officials and I have had with officials in GB and with the relevant Ministers at Westminster.

There is a factor that needs to be kept in mind. There has been correspondence from the Treasury with regard to potential penalties. We are straying into an area that might suggest that having topical questions after the other questions might be a better arrangement. However, the potential penalties that might arise have certainly been made clear by the Treasury, and I hope that we will be in a position to get the legislation through and have Royal Assent by the end of this year. If we do that, I think that we will be in line with what is expected by Westminster.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answer. I certainly was not going to raise the question of penalties because it is coming up very shortly. Can the Minister give us any detail around any concessions and differentiations that have been agreed or formalised between ourselves and the UK considering the different situation here in Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: On a number of occasions, I have identified three core issues that were raised right at the start by myself and officials. They were, of course, in regard to the split

payments and the direct payments. We identified several issues at the start. The key thing was to go beyond that, because I think we have secured those. That was a major achievement; it is one that is envied by people in Great Britain. We have achieved those. We are just making sure that all of those things are fitted into the complexities of the much-debated computer system that is handling welfare reform, and which has been much in the news. We are confident about those. There are some additional matters. Until we have taken it through the Executive, I do not want to comment any further on the matter but there are certainly other issues that we are determined to take forward to get the best outcome for Northern Ireland.

Special Adviser: Apology

Mr Allister: On 4 July, the Minister told the Social Development Committee that he had no criticism at all of what his special adviser did in regard to his infamous phone call to Councillor Palmer. Has his special adviser since apologised and, if so, does the Minister now accept that Councillor Palmer told the truth about that phone call? (AQT 12/11-15)

Mr McCausland: That is an interesting use of the word "infamous" by the Member, who seems to prejudge things before he has all the facts. I think it is always a good idea to wait until you get the facts before you make a determination on anything. I want to welcome the Member to the Committee for Social Development. I hope that his presence there will ensure that he is better informed on some of these matters. I am not party to any conversation that took place, nor am I aware of any apology being made.

Mr Allister: As Minister, I assume that you would expect to be aware of that, so we can assume that there was no apology. However, there is something that you might be aware of. Can you tell us whether any Minister was present when that phone call was made or when the decision to make it was made?

Mr McCausland: All these matters will be considered in due course by the Committee inquiry that is to take place. I am sure that they will all be dealt with. I am sure that the special adviser will appear and will answer those questions.

Social Housing: Frederick Street, Belfast

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister explain his Department's removal of Frederick Street in north Belfast from the social housing development programme and can he assure the House that this does not demonstrate a lack of ambition in his Department to build social housing to meet needs not only in Belfast but across the North? (AQT 13/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Member focused on a particular site that is adjacent to the University of Ulster campus, which of course is the biggest development that will take place in north Belfast — indeed, the whole of Belfast — over the coming period.

The particular piece of ground that the Member mentioned belongs to the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service. It is being used as a car park and there is no intention to use it as anything other than a car park. Therefore, I see little point in having something in a programme that could never be realised because the land is required for car parking. There will be substantial car parking demands there, of course, because of the University of Ulster campus and the thousands of students who will be coming to the site.

If the Member looks at the detailed social housing development record and the future programme for North Belfast, she will see that that constituency has received a very large share — indeed, the lion's share — of social housing investment over the past number of years.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister confirm that there are at least three sites available for car parking to meet the needs of the University of Ulster campus? Will he not acknowledge the fact that given the Department's decision in recent months in relation to Girdwood and his refusal to build social housing where it is most needed on the basis of objective need, there is a perception in the community that the reasons for this decision are quite suspect indeed?

Mr McCausland: I encourage the Member to look a little more closely at housing delivery and housing demand in north Belfast. The more that that is carefully scrutinised, the more it will bring forward some truths that have, perhaps, been rather buried in the past. There has been an extensive programme of building and there will be significantly more building over the next number of years.

I am not responsible for the car parking arrangements for the university. All that is being taken forward by the university, which made the planning application for the car park.

Social Housing: Additional Funding

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In light of the growing and pressurised demand for social housing, particularly in my area of Magherafelt and Cookstown, what are the Minister and his Department's plans to prioritise additional funding to get those houses built? (AQT 14/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I think that the priority is to make sure that the money that has already been allocated to the Housing Executive for newbuild social housing and the social housing development programme is spent. We do not want to get into a situation, as happened in the recent past, of the Housing Executive coming back late in the year and saying that it cannot spend all the money that it got. I want to ensure that every penny that has been devoted by my Department and me for social housing is spent.

That brings us to how the Housing Executive and the housing associations are performing. A lot more could be done. We should be much better at delivering social housing in Northern Ireland, but that is entirely dependent on effective, efficient working by the Housing Executive and the housing associations. As we move forward with housing and make some of the changes that I think are necessary in Northern Ireland, I hope that we will get a better delivery.

Mr McGlone: It goes back to the Department. What is the Department doing to make sure that we do not have embarrassing situations such as when £15 million was handed back? What is it doing to make sure that projects are spade-ready and that people have the potential to have a roof over their heads? The waiting list is substantially growing.

Mr McCausland: It is always important to examine waiting lists carefully, because you can be on a housing waiting list in Northern Ireland and be a homeowner. That is a slightly odd situation when you have a house. Anybody can put their name down, and there are no restrictions on that.

One of the things that I have done — it was the right thing to do — was to make sure that we meet regularly with the Housing Executive and

housing associations to get them to step up to the mark. Indeed, some time ago, I spoke to the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and told it that it needed to be more ambitious. I was pleased to have the opportunity to see what can be done by housing associations in Great Britain when I visited them recently with the vice-chair of the Housing Executive. I encourage members of the Social Development Committee to do the same thing. Go and see what is happening there and how dynamic some of those associations are.

I am not sure of what the exact figure is, because it changes through amalgamations, etc, but we have just under 30 housing associations in Northern Ireland. Only about half a dozen of them are building, and the bulk of the building is being done by a handful of associations. That situation needs to change. We need a more dynamic sector.

Facing the Future: Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland

Mr Swann: The 'Facing the Future: Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland' contains a proposal to pilot, in four areas, a housing-led approach to regenerate communities that have experienced blight, dereliction and decline. The Doury Road in my constituency of North Antrim is one of those areas. Will the Minister confirm that that project is going ahead and that it is not being delayed by the request by Sinn Féin to add a fifth area? (AQT 15/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Having brought forward the proposal for housing-led regeneration, which was an initiative by me and the Department, we went out and, in a sense, advertised, publicised and made known that new programme. Housing-led regeneration is good practice elsewhere in United Kingdom but, so far, it has never been implemented in Northern Ireland. Housing-led regeneration is simply good practice.

I took the opportunity to visit four areas where people have expressed an interest in this. The Doury Road was one of those areas, and I met with local representatives and local residents there. We are now assessing all the potential areas that we could look at on the basis of set criteria. Once those have been finalised, an announcement will be made fairly soon on the final set of areas that will be taken forward under the programme. The Doury Road certainly ticks all the boxes.

Mr Swann: Minister, the question that I actually asked was whether you would confirm that the

process has been delayed by Sinn Féin's request to add a fifth area. If it has not, will you give us a timeline of when the Doury Road will actually attain the funds?

Mr McCausland: I said that we were applying the criteria. That is happening. I said that the announcement will be made in a few weeks. This has not been delayed; it is simply being done properly as you would expect it to be. We will announce the areas that are going to be taken forward in a few weeks.

When I was up at Doury Road, I told the folk there that the programme will be taken forward very quickly and within a matter of weeks. I think that they were quite pleased and satisfied with that. When you look at the criteria, the Doury Road certainly ticks the boxes.

3.00 pm

Ardoyne

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. What effort is the Minister making to reduce sectarian tensions and to have the loyalist camp at Ardoyne removed? (AQT 16/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The situation at Ardoyne is certainly difficult. There is no doubt that a long-term piece of work is to be done with regard to building better relationships and reducing difficulties at that location. The presence of a loyalist/unionist camp at the site is not the only factor feeding into difficulties there. Over the past number of years — indeed, for many years — there has been difficulty at that site. It is not something new that has suddenly appeared out of space; it has been there for a very long time. If you go back to last year, you see that we had a dissident republican gunman trying to murder police officers at that point. So, there have been difficulties there for quite some time, and I want to see them resolved. We are doing various things, but I do not think that they will necessarily produce immediate results. This is a long-term thing; it has been there for a long time.

Mr Speaker: Order. That ends topical questions to the Minister. We move on to questions for oral answer to the Minister for Social Development.

Fuel Poverty

1. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the action his Department is planning to take to ensure that vulnerable households have adequate heating and insulation for the winter months. (AQO 4487/11-15)

14. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development what progress has been made on his pay as you go for oil system pilot. (AQO 4500/11-15)

Mr McCausland: With the Speaker's permission, I will answer questions 1 and 14 together as both relate to the wider issue of fuel poverty.

The fuel poverty strategy Warmer Healthier Homes was launched in April 2011 and sets out our vision for the future as a society in which people live in a warm comfortable home and do not need to worry about the effect of the cold on their health.

My Department delivers a number of schemes that can help householders heat their homes more efficiently, such as the warm homes scheme and the boiler replacement scheme. The warm homes scheme continues to be our primary tool for tackling fuel poverty with an annual target of installing energy efficiency improvements in 9,000 homes. We have been meeting the target consistently since 2009, providing a range of measures to make homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient.

The boiler replacement scheme was launched in September 2012 and has been hugely successful. It offers an allowance towards the cost of replacing old, inefficient boilers to householders where the annual gross income is less than £40,000. The scheme aims to assist 16,000 households to replace their old, inefficient boiler over three years, with an average three-bedroom semi-detached house saving in excess of £2,700 over the 10-year period. That figure increases the older the boiler being replaced is.

There are two other elements for tackling fuel poverty. Last year, in response to high oil prices, we did some work around a pilot pay-as-you-go scheme, which was in place for three months and was then evaluated. There are, however, two crucial issues around the cost and delivery of introducing a pay-as-you-go system into the mainstream energy strategy. Those two issues are around the cost associated with production and administration.

We have had meetings about this, and we are looking at paying as you go. We are waiting for plans for a new business case that will take into consideration the issues that were highlighted.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the high levels of fuel poverty that he has spoken about, which certainly have not reached this Building — not today anyway — will he assure us that live applications for replacement boilers will be processed before the onset of the winter?

Mr McCausland: The processing of applications is an ongoing process. Applications come in constantly and are approved and signed off. At any point in time, people are at different stages. Therefore, it is not a question that lends itself to a ready answer because of the nature of the process. However, if applications are coming in, they are being dealt with as quickly as the Housing Executive can possibly deal with them.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. With regard to the pay-as-you-go scheme, what are the main cost issues?

Mr McCausland: The original costings proved to be too expensive, with estimation of the production and administration of the pay-as-you-go oil system in the range of £400 to £650 per unit. If the Department supported a scheme to bulk-buy around 900 litres for 10,000 households at a cost of £5 million from a single oil supplier, that may lead to accusations of market interference and distortion. However, local job creation will not be significant as the pay-as-you-go units are manufactured in China.

Mr F McCann: The Minister knows that quite a number of people live in relatively new houses that had insulation excluded during the building process. What is being done to help those people to rectify that problem?

Mr McCausland: I met the residents of an estate where that was a problem. There are limits to what can be done in the case of private ownership. There is an onus on private owners when they are buying a property to take due care. However, I can understand that it is virtually impossible for an individual to gain access to a wall cavity to find out the state of the insulation.

Lack of cavity wall insulation is not an issue for people in just the private sector. Thousands of people in social housing have no cavity wall insulation because their houses were built without it. That issue has been around for

many years and was concealed and hidden, I suggest, because I know of one estate where the matter has been raised for 10 years. Nothing was done about it other than a little bit of patching here and there. We have now engaged fully with the Housing Executive. I went again to Liverpool to see how houses are being retrofitted to deal with that issue.

Some good work is ongoing with the Housing Executive as to how we will, over time, deal with the thousands of social houses across Northern Ireland that lack insulation. As a result, they are cold and hard to heat and people are suffering fuel poverty. Such properties are not only cold but, in many cases, can be damp as well. Sometimes people were being fobbed off and told that it was condensation. It was certainly not condensation in many cases.

I think that we are in a much better place. I recognised that there was a problem; I made it a priority; and we are taking that forward as quickly as we possibly can.

Mr Copeland: Is the Minister aware that many socially owned properties are, on paper, possessed of cavity wall insulation but of a fibre type fitted some time ago? Because of condensation, damp and moisture, it has now all sunk to the bottom and, effectively, the properties are sitting in a damp band about 3 feet high around the bottom. Is he taking any steps to remedy that?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is doing a survey of all its properties to see what needs to be done in regard to energy efficiency. I focussed on those that did not have any cavity wall insulation in the first place. However, the Member is right to identify others where there has been a deterioration of the insulation that was installed quite a number of years ago.

The work being done by the Housing Executive in assessing its properties and getting that report finished will inform much better what can be done. There is work that certainly needs to be done with all of those. It is not so much a housing association property issue because their properties tend to be much newer. However, there is certainly a need to get Housing Executive properties up to standard. I think that we have the resources to do that. It is a matter of making it happen. I can assure the Member that we are pressing on with that as quickly as possible. I had a meeting with the chair of the Housing Executive recently and got an update on where we are with that.

Welfare Reform: Financial Penalty

2. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Social Development whether any of his previous warnings have come to fruition regarding the likelihood of financial penalties if there was a delay in welfare reform. (AQO 4488/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I previously outlined to the Assembly how social security benefits in Northern Ireland are funded and the conditions that underpin that funding. In 2012-13, over £5 billion of funding was provided by Her Majesty's Treasury to cover the cost of social security spending in Northern Ireland. That funding is in addition to the Northern Ireland block grant and is provided on the basis that there is parity between the social security systems in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. That is also the practical outworking of the provisions in the Northern Ireland Act, which commit us to maintaining a single system of social security.

In making the funding available for social security spending, the Treasury is carrying all of the risk for any potential increases in social security spending. It is, therefore, concerned that Northern Ireland has not yet implemented welfare reform at a time when social security spending has been identified as one of the key levers on the coalition Government's approach to controlling UK public finances and the fiscal deficit.

I previously updated the Assembly on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions' letter of May 2012, which outlined that any delay in passing the Welfare Reform Bill will increase the costs to the Treasury and that the UK Government are entitled to recover those costs through an adjustment to the Northern Ireland block grant.

On 1 July 2013, the Minister of Finance and Personnel advised the Assembly of recent correspondence from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, which made it clear that if the Executive do not implement relevant welfare reforms by January 2014, the Northern Ireland block will be adjusted. The Minister made clear that the costs are potentially huge and unaffordable to the Northern Ireland block, with the Chief Secretary's estimated costs for the delays incurred this year as some £5 million per month and up to £200 million per year by 2017-18.

Officials continue to engage with the Treasury to ensure that we protect the interests of Northern Ireland and get the best deal for citizens. However, at the most recent meeting

with the Treasury on 4 September, Treasury officials reiterated their position that failure to implement relevant welfare reforms by January 2014 will result in the Northern Ireland block being adjusted. It is, therefore, essential that we take all necessary steps to avoid incurring those penalties and progress the legislation as a key priority.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that detail. Last October, the Minister was scaremongering about time running out. The current Finance Minister, in the same debate, said that time had already run out. Does the Minister now agree with me that his claims were ill-informed and that the reason why there has been no penalty is because the introduction of the reforms in England has been so chaotic rather than being due to his negotiation skills?

Mr McCausland: If the Member had listened to my answer — actually listened — and understood what I said, she would have heard me refer to correspondence on two occasions and clear requirements and warnings in writing. Her use of the word "scaremongering" is absolutely incredible.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for the answers that he has given so far. Has he had any warnings on this issue in the past?

Mr McCausland: The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions wrote to me in May 2012 indicating that the delay in passing the Northern Ireland legislation would incur costs to the Exchequer and that the UK Government are entitled to seek to recover those costs through an adjustment to the block grant. Fundamentally, the agreement that funds Northern Ireland social security spending directly from the Treasury on the basis of need conditions is that Northern Ireland spending will be met only if we maintain the same systems. That is outlined in the statement of funding policy.

More recently, in July 2013, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury wrote to the Finance Minister advising that it was imperative that welfare reform legislation be dealt with by January 2014. That was reiterated, as I said, on 4 September. The point has been made absolutely clear on three occasions about the difficulties that we will face if we do not take this forward. That is why I was so dismissive of any talk of scaremongering. Those are real concerns.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Is the Minister concerned that

reports emanating from Britain indicate that, since the introduction of benefit cuts, there have been many major problems in communities there? A Government audit report published last week states that the introduction of universal credit may not be feasible, and £38 million in IT costs has already been written off.

Mr McCausland: I had the opportunity to go over some time ago to see some of the work being done on the design of the original system. It was quite an incredible operation. In view of what has emerged, it does not seem to have worked very effectively. I am glad to say that that is not an issue over which I have any responsibility. Whoever has responsibility for dealing with the development of the IT system has responsibility for what is probably the biggest IT operation anywhere in the world. People are bound to be concerned about that and what its impact will be.

3.15 pm

Information on the impact of the various changes that are being phased in gradually in GB is emerging as time goes on, and we will monitor that very closely. The key thing to remember is that what happens here will not be exactly the same as what happens or has happened across the water. We are tailoring it to ensure that we get the best outcome for Northern Ireland. I will work closely with the Executive subcommittee and the Committee for Social Development in that regard. We want to ensure that we get a good outcome.

Vacant Dwellings

3. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the number of vacant domestic dwellings in the social housing sector and his plans to replace or make these dwellings habitable. (AQO 4489/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently has 1,887 void properties across Northern Ireland: 197 properties that will be re-let imminently; 348 difficult-to-let properties, which the Housing Executive will continue to offer to applicants; 650 properties undergoing major repairs, which will be made available for letting when the works are complete; 117 properties for which sales are pending; 539 properties for which demolition is pending; and 39 properties that are classified as subject to the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) or are occupied by squatters.

Should the Member wish, I would be happy to provide him with a breakdown of vacant Housing Executive properties by region.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for the work that he is doing on vacant properties, but he will be aware that, over a number of years, I have raised with him the number of properties in the Ballysally estate in Coleraine that have been derelict for quite some considerable time. I have met the housing association that hopes to renovate and refurbish them. Can he update the House on that refurbishment?

Mr McCausland: I share the Member's concern about Ballysally because the derelict properties were used so much by a documentary filmmaker in a programme that focused very much on that aspect and missed all the good things that are happening in the estate. Nevertheless, it is clear when you go there that they are a blight on the area. I went up and saw the poor condition of the houses that were owned previously by the Students Housing Association Co-operative (SHAC). I heard at first hand about the effect on tenants. I instructed, therefore, that work be progressed as a matter of urgency to bring those properties back into use. Oaklee Housing Association, which now owns the properties, has advised that it intends to tender for work to refurbish the first 10 this week, with a view to commencing work on site by November. Subject to sufficient demand for housing, work on the next 10 properties will commence immediately afterwards.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the work that is being done on the matter. As I understand it, there are, for example, a number of newly allocated homes for which necessary repairs are unable to be carried out because of recent problems associated with maintenance contracts. Can the Minister, first, confirm whether that is the case? If so, what is being done to ensure that people who have been allocated tenancies can take them up as quickly as possible?

Mr McCausland: Certainly, the difficulties with Housing Executive contractors have created problems there and a backlog of work in a number of areas. The demise of certain companies not only has an effect on employees but a major impact on tenants, in that they do not get the standard of service that they should get. I understand that, on 28 August, the Housing Executive looked at some of the issues with contracts. Some of the work may become direct labour organisation work or whatever. As for the arrangements for those particular

contracts, I have not had sight of the final outcome of who will do the work. However, the Housing Executive has been made well aware of our concerns and the need to clear the backlog so that people are not left in a difficult situation or are unable to move into a house that has been allocated to them, as the Member suggests is happening. There certainly is an issue there. It is being addressed, but it will take a while to deal with that backlog.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister clarify the advice given by the Housing Executive to regional Housing Executive offices on housing transfers?

Mr McCausland: The position on that was, I understand, also dealt with at the executive's board meeting on 28 August. It is looking at a way to address the difficulty that was created by the judge's determination in the judicial review. Certainly, what happened in regard to St Matthew's Housing Association is a matter of public record and public concern, and that is being looked into. There was some hold on that during the judicial review, but the investigation is now continuing. I discussed the issue at a meeting with the Housing Executive this morning, and although it was not able to give me the details at the meeting, it indicated that the matter was dealt with on 28 August and that it has found a way forward that it thinks will address the issue. I am well aware, as I am sure the Member is in his own case, of people who were virtually ready to move in to a house, with a key for the door in their hand, only for the transfer to be halted. So, it has been a very unfortunate situation, but the Housing Executive feels that it can be redressed and resolved.

Rural Fuel Poverty

4. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his commitment to work collaboratively with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in addressing rural fuel poverty. (AQO 4490/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to working with a range of partners in and outside government to improve incomes and to alleviate poverty, including fuel poverty. Low income is, of course, one of the key factors associated with fuel poverty.

My Department's work on improving the uptake of benefits has produced £50 million in additional income for more than 15,000 people since 2005. In the past year, the results were

extremely good, and the uptake trebled, with £13.1 million in new annual income being shared by 4,000 people mainly aged 60 and over.

On 3 July, I launched 'Maximising Incomes & Outcomes: A 3 Year Plan for Improving the Uptake of Benefits', which sets out six strategic priorities for action and a wide range of approaches. Over the next three years, my Department will work across government and with increasing numbers of third-sector partners to ensure that a minimum of £30 million in new and additional benefits is generated for at least 10,000 people.

I am glad that other Departments are following our lead, and I welcome the contribution that they are now making by working with my Department in addressing fuel poverty in rural areas.

My Department is also conducting an affordable warmth pilot, working with local councils, Housing Executive etc to find those homes that are suffering the worst effects of fuel poverty. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has been involved in providing funding for hard-to-heat properties identified during the pilot.

My Department provides energy-efficiency assistance to vulnerable households through the warm homes scheme, which stipulates that 40% of measures delivered must be for homes in rural areas.

Since 2011, 12,500 rural homes have received heating and/or insulation through the programme. DARD contributes to the warm homes scheme with additional money to provide a top-up grant for hard-to-heat homes. In 2012-13, 430 rural homes benefited from that collaborative working.

Many people in rural homes apply for the boiler replacement grant, and they have the option of switching from oil to a renewable energy source. However, the scheme shows very low take-up of that option, with only two applications for that type of boiler out of a total of approximately 12,000 approvals for replacement boilers.

In addition, as a key element of 'Maximising Incomes & Outcomes: A 3 Year Plan for Improving the Uptake of Benefits', my Department also continues to work in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in addressing rural poverty through the maximising access in rural

areas, or the MARA project as it is known. That will run to 2015.

Home visits are carried out by contracted local community-based facilitators to rural homes in areas deemed to be disadvantaged using a range of socio-economic indicators. Many people have had a full benefit check by the Make the Call benefit advice team. To date, 2,772 benefit entitlement checks have been carried out, with potential entitlement identified for 828, which is 30% of people who are living in rural areas and are at risk of poverty. So, more than 100 people to date have benefited from over £300,000 in new and additional annual income.

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not normally like to interject when Ministers are speaking, especially when they are in full flow, but I just want to remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. As you said, it was a fairly detailed answer, and I thank the Minister. As he is aware, the warm homes scheme is often very urban-focused. Does he have any plans to extend it to more rural areas?

Mr McCausland: I apologise first to the Speaker; we are doing so much in that area that it is very difficult to cram even part of it into two minutes.

Mr Speaker: I can understand that.

Mr McCausland: You understand that.

I assure the Member that the warm homes scheme stipulates that 40% of measures delivered must be in homes in rural areas. There is a set focus on rural areas, and that will continue.

Mr Craig: Can the Minister outline what other avenues his Department is taking to tackle wider poverty issues in rural areas, and can he give a promise that some of that will be done in my Lagan Valley constituency, which has a huge rural area attached to it?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question, and I assure him that Lagan Valley will not be forgotten. My Department is also committed to improving benefit uptake approaches in the community and maximising incomes and outcomes. Community roadshow events will be delivered in every council area in Northern Ireland over the next three years,

including in Lisburn and all the other council areas that make up Lagan Valley. It will certainly not be overlooked.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for, in particular, his marathon first answer. The latest Home Energy Conservation Authority annual report indicated that the number of households in fuel poverty had only been reduced from 44% to 42%. Does the Minister believe that this is enough or is acceptable, and what other measures is he planning to take to reduce it further?

Mr McCausland: The level of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland — and, of course, we need to keep in mind that it is relative fuel poverty — reduced by 2%. There are factors that contribute to fuel poverty that come within the remit of my Department. So, increasing income through benefit uptake, the warm homes scheme, and so on, can reduce fuel poverty.

However, we are taking a new and more focused area approach to this. Professor Christine Liddell has been working with the Department intensively to bring in a sound evidence-based approach, and this says that we need to identify those in greatest levels of fuel poverty rather than simply try to cater for everything. That would be impossible with figures of over 40%. We have to deal with those who have the greatest problems, and her work is focused on that.

The warm homes and boiler replacement schemes have been very good and much appreciated. Hardly a week goes by in which I do not bump into people who say how much they value the boiler replacement scheme. However, more can be done. Other issues fall within the remit of other Ministers, and the announcement by your Fermanagh and West Tyrone colleague the Minister Arlene Foster about the extension of the gas network will make a difference. We are so heavily dependent on oil in Northern Ireland. That is not the best place to be, and I am sure that her work on that will be appreciated by all your constituents and those elsewhere.

Laurencetown Community Play Area

5. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department can take steps to speed up the process for a land transfer from the Housing Executive to Craigavon Borough Council for the development of a community play area in Laurencetown. (AQO 4491/11-15)

Mrs D Kelly: I trust that the Minister will have noted that it should have read "to Banbridge District Council".

Mr McCausland: That has taken the first bit out of my answer; I was going to point out that Mrs Kelly had got the wrong council area.

I understand that the Housing Executive advised Banbridge District Council on 6 August that it was willing to proceed with the freehold transfer of land at Laurencetown to facilitate a community play area. In accordance with the requirements of 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland', the Housing Executive is required to complete an economic appraisal for the transfer of the site. An economic appraisal is being drafted and is expected to be considered for approval by the Housing Executive later this month. Subject to the necessary approvals, the executive could provide the council with a letter of comfort to commence construction of the play area followed shortly by formal transfer, subject to completion of legal formalities.

3.30 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for those comments and for any intervention that he has made, because it is money that has to be spent by the end of March next year. I wonder whether he is aware that, as I understand it, the officer who was responsible works only two days. Is the Minister confident that any other land transfer issues are being dealt with as swiftly as they could otherwise be?

Mr McCausland: There are many different factors that impact on land transfers. I am not aware of the detailed staffing arrangements in any particular office, and I would not want in any way to suggest — I am sure that she does not either — that that is something that had an impact on this particular occasion. However, there are factors that do contribute, and those can be on the part of a range of stakeholders. Therefore, we will certainly do what we can when we are made aware of particular problems, and I can assure her of that.

Private Members' Business

Ministerial Pledge of Office/Code of Conduct for Members

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly confirms its continued support for the terms of the ministerial Pledge of Office, in particular, the commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means; further confirms its commitment to the principles of personal conduct contained in the code of conduct for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, in particular, the requirement to promote good relations; rejects the comments of Gerry Kelly MLA at the Castlederg IRA memorial event that will give succour to dissident republican groups and help indoctrinate a new generation down the path of violence; and condemns the use of terrorist violence in the present day, and the past. — [Mr Buchanan.]

Mr G Kelly: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after the second "particular" and insert

"operating in a way conducive to good relations and promoting the principal tenets of the Good Friday Agreement of equality, mutual respect, parity of esteem and the right to live free from sectarian harassment."

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. To start off, I want to say that my support for the terms of the ministerial Pledge of Office and the code of conduct for Members is unquestionable. I am proposing the amendment, because the DUP motion mentions:

"give succour to dissident republican groups".

I dealt with that in the Castlederg speech, which might surprise the DUP. Although Tom Buchanan took selective quotations from it, I will quote from it at a bit more length. In fact, I think that the speech in itself, or an abridged version of it, tells the story. I am quoting myself as I spoke in Castlederg:

"Let me state this clearly at the start: No Unionist MLA, Councillor, MP or Minister; no loyalist paramilitary or Loyal Order spokesperson — no matter how loud they

shout — will prevent me or any other Republican honouring our comrades who gave their lives in the Struggle for Irish freedom and equality. The Republicans and Nationalists of Castlederg/Aghyaran and of Tyrone remember the oppression of house raids, harassment, internment, collusion, imprisonment and shoot to kill. They also remember when the RUC, UDR and British Army in their thousands tried to prevent the dignified burials of our comrades ...

There was a war ... Terrible things happened during that conflict. Terrible suffering was inflicted on all sides — by all sides. But let us not countenance a hierarchy of victims which would discriminate against Republicans and Nationalists not just in life, but in death also.

We are told by Unionists that Tyrone Republicans are insensitive to those who suffered at the hands of Republicans, in this area. Yet Castlederg is where Republicans have been involved in dialogue with the Loyal Orders and others within the Unionist section of our community for over 5 years. Despite the difficulties and hurt felt, the majority Nationalist population in the area have tolerated Loyal Order marches through the town which amount to almost 20 in this year alone ... It was agreed in those talks that the centre of Castlederg should be a shared space. Yet when a single Republican commemoration parade is organised we are confronted with a deluge of orchestrated complaints. In effect we are being told that it is right for unionism to remember their British dead without interference but how dare Republicans remember their Irish dead in the same way. No discussion of the issue — just megaphone attack.

When the problem was identified publicly: as Republicans parading past the cenotaph, Castlederg Republicans took an initiative ... They said that, this year, they would not parade around the Diamond where the cenotaph and the Methodist Church were situated.

The Parades Commission ... restricted the parade further. Even those restrictions weren't enough for Unionists. They then demanded that honouring our dead should be banned altogether. They demanded that the British Secretary of State ban the commemoration parade and then that the PSNI ban it.

As people here know, that has been done before in our history and it did not work then and it certainly will not work now. You cannot, with any law or legislation banish the feeling of respect and pride in the hearts of Republicans for their comrades ...

So, having said all that, where does it bring us? Does it make me feel hopeless or helpless? No. Do I think dialogue should cease? No, I don't. It means, after today, we seek out those who we need to talk to in the Unionist part of our community and we find a way forward with them."

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

"We recognise that there are two narratives about our past. That is the reality. It does not mean that we will agree on the past. I do not expect Unionists to agree with or even accept a Republican or Nationalist view of the past. No more than Unionists can expect Republicans to agree with their account of our history. I may not like the part played by the Crown Forces during the conflict but I absolutely accept their right to commemorate their dead with dignity ...

If both sections of our community can come to terms with the fact of there being two narratives, at least two views of our past. That, I believe will help our whole society to move forward. We have, in fact, agreed on many things already — the Good Friday Agreement, St Andrews and Hillsborough agreements being prime examples. There are also things we don't agree on. But for the future, for a shared future"

— much talked about —

"there may have to be more compromises on all sides. If we can allow for the different narratives it may open up the space to do that.

Without dialogue, whether in Castlederg or Derry or Rasharkin or Belfast we cannot progress. So as Republicans we must stand by face to face dialogue as a method of resolution."

Speaking of volunteer Seamus Harvey and volunteer Gerard McGlynn, I continued:

"It is worth saying — and I hope Unionism is listening — that they were ordinary young men who loved their families and friends and were loved in return. They got great satisfaction from playing sport and reading

history and going to dances or courting or playing with their children or going to college or university. They were ordinary young men in the extraordinary circumstances of the early 1970's who rose to the challenge of the time. They had a vision of Equality and Freedom and they knew the risks they were taking to achieve it but they could not stand idly by or leave it to others.

It is a harsh reality of Resistance that we lose some of our best activists and young people during armed conflict and Seamus and Gerard along with their other comrades whom we remember here today, paid with their lives. Forever young, they are remembered, loved and cherished by their families, friends and comrades and always will be ...

I don't know what our dead comrades might have said if they were here today on this platform, but what I do know is that they left a legacy behind them. Their courage and their sacrifice inspired others who took up their mantle and continued their struggle.

What I do know is that they played their part in our long struggle with dedication and commitment using the tools available to them in the 1970s. As our comrades in 1916, or in 1803, or in 1798 used the tools available to them in their eras and indeed in any of the many uprisings, large or small which has peppered our Island's history.

What I do know is that we, who continue that struggle for Irish Unity" —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr G Kelly: No.

"What I do know is that we who continue that struggle for Irish Unity and Independence, must use the tools of 2013. We should not and cannot act as if it is 1916 or 1969 or 1980 or 1996 or even 2006. We cannot live in our past but we must learn from our past to secure and improve our future. There are those on both sides, a minority, who yearn for past certainties, who want to return to the conflict years. They will use any issue in a forlorn attempt to undermine progress and to destabilise the peace. They will fail because they have no vision for the future of Ireland and therefore no strategy other than violence itself. The vast majority of people on the Island reject them ...

The united Ireland Sinn Féin seeks to build is inclusive, pluralist and where all the elements of the Irish nation are comfortable, secure and can find the fullest expression of their identity.

Sinn Féin ... are transforming a society moving out of conflict and into a new shared future. In the South we are providing the credible, radical republican opposition to ... a political establishment which has failed the Irish people.

This generation of republicans is laying the foundations for a New Republic — a 32-County Republic with social justice and equality at its core.

This generation has the greatest opportunity since Partition to finally achieve genuine national self-determination. We do not underestimate the challenges ahead. Indeed as Republicans we embrace challenge, we embrace activism and we embrace the responsibility that comes with activism.

Finally, and importantly we could not have got this far without the activism, dedication and self-sacrifice of the people we are here to honour today. Our best tribute to them, I would suggest is to rededicate ourselves to the achievement of the United Ireland for which they gave their lives."

A LeasCheann Comhairle, that is an abridged version of my speech. As there is so much interest in it, which took me by surprise more than most, I will put a copy of it in the Library so that people might read it. I spoke to a number of unionists and loyalists about this speech and all except one had not read it. I doubt very much that Members who are going to speak about it today have even read the speech. That is why I quoted it today. If you are going to criticise someone, it is best to know what they said before you do so.

Mr A Maginness: The events in Castlederg in August were a disaster for local community relations and the body politic here in Northern Ireland. The opportunity was there for the republican movement in the form of Sinn Féin to show people that it did not need to commemorate by coat-trailing through that town and, in so doing, exacerbating community relations and poisoning the political atmosphere here in Northern Ireland at a time when the atmosphere was being poisoned enough by Orange parades up and down the country, particularly in Belfast. For Sinn Féin to have commenced a march in commemoration of two of its members was totally misconceived. It is

delusional for Mr Kelly to say, "Well, do you know something? We had to commemorate these young men by marching through the town." The fact is that it did not have to do that. The magnanimous thing would have been to have said, "Yes, we want to commemorate these two young men. We will do it, but we will not do it by way of marching. We will hire a hall or a football pitch. We will do something to commemorate these young men and their sacrifice to the republican movement." Yet, that opportunity was wasted by the republican movement. Think of the impact that that alternative would have had on trying to ease the critical political situation that we have here in Northern Ireland. We should look very carefully at what we do and say.

I endorse what the Tánaiste said about Castlederg in Cambridge at the weekend. He said:

"I acknowledge that republicans in Castlederg are entitled to remember those republicans who died during the troubles — but I disagree with the way they did so this year. Their entitlement is tempered by responsibility to respect and be sensitive to the suffering of victims of the Troubles. I saw little of that respect or sensitivity in Castlederg last month."

What ordinary people in Belfast want regarding Orange marches, whether it be the Black institution or the Orange Order, is respect and sensitivity. Yet, when the republican movement and Sinn Féin have an opportunity to show respect and sensitivity, they fail to do so. That is why I say that it was a disaster.

The motion that has been put forward by the DUP is so selective. There is no attempt to look at all the other associated problems, which the DUP have contributed to. On 25 August last year, prior to that, we had a letter signed by the First Minister and other DUP members effectively saying that the Parades Commission had no right to be, in effect, regulating parades in Belfast, particularly in relation to the sensitive part of Belfast that is Carrick Hill and St Patrick's. That added a tremendous amount of disrespect to the Parades Commission.

3.45 pm

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

Mr A Maginness: I will finish now. It added succour to those who wished to defy and undermine the rule of law in relation to parades.

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

Mr A Maginness: I say this to the DUP: look at what you have done and what your leader has done and draw lessons from that.

Mr Nesbitt: In opening the debate, Mr Buchanan made some very selective remarks with regard to my appearance on BBC radio this morning. Let me be clear and repeat that there are significant sections of this community who will not welcome the fact that three of the four substantive debates on the first two days of this new session are related to the legacy of the past. Mr Buchanan may not be aware of that. It is perhaps no surprise because he and his colleagues were deeply unaware of the fact that there was no consensus for building and constructing a peace-building and conflict resolution centre at the Maze. It was us who had to point that out to them, so I will take no lessons from the DUP on standing up to Sinn Féin and doing what is right for Northern Ireland, unless the Members have changed their mind and now want to build it again. I do not know whether Mr Buchanan has ever debated with Gerry Kelly and Sinn Féin, but I have on many occasions and will continue to do so. I will challenge Mr Kelly.

Let me make this clear. I have said repeatedly and publicly that if you have lost a loved one, it is the human condition that the family and the friends and the community will want to remember them, and that includes people who blew themselves up transporting bombs to Castlederg. The question is of what is an appropriate way to do it. No one needed to die to get to where we are today, and those who did die died because they made a choice. It is not right to say that violence was inevitable. I will accept that unionism left stones unturned in the 1950s and 1960s. Unionism did leave stones unturned, but the way to fix it was not through violence, and that was a choice — a bad choice — by republicans.

The motion calls for a commitment to exclusively peaceful means, and it would do no harm if we were all to recommit to what the Ulster Unionist Party secured in the Belfast Agreement and which was bought into by four of the parties in this Chamber today but not by the DUP, which was outside the gates crying foul at the time. The key phrase — *[Interruption.]* Would you like me to give way, or do you want to speak from a sedentary position? Mr Deputy Speaker, I leave it to you.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask all Members to make their remarks through the Chair.

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In this motion, we are called on to reject:

"the comments of Gerry Kelly MLA at the Castlederg IRA memorial event that will give succour to dissident republican groups".

I have read the speech. Of course, I have read it, and it does give succour. What gives succour to people who are currently engaged in violence is the ambivalence of Sinn Féin, the Provisional IRA and the republican movement to violence. We believe that terrorist violence is an absolute and that it is absolutely wrong. Move off that and say that there are conditions that justify it and you have the terrorist campaign of the Provisional IRA. So, you have people such as the Ulster Unionists saying that it is never right and that there are no conditions. You have Sinn Féin saying that there are conditions but that they no longer exist, and you have people who say that the conditions still exist. So, Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar die. Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr die. David Black dies. That is because of the ambivalence and because you moved off the absolute that terrorism is absolutely wrong.

This motion also says that we should condemn the use of terrorist violence in the present day and in the past. I say to Mr Buchanan and his colleagues that if you have challenged Sinn Féin as I have, you will know that it does not believe that the Provisional IRA committed acts of violence. Mr Kelly says that shooting a prison warden in the head, as he did, is not an act of violence. If his invitation to me to come into some sort of new dispensation on this island includes accepting that shooting a prison warden in the head is not an act of terrorist violence, I say to Mr Kelly: I will not be there. However, I may be in Dublin in 2016, not to celebrate the Easter rising but to acknowledge that it happened. I am not one of those unionists who wants to airbrush the hunger strikes out of existence and rewrite history that way, but acknowledgement has to be done in a fair and truthful manner.

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

Mr Nesbitt: If it is appropriate, that will mean people such as me acknowledging, without condoning, what has happened in the past. That is the challenge and the hope that I offer to people if they are prepared to be honest.

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

Mr Dickson: I can address the vast majority of the motion swiftly by saying that the Alliance Party always has been and always will be committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means, to equality, to the promotion of good community relations and to a truly shared future for everyone in Northern Ireland. We condemn all violence, from the actions of those who murder and destroy with bombs and bullets, now and in the past, to those who attack our police officers with masonry, petrol bombs and ceremonial swords.

We have no problem with the wording of the amendment. However, we do not think that it is appropriate to remove condemnation of the remarks made at Castlederg, so we will support the original motion. Much could be said to highlight the hypocrisy in parts of the motion. After all, support for policing is a key part of the Pledge of Office and a requirement of every elected representative, yet while our police officers have been pelted and injured with bricks, bottles and other missiles, and confronted by people wielding hatchets and hammers, the focus of public comment from some members of the DUP was to criticise the police. The motion also refers to good community relations, yet elected representatives have said that they have no problem with flags being burned and offensive comments being made on social media.

I will turn to the thrust of the motion: Mr Kelly's comments at Castlederg. His description of past violence as a tool was particularly chilling, as was his apparent argument that republicans should refrain from the use of violence, not because it is wrong but because there is now a new vision to achieve their objectives. There was no absolute commitment to non-violence, just an appeal to political strategy.

His political labelling of Castlederg was also very concerning. No village, town or city in Northern Ireland is nationalist or unionist, and no group has any more or less ownership of an area because of its identity. The Alliance Party's vision of shared space recognises that if we are all to build a united community, shared space needs to go beyond town centres. We need shared neighbourhoods in the same way that we share our workplaces. Representatives need to stop labelling towns and areas like territory.

Mr Kelly will no doubt say that he talked a lot about equality at Castlederg, but, in reality, he reinforced a separate-but-equal, them-versus-us mentality. He showed little regard for the economic and social inequalities that are inevitable outcomes of continued division.

In all those instances over the summer, including the letter from America, pandering to the electorate trumped proper and effective leadership. If we are genuinely to move forward, to build what I want and my party passionately desires — a united community — elected representatives cannot continue to undermine support for the police, the rule of law and community relations. This summer was a disaster for Northern Ireland internally, bringing nothing but despair and frustration and increasing tensions, which make the already challenging Haass talks all the more difficult.

Internationally, the world turned its face against us. In the global media, we did not receive attention for the many positive events that took place here but for the tension, violence and disorder on our streets. Having issued an invitation to Dr Haass in June, the DUP and Sinn Féin have deliberately persisted in bringing us to the edge of the abyss, which genuinely calls into question their leadership and commitment to those upcoming talks. Their conduct over the summer was completely at odds with the constructive behaviour needed to achieve agreement. Today, they need to demonstrate their genuine commitment to the talks, not only to the Assembly but, more importantly, to the public that expects it of them. However, we are, understandably, growing more cynical by the day.

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

Mr Dickson: We now need to move forward recognising the need for compromise and setting about building a united community for everyone.

Mr McCausland: On Sunday 11 August, the republican commemoration of two IRA terrorists Seamus Harvey and Gerard McGlynn took place in Castlederg. I read, and, in fact, have in front of me, all that Gerry Kelly said on the day because it is obviously on the internet, and I assure him that my colleague Tom Buchanan also read what he said in its entirety, and he has a copy with him. So it is not a case of speaking about something about which we know nothing because we have read it. It was clear, and he confirmed, that he was borrowing extensively from his speech on that day in what he said today.

It is clear that this was a eulogy, a praising of those who died when they set out to destroy or murder but ended up dying themselves. Mr Kelly used the words "respect" and "pride". In his speech, he spoke about young men who

"rose to the challenge", who had left a great "legacy" and who had a "vision of equality and freedom". I find it impossible to reconcile those things with those who went out to murder, maim or destroy.

It was not the only occasion in those early days of the Troubles when members of the Provisional IRA died as a result of premature explosions. On this occasion, no one was killed other than the terrorists, but, on other occasions, others were killed by premature explosions. In Belfast and in other parts of the Province, those who were victims along with the perpetrators included some very small children who died as a result of those particular operations. He talked of respect and pride and of those who had left a legacy. What would that legacy have been if they had succeeded? What if, instead of dying in that instant themselves, they had reached their target and blown it up or murdered the people who were at the particular location? This was about eulogising those who were intent on murder and mayhem. Although, in the middle of the speech, part of a paragraph refers to dissident republicans today, the fact is that they will see this as validation and justification for the things that they are doing now.

This was a day when the political atmosphere in Northern Ireland was, as a previous Member said, poisoned. It was poisoned by what was said, poisoned by what was done by republicans and poisoned by the way in which they did it. They came to flaunt their terrorist past in the faces of innocent victims.

The issue of eulogising the past is not unique to Castlederg. Let us go back to Easter and the case of a republican demonstration in my constituency. There, as part of the commemoration, small children were dressed up in what looked to me to be very much like paramilitary uniforms. I do not know what organisation they represented.

4.00 pm

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCausland: No, I have very little time; sorry.

They were dressed up in paramilitary uniforms. It was not just the dissident republican parade in Ardoyne at Easter at which children were dressed up. There were parades in west Belfast at which children were dressed up. This is about eulogising the past and, in effect, passing it on to another generation.

Sinn Féin has changed. Today, it condemns those who do the things that the Provisional IRA did in the past. However, there is a huge inconsistency between condemning those who do it now but, at the same time, not those who did it then. That is because murder is murder is murder. Whether it was murder in 1973, 1983, 1993 or 2003, it is still murder. Sinn Féin has still some way to go. It has to recognise that bombing and murder are wrong not only today but in the past.

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

Mr McCausland: I will indeed.

These are people who are bound to the past. They are prisoners of a violent republican tradition. Sadly, there is every danger of them passing that on to another generation.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Táimid ar ais arís. We are back again. It is a pity that we are not here discussing job creation, educational excellence, youth unemployment or equality for all our young people, no matter where they live. That is what we should be discussing. What are we here discussing? The "no" antics. This could be pre-Good Friday Agreement or pre-power-sharing, North/South, British-Irish agreement. It is very disappointing, I have to say. It is the DUP playing to lowest common denominator politics, whipping up sectarianism. What we need in our society is parity of esteem and respect. That does not mean that we all have to agree with each other, but what we do need is respect.

Let us look at parades in the North of Ireland. There are roughly 3,000 parades; most are uncontentious. Of those, 5% are republican and 95% are loyalist, unionist parades. On the Shankill Road this weekend, 72 bands marched. Yet here we are talking about one republican parade. Let us look at the cost. We were at the Policing Board last Thursday, and we heard the costs. We heard the monetary cost, and we heard the human cost. Since December, the cost has been £28 million; that would build a hell of a lot of schools. The fiasco in Ardoyne cost £300,000 a week and countless attacks on police officers. And what have we? Deafening silence from the boys opposite.

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not.

Deafening silence — *[Interruption.]* Deafening silence. If people want to talk about commemorations, if people want to talk about Castlederg, certainly we will talk about that. Republicans moved to address concerns. If there are objections, we are open to listening to them, but do not try to use republican dead to deflect from the failure of leadership this summer. That is what we had: an absolute failure of political leadership, UUP and DUP. The pain of a republican family is the same as the pain of a British Army, RUC or loyalist family, or the family of someone who was not engaged in the conflict at all. Let us not pretend that the British state did not kill people. Let us not pretend that.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not give way. You had your opportunity to speak.

Let us not pretend that a mother's pain should not be acknowledged. There should be no hierarchy of victims. Equally, many people in this Chamber have eulogised people who have gone out and shot people in our society. If you are going to do that, at least do not be hypocritical about it. We had a bitter conflict, and I, for one, do not want to go back there. For us not to go back to conflict, we have to deal with inequalities and sectarianism, and we have to work together.

We have a leader in Florida writing letters back to the North of Ireland. We have schoolchildren being terrorised. We have communities hemmed in in so-called peace camps. We have scarce resources being squandered. I know what I want, and I know what Sinn Féin wants. We want functioning, stable political institutions, North and South, in Britain and in Ireland. We want peace on our streets. We want jobs for our young people. We want excellent education for our young people. We want good residential care for our elderly. Everyone needs to pull back from the brink. We need to engage in dialogue —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close, please?

Ms Ruane: — and bring about the changes that we need on the basis of equality and respect.

Mr Campbell: I am afraid that the issues raised regarding the Castlederg parade demonstrate not just how far some people have yet to go but, in a strange way, how far they have already come.

I want to make my remarks relevant to the comments made by Mr Kelly at the event and draw a few analyses from those comments. It quickly became clear, as quoted on several occasions, that the parade arranged in Castlederg would be a eulogy to a number of members of the IRA and, in particular, Messrs Harvey and McGlynn, who, had they been successful, would have murdered innocent people in Castlederg rather than killed themselves. It ended up as a eulogy by Mr Kelly and others to the actions of those individuals.

Mr Kelly talked about their actions being a struggle for Irish freedom. He then exceeded that by saying that they gave their lives so that we could be free. That comment is not going to the bottom of the barrel; it is going through the base of the barrel and into the sewer.

Many years ago, I used to be exasperated when trying to understand the mindset of people in the nationalist and republican community who could tolerate, let alone accept and support, murder in their own community. I say I used to be exasperated, because I am no longer exasperated. I used to fail to understand how people in the republican community could give adulation to those who, had they been successful in this instance, would have killed them. As we have heard many times from the bard of Carrickmore, who I see is not here today, Castlederg is a majority nationalist town. Therefore, if the two individuals had been successful in murdering people, the chances are that the majority of the people that they would have murdered would have been Roman Catholic.

As I say, I used to wonder about the mentality of people who could not only say that they do not mind about that but could give support to it. No longer; I am no longer exasperated. I have given up trying to understand the mental capacity of anybody who tries to justify that.

The one thing —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: No; I am very short of time. There is one thing that we have to come to terms with — something that Sinn Féin will have to come to terms with — as a result of what they engaged in at Castlederg. It is this: every time, from 11 August 2013, when they talk about a shared future, every time that they talk about a shared space, every time that they talk about progress, every time that they talk about peace and every time that they refer to reconciliation, one word will stick in their craw

every week of every month of every year. That word is "Castlederg".

Mr Attwood: Before the recess, the running narrative of this Assembly was that it was detached from the life of the real world. If you were to draw conclusions from many of the contributions of Sinn Féin and the DUP this afternoon, that would be the narrative again. There are Members who are detached from people's sense of things outside this Chamber.

In all the contributions from the DUP Benches, there has not been one reference, word or indication about any adverse comment that came from the DUP or unionism over the summer months, given the issues that arose. Mr Buchanan, in his opening remarks, spent two minutes turning on the UUP and the next eight minutes making no reference whatsoever to anything other than what came from the mouths of Sinn Féin representatives. When Mr McCausland spoke, he talked of the poison in the early 1970s of republican terror without any reference whatsoever to the other sources of poison in this society that gave rise to tension, divisions and conflict.

On the other hand, when it came to Sinn Féin's contributions, although I understand why it wants to respect those whom it views as having struggled and died during the years of conflict, there was no reference whatsoever to the fact that the people of Ireland, repeatedly, year after year, decade after decade, election after election endorsed democratic struggle as the way to resolve our conflict. At no point did any person from the Sinn Féin Benches acknowledge that, during those years of conflict, nearly half of all those who died did so at the hands of republican organisations and that the vast majority of those who died were civilians.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Attwood: Yes.

Mr D Bradley: The Member, like me, will probably have noticed that the constant refrain from Sinn Féin on dissident violence is that it is wrong because the dissidents have not outlined a strategy. Does the Member agree with me that political violence is wrong, strategy or no strategy, and that it was wrong in the past when the Provos were involved?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Attwood: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Not only was it wrong, it was anti-national, anti-democratic and it was visited primarily upon the civilian population at a time when there was an alternative, constitutional, democratic approach, even though that was difficult. Against all standards of morality, ethics and the democratic standards of the people of this island, there was offence inflicted by the IRA. So, the IRA, or the people who did the explaining for the IRA, over the summer, demonstrated that they continue to be detached from the true narrative of Irish politics over the past 30 or 40 years. In the same way, unionism, the DUP in particular, demonstrated that they were detached about the truth of what unionism did in this society for many years, and the truth about what unionist leaders failed to do over the summer months. In my view, that proves the folly of putting too many eggs in the DUP and Sinn Féin basket.

What conclusions do we draw from all that? There has been immense change. The new beginning to policing, devolution, a measure of stability and a united stand against terror are achievements that should not be discounted. However, two clear patterns in our politics have emerged. The first is that our politics are degrading before our very eyes, and we need to acknowledge that. Yes, acknowledge the achievements, but recognise that our politics are degrading before our very eyes. That is what disputes about the past, commemorations, flags and parades and the paralysis in government demonstrate. The second lesson that we have to learn is that there is no possibility that the short-term management of disputed issues, as we have seen over recent months, is a recipe for success in the future.

4.15 pm

I have an extra minute, Mr Deputy Speaker. The lesson of the summer, the recent months or the past number of years is that if we are going to address these issues of flags, parades, commemorations and the past, then let us do so comprehensively and ethically and not on a selective basis. That is the conclusion that we have to draw from the summer months. If we do not apply our minds, wisdom and wit to that task, our politics will continue to degrade before our very eyes. That is the moment, the space and the opportunity created by the Haass process to deal comprehensively and ethically, for once and for all, for the unfinished business of agreement politics — the legacy of what was unfinished in 1998 and since.

If you draw conclusions from this debate, from the DUP and Sinn Féin and the actions of some

of them over the summer months, you will conclude negatively.

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

Mr Attwood: That is not the lesson of the summer; that is not the message to send out on the opening day of this term.

Mr Hussey: On 11 August 2013, there were two events in my constituency of West Tyrone. There was a commemoration event in Castlederg, and there was a commemoration event in Omagh. The event in Omagh, of course, commemorated 15 August 1998, when 29 people and two unborn babies were murdered. In Castlederg, the Derg Valley Victims Voice and the people of Castlederg wanted to bring to the attention of the republican movement the deaths of 29 people in Castlederg — 29 people who had been murdered by republicans; 29 people who had been murdered and had their deaths overlooked. There was an attitude of, "Let us just airbrush them from history."

Fifty bombs in a town the size of Castlederg. It could have been 51, because, on 11 August 1973, two men set off from County Donegal to bomb Castlederg. Thank God, they did not get across the border, because their own car bomb exploded and killed them both. What would have happened if they had got that car into Castlederg? We all know what would have happened. People would have been killed, so I thank God that those two people did not get their car into Castlederg.

I cannot understand why anybody would want to commemorate and glorify people who were prepared to do that, because, on 15 August 1998, Omagh showed us what a car bomb can do. Two men drove that car into Omagh in 1998. What is the difference between the two men who drove that bomb into Omagh in 1998 and the two who were killed in County Donegal? What is the difference? Nothing; they were terrorists, and they went out to terrorise.

So, we have Mr Kelly referring to Seamus Harvey and Gerard McGlynn as leaders who had "a vision of equality". What was the equality? What was the equality that those two men saw? Was it, "I know. We'll take a bomb into Castlederg, we'll blow the town to hell, we'll wreck everybody's business and we'll make everybody unemployed?" Was that the equality? That is a nonsense. That is an equality that nobody wants, Mr Kelly. A bomb

does not bring equality. Twenty-nine deaths in Castlederg did not bring equality. Those people were murdered in cold blood.

We had situations in Castlederg in which people were murdered, and the IRA bombed their bodies. What equality does that represent?

It certainly does not represent equality in my eyes, and it is not an equality that I would want.

Mr Kelly went to say that their courage inspired others to continue the struggle — their courage encouraged others to continue the struggle. What was courageous about driving a car bomb? Are you going to stand there in 10 years' time and tell me that the people who drove the car into Omagh were courageous?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Could all remarks be made through the Chair, please?

Mr Hussey: They were cowards, Mr Deputy Speaker. Those who brought the car bomb from Donegal were cowards, and those who brought the car bomb into Omagh were cowards.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hussey: I will not give way. Terrorism is terrorism regardless of how you look at it.

You go on to say that they left a legacy behind them. You are damned right they left a legacy behind them. They left a legacy in Castlederg, for the Derg Valley Victims Voice, for example, with 29 unsolved deaths. They left a legacy of mourning in houses because they took those bombs into various towns. I certainly would not want to commemorate it.

One of the points that was made — you said it, Mr Kelly, as did your leader — was that we should respect the dead with dignity. What about Enniskillen in 1987? That is the dignity that the IRA and republicans would show to our dead. The Enniskillen bomb was an indication of what republicanism thought of our right as British citizens to respect our dead. On the same day, they had a bomb in Tullyhommon which, thank the good Lord, did not go off.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Would the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Hussey: So, I am sorry; I cannot see the vision of loveliness that others seem to see. The event in Castlederg was wrong, and it was shameful. I am glad that those two were killed

by their own bomb because I would rather see them dead than innocent people in Castlederg.

Mr B McCrea: So, here we all are, back from our summer holidays. I have never listened to such a drab, dreary and depressing debate in my life. It is all about "whataboutery" and the past and not going forward. The challenges facing this society are youth unemployment, healthcare and trying to find some way through welfare reform. The people of Northern Ireland look to us to see whether we can find some solutions.

I listened to the leader of the UUP start off by saying that people here will be depressed about the fact that we are spending three of the four debates talking about the past, but then he got stuck in and wanted to pick a fight with the DUP and go on about all these things. You cannot speak from both sides of your mouth at the one time. Either you are the leader of the Protestant unionist loyalist (PUL) community, the leader that criticises the PSNI — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr B McCrea: — and the person who brings forward a cultural war, or you are someone who is trying to build a better future. This shim-shamming around does no one any favours. If you are really serious about leading this country forward, you have to start showing some leadership.

The problem that I have with the motion, although there were very serious issues at Castlederg, is that it brings forward the politics of the street without resolving them. It drags us back to "whataboutery", blame and division without suggesting any way forward.

Have the Members opposite forgotten that they are actually in government with these people and are together with them? Would it not have been better for the Government to have joined together and produced a statement that, first of all, condemned all violence against the PSNI? There was a deafening silence on that. Would it not have been better to have produced a joint statement that could have provided some form of government and leadership, or are they suggesting that they are happy to go back to the 1970s?

Mr Attwood was right to say in his contribution that the way we are going here now will mean that this country will end up back in violence in three years' time if we carry on like this. There is a responsibility on the political leaders in the

House to find a way forward and not to drag us back to the past. I acknowledged Mr Attwood's contribution, but I would also point out to some other Members who are present that they too are in the Government and that they too are part of this collectivism. They should be able to make this intervention when they are around the Executive table. For that matter, I am surprised that Members from the Alliance Party are criticising certain elements of this when they are also part of the Government. You have to realise that you are all part of the Government, and the people are looking to the Government to provide some form of solution.

I will conclude on this matter by referring to Sinn Féin. The amendment that Sinn Féin has tabled is like motherhood and apple pie. How can you not agree with the statement that has been put down? Yet, it avoids dealing properly with the issue. I have to say to Members from that party that they too are in government. They should be able to get the First Minister and the deputy First Minister together and come up with a joint statement about how we deal with the problems that our people face. That is what genuine leadership is about, but perhaps this Chamber is not the place to do it.

So, when it comes to how we will vote on this motion and the amendment, I have to say this to you: a plague on all your houses. We will abstain, and we will tell you that this is not the right way to go forward. If you insist on tabling motions —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I will give way.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his contributions, but it is clear that his general strategy is going to be a pretty repetitive style of attacking everybody and anything that comes forward in the House. Does NI21 have some sort of policy paper on dealing with the past that we, as the other parties, can engage with and see if you have any suggestions for working on the issue?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr B McCrea: I am sure that the Member intended that to be a witty, pithy interjection. The issue in this —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: No. I have given way once already; I will not do so a second time. The

issue is this: you are all gearing up for these great Haass talks. I understand that there are new leaders of the SDLP delegation, that the Alliance Party is working at it and that the two parties over here will be discussing it. When will you have a sense of maturity and sort it out yourselves? When will you be able to sit around an Executive table — you are the Government — and say, "Let's thrash this out"? Why is it that, after 15 years, you still have to get somebody else to come and hold your hand?

On the interjection from my colleague from the Alliance Party, yes, we will make a contribution to the debate, but we will do so standing on our own two feet. We do not need some succour to come from across the Atlantic to say this is how we have to do.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I appear to have stirred the leader of the UUP with only 30 seconds to go. I will not take his intervention this time, but I will engage in debate another time. Real debate is required and not just meaningless sound bites. Real leadership is what is required and real forward thinking. Do you know what? I have looked at this —

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

Mr B McCrea: — pathetic debate, and I think, "Shame on all of you".

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that it is inappropriate language if not unparliamentary language to refer to a person who is coming to enable and assist the progress of politics in Northern Ireland in the way that the Member has done. I ask him to revisit his remark.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind all Members that they should be careful with their language in the Chamber. I ask staff to review the transcript. I ask you to continue for a brief moment, Mr McCrea.

Mr G Robinson: I was in attendance at the highly provocative republican march in Castlederg and witnessed at first hand the devastation, hurt and trauma that that march caused to the innocent victims of IRA violence in Castlederg. Yet again, Members from Sinn Féin have proved that they do not respect the wishes or feelings of the people who have suffered from the violence that they have tried to justify. That march took place in a town that

was devastated and scarred physically and mentally by the terror that the IRA wreaked on that community. Gerry Kelly should be ashamed of his comments, which, I believe, greatly exceeded the code of conduct that Members of the House sign up to. His words failed to meet the good relations criteria and could give succour to dissident republican groups to carry on the mayhem and death perpetrated by republicans.

4.30 pm

It is my belief that Gerry Kelly has exposed himself and his party to justified criticism. Perhaps he can tell us all how forcing a march through Castlederg that, every other political party said, should not be permitted can be deemed as promoting good relations.

It is my pleasure to support my colleagues' motion today and to pledge myself to upholding the standards that are demanded in the code of conduct in the House.

Mr Allister: This debate — indeed the events of the summer, the motion and the amendment — are testament to the continuing abject failure of the Belfast Agreement. Here we are, 15 years after the new dawn of 1998 that we were all sought to be conned about, discovering that, right at the heart of government, are those who still cling to the justification — not just the justification, the eulogising — of evil, wicked terrorism. Of course, there are some in the House who should remember that they put them there. The DUP's contribution to the debate thus far, perhaps Mr Campbell excluded, has been somewhat lacklustre. Maybe Lord Morrow's conclusion will be different. However, it says to me that there is a realisation that what they have created is not working, and we saw that writ large in Castlederg.

Mr Kelly comes to the House and treats us to a rerun of his atrocious speech in Castlederg. He tells us that there was no option in the 1970s for young men but to be terrorists. Sorry, Mr Kelly, no one made you be a terrorist. You, Mr Kelly, and your ilk chose to be terrorists, you chose to pull the trigger, and you chose to plant the bomb in circumstances in which you rejected the ballot in favour of the bullet.

In 1973 and for many years previously, Mr Gerry Kelly had the availability of the franchise: he could vote, he could stand himself for election, but he chose instead to be a terrorist. We had the 1949 Act, which delivered the guarantee that, if a majority in the House as it

then was wanted a united Ireland, Northern Ireland would cease to be part of the United Kingdom. We had the 1973 Act, which gave that directly to the people of Northern Ireland in referendum. So do not come to the House and say that you had no choice. You had the choice of democracy or the choice of terrorism, and you chose the path of terrorism. You are no different from those who today still choose and tread that path.

Of course, Mr Kelly, Pontius Pilate-like, then tries to wash his hands of today's terrorism. In discussing Castlederg, he told 'The Nolan Show' that he stood over what he did as the only way to change the situation. Asked whether it was worth it, he said:

*"Would I make the same decision again?
Yes."*

Gerry Kelly was saying to the listening public, "Would I kill again at the Old Bailey? Yes. Would I shoot an innocent prison officer in the head? Yes". He then expects young, easily influenced people who today have the same inclination to see some great distinction between the terror of Kelly and the terror of the so-called dissidents. There is no distinction. The godfathers of yesteryear are still responsible for breeding, sustaining, encouraging and inducing the terror of today.

Those who coat-tailed through Castlederg were showing just how committed they are to that terrorist path. The only good thing about Castlederg and the only one thing to celebrate is that, if anyone had to die that day, it was the victim-makers rather than innocent victims.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I listened very carefully to the debate today and, indeed, to the debate over the summer months on Castlederg and other matters. At times, there is a responsibility on us all as political leaders to analyse what our political opponents, foes or opposition say to us, and I have been doing that quite carefully. However, when I was listening to the debate today, I was asking myself these questions: is the moral indignation that we are listening to genuine; are they seriously lecturing us from the opposite Benches on the use of violence for political purposes; and what is the purpose of today's motion on Castlederg?

So let us examine the summer months in which this society witnessed some of the worst street violence for many years. Hundreds of police officers were injured in scenes that we had hoped were consigned to the history books. On

at least two occasions, senior police officers made it quite clear that the intention of those behind the street violence was to murder officers. Yet the debate today is about a parade that passed off peacefully; where those who wished to parade, paraded; where those who wished to protest, protested; and everyone — everyone — got home safely. However, the DUP has brought to the Chamber a debate about that peaceful parade. Why? It goes back to my earlier point: are they serious in thinking that we on these Benches believe their moral indignation about political violence? We do not.

We have to build a future with our partners in government, our partners who are not in government and the people, but let us examine a few things. This state was founded on the threat and use of violence. Mr Nesbitt, the current leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, said that he believes that his party left a few stones unturned in relation to the past and that it should have done things better. I suggest that you did not leave any stones unturned. The Ulster Unionist Party used every piece of repressive legislation that it could to ensure that a significant proportion of this population was treated as second-class citizens. Indeed, it led to the apartheid regime in South Africa commenting that it wished that it had that legislation.

Let us go forward a number of years and look at the moral indignation at commemorating those who lost their lives as a result of the conflict. They were combatants — they knew the risks that they faced. They volunteered to be members of the IRA, and they went out and faced those risks. You have to accept the risks if you volunteer for that. Is it moral indignation at republicans commemorating them? Over the weekend, 72 loyalist bands marched down the Shankill Road, as they have every year since UDA volunteer Brian Robinson was shot dead in an SAS ambush. Let us look at what Brian Robinson carried out. Brian Robinson drove up on to the road and shot dead the first Roman Catholic he spotted. When he went to make his escape, an SAS unit, which was clearly well briefed on what was going to happen, shot him dead. The Brian Robinson memorial flute band has paraded ever since. Who has paraded behind the Brian Robinson memorial flute band past the spot where Paddy McKenna was shot dead? Unionist politicians of every colour and creed have, since then, marched behind the Brian Robinson memorial flute band past that area. I have not heard any unionist politician comment on those bands marching down the Shankill Road. So are they opposed to commemorations? No. Indeed, we are told that, in Mr Campbell's constituency, four UVF

car bombers who killed themselves are commemorated every year. So there is no moral indignation about violence.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member may be unaware that I have called on the Secretary of State to outlaw any parade commemorating terrorism. If we can all agree on the principle of that, we can do our audit of current parades and decide which ones would fall outside the law in future. However, I have to put this challenge to Mr O'Dowd, given that Mr Kelly believes that shooting a prison warden in the head is not an act of terrorism: are we going to agree on what a definition of "terrorism" is?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr O'Dowd: We need to agree on the future because we are not going to agree on the past, for very valid reasons on each side. However, we have to agree on how we deal with the past and how we deal with the future.

I will quote our absent First Minister, who has been away for six weeks, which I think is also totally unacceptable:

"If we want to fight the battles of the last 40 years for the next 40 years then the peace that has been won will never deliver the prosperity the Province needs."

I get the sense that DUP Back-Benchers, and indeed a number of Front-Benchers, want to fight the battles of the past 40 years over and over and over again. I think that that will be a huge mistake, because we will not be able to move forward if we continue to return to and debate in this Chamber or in the media over and over again the collective mistakes of the past. Our job is to build a political future for everyone in this society, and that task belongs to us all. Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Lord Morrow: There has been much said in this debate. Some of it has been quite useful, but some of it has been to the contrary. It is interesting to listen to some of the speakers, in particular those on the Sinn Féin Benches, who seem to fail to understand. Indeed, Mr Kelly threw out a challenge, exhorting unionists on this side to read what he said. He concluded that unionists had not, in fact, read what he said. Many unionists have read what he said, but Mr Kelly should not be one bit surprised if unionists do not read what he says, because we came to the position a long time ago that actions speak louder than words. We hear

honeyed words and nice speeches — not well meaning, but well concocted — that are put together in the hope that unionists will fall for them.

I listened intently to what John O'Dowd said. Maybe Mr O'Dowd has, at long last, come to the position that unionists came to quite some time ago. He said that we need to agree on the future as we cannot agree on the past. How right he is, because Sinn Féin has devoted all its time and energy to trying to rewrite the past. Maybe that has dawned on Mr O'Dowd, and maybe he should share that with his colleagues. We in the DUP are not going to allow Sinn Féin or anybody else to rewrite the past and history.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to what Mr O'Dowd just said. Mr O'Dowd also raised the issue of the Brian Robinson parade and the Freeman Memorial parade in Coleraine. Does the Member agree that the massive, Grand Canyon-like chasm of a difference between those two parades and the one in Castlederg is that the parade in Castlederg was organised, endorsed, validated, supported and eulogised by Sinn Féin and the others were not by any unionist party? That is the difference.

Lord Morrow: The point that my colleague Mr Campbell makes is very significant. On that point, I want to say something else, and again, I ask Sinn Féin, as well as the SDLP, to take note. As elections come up here in Northern Ireland, we know the type of person that Sinn Féin will put forward: it is the one with the military record and the one who has, as it were, done time. Most of them have a criminal record, and they get endorsed by the community, which in some way empowers them. Therefore, they are what you call well-trained activists, who have been skilled in the awful things that have happened over the past 35 years.

4.45 pm

The SDLP also rounded on us. Let me say to the SDLP that we do not forget its actions. It will have to live with this one until it distances itself entirely from it. There is no unionist in this House who would ever stand up and say, "Let us have some of our play parks named after convicted terrorists." That will not happen. Sadly, it happened in the SDLP. This is one that it has to live with.

I was also interested in Mr Nesbitt. He is a sort of johnny-come-lately to politics. He has a lot of

learning to do. He then tries to lecture the DUP on the Maze. If I had my way, Mr Nesbitt, the Maze would still be full. We know who swung the doors open. We know who let them out.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Sit where you are. *[Laughter.]* We know who disbanded —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask that all remarks be made through the Chair, please.

Lord Morrow: Let me say that Mr Nesbitt need not come in here, into this House, and start to lecture unionists who have been in public life for 30 or 40 years. We do not need any lectures from the likes of Mike Nesbitt, because some of us have forgotten more about politics than he has ever learnt.

Let me also say this: he did make a confession that during his party's term, it left some stones unturned. He did not name what those stones were. If he wants to name them, I am happy to give way and give him a bit of space to do that. However, he needs to start telling us what stones he is talking about that his party left unturned.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Will you talk about stones unturned?

Mr Nesbitt: I will certainly mention stones unturned.

Lord Morrow: Well, if he will talk about stones unturned, I will give way to him.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I have mentioned stones unturned. I may be new to politics but I know enough about this to know that, in negotiation, when you have made the first step, you wait for somebody else to make the second step. So, I will not make a second step and start detailing the stones unturned. *[Laughter.]* I ask the Member whether he realises that the prison would now be empty had there been early release or not? I ask him whether he condemns Israel for the early release of prisoners in its peace process.

Lord Morrow: I will stick to our own situation here and will not travel to Israel. Perhaps, the Member, when he deals with that, could tell us whether the RUC would still be here or gone? No, Mr Nesbitt: it is gone, thanks to you and the likes of you.

Let us be very clear: in this country, we are either up for moving on or we are caught in a time trap like Sinn Féin Members opposite. They tell us that they want to move on, but that they want to stick with the past. It has been put very clearly to Mr Kelly today: does he see the dissidents as terrorists or just misguided republicans? His silence is deafening. By his actions in Castlederg and his words and deeds, he has done more to encourage the dissidents than any other individual in this country. Mr Kelly needs to make up his mind. He needs either to unshackle himself entirely from the past or to say that he needs his past because it keeps him very sweet with his community. Mr Kelly, there comes a time when people have to make decisions. You are at that stage in your life, if I might say so to you.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: In just a moment. You must tell the community at large —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask again that all remarks be made through the Chair, please.

Lord Morrow: He must say, "Yes, we in Sinn Féin have an awful past". He must say very clearly that for Sinn Féin/IRA, which led that murderous campaign, that is in the past and it is moving on to a new future.

Mr G Kelly: Will the Member dissociate himself from the apartheid system, which unionists ran for generations in this area, or will he maintain that there was absolutely nothing wrong with the endemic discrimination and oppression of the Catholic and nationalist people over generations?

Mr A Maginness: How did that justify violence?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: Mr Kelly is again trying in some way to justify the actions of the Provisional IRA over the past 40 years. I am sorry; that is not going to wash and it is not going to wear. He has to realise that he is either moving on or dragging the past with him. Come on. He cannot have it both ways — he just cannot. Today is an opportunity for Sinn Féin to declare that it is on the side of law and order for a change. It tells us that — *[Interruption.]* We heard your talk about equality. We know your definition of equality; we understand it all right. You fought —

Mr O'Dowd: What is your definition of law and order?

Lord Morrow: You had the —

Mr O'Dowd: What is your definition of law and order?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: They had the IRA fighting for equality, allegedly, for 40 years. What were they doing? They were killing people. They were taking car bombs into towns to blow people to pieces. They were shooting people in the back. They were shooting children going to school. That is, of course, how they believed in equality. Have they or have they not moved on? Are they stuck in their time warp? We see them here today, and they come across as saying, "We are very constructive politicians, but we are going to have our past with us, and we are going to remember it." No, Mr Kelly, the position is very clearly this: there is a difference between the agents of law and order, and terrorists. You were on the side of the terrorists. You did not have to be; you chose to be.

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

Lord Morrow: We are going to stay on the side of law and order, and push for a society here that everybody can share in.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 36; Noes 52.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr G Kelly and Ms Ruane

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, 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 Noes: Mr Anderson and Mr G Robinson.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Agnew, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 52; Noes 24.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, 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 Anderson and Mr G Robinson

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr G Kelly and Ms Ruane.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Agnew, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly confirms its continued support for the terms of the ministerial Pledge of Office, in particular, the commitment to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means; further confirms its commitment to the principles of personal conduct contained in the code of conduct for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, in particular, the requirement to promote good relations; rejects the comments of Gerry Kelly MLA at the Castlederg IRA memorial event that will give succour to dissident republican groups and help indoctrinate a new generation down the path of violence; and condemns the use of terrorist violence in the present day, and the past.

Adjourned at 5.21 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Dental Hospital Inquiry Report

Published at 12.00 noon on 22 July 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a statement to the Assembly to advise members of the full publication of the report of the statutory inquiry into the oral medicine service at the Royal Victoria Hospital's dental hospital and the associated action plan, coordinated by my Department, to address the recommendations of that report.

On 28 June 2011, when I made my statement to the Assembly on the findings of the statutory inquiry into the oral medicine service at the Royal Victoria Hospital's dental hospital and how these would be addressed, I placed the executive summary of the report, including all 45 recommendations, in the Assembly Library. I was unable at that time to provide the full report as it contained issues that were subject to regulatory processes that were not complete.

The Inquiry has now submitted a final version of its report to me and I am placing on my Department's website to-day a copy of the full Dental Hospital Inquiry Report and the associated DHSSPS Action Plan to address the recommendations of the report. Most of the 42 action points in the plan have already either been completed in full or in part. Only a small number have yet to be fully implemented. It is envisaged that all the actions should be completed or on-going by September 2014.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Mr Brian Fee QC, and his team for the comprehensive report they provided to me. This highlights that there were serious deficiencies in the quality of care provided by the Oral Medicine Department of the Dental Hospital and Belfast HSC Trust to the patients recalled, which did impact adversely on the health of some. This should not have happened and I want to ensure that it never happens again.

I hope that implementation of the Action Plan will help address the concerns that this incident has raised and that it improves public confidence in the Belfast Dental Hospital that lessons have been learnt and services are now managed in such a way to ensure patient safety and the best possible quality of services.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21

Published at 9.30 am on Wednesday 24 July 2013

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): This statement is to update the Assembly on progress with the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21.

We launched the latest iteration of the Executive's Investment Strategy in October last year, covering the years 2011-21. This Strategy builds on the record level of investment delivered by the Executive since 2008, which has seen new roads, schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure assets delivered right across the region. It underlines our continued determination to secure the physical infrastructure we need to help deliver first-class public services, to regenerate our communities and to help our economy return to growth. The Strategy is informed by, and helps to support, our Programme for Government objectives and targets. It plays an important role too in delivering the infrastructure we need to support our Economic Strategy – building on the high quality jobs we have already attracted here by making this region a more competitive and attractive destination for inward investment. Delivering the Investment Strategy is also helping to support jobs in the hard-pressed construction industry – with the majority of contracts being won by local companies using local labour and materials.

The Investment Strategy covers a 10-year time frame, but is sufficiently flexible to respond to developments in policy and the wider economic context. For example, our recent statement on Together: Building a United Community commits us to

invest substantial capital funds in shared education campuses, regeneration of urban villages and shared neighbourhood developments.

One of the benefits of the Investment Strategy is that it allows us to look back and assess our progress.

In the financial year 2012/13, some £1.3 billion was invested in capital infrastructure projects across the region, including approximately:

- £250 million under the **Networks** pillar;
- £130 million under the **Skills** pillar;
- £325million under the **Health** pillar;
- £240 million under the **Social** pillar;
- £175 million under the **Environment** pillar;
- £100 million under the **Productive** Pillar;
- £80 million under the **Justice** pillar.

During 2012/13 and the current financial year a number of important capital projects or programmes were completed. These included:

Networks:

- New park and ride facilities at Millbrook near Larne and at Antrim and Ballymoney Stations.
- Completion of delivery of new trains and a new Train Care Maintenance and Stabling facility at Adelaide.
- Track Safety improvements work on the Coleraine to Derry-Londonderry Line and Phase One of the track renewal project.
- Completion of the upgrade of Portadown Railway Station.
- 87 new Goldliner coaches entered service, which has resulted in improved services and a 6% increase in Goldline passenger journeys.
- Major improvements on the A32 at Shannaragh were completed in March 2013 and at Cherrymount Link in June 2013. Both schemes will significantly improve traffic flow and journey times.

Skills

- Delivery of new and refurbished schools, including St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle, Torbank Special School, Dundonald, Bangor Grammar School, Magherafelt Primary and Nursery School, St Columba's Primary School, Straw, and Lagan College, Belfast and progress is being made with 18 more new build capital schools projects. Arvalee Special School which has been destroyed by arson has been accommodated on temporary classrooms and will have priority for a new school on the Lisanelly site.

Health

- The opening of the £276 million South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen on time and to budget and completion of the Grangewood Mental Health and Crisis Unit, a new 30 bed acute mental health inpatient unit in Derry-Londonderry.
- Opening of the Northern Ireland Molecular Pathology Lab (NI-MPL) and Northern Ireland Biobank (NIB), in association with Queen's University Belfast.
- The new Emergency Department at Antrim Area Hospital was official opened last week. In addition, Northern Ireland's First Sexual Assault Referral Centre was completed on the Antrim Area Hospital Site by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

- Substantial completion of three further capital developments representing an aggregate investment in the Health and Social Care Estate of circa £160million.

Social

- In excess of £160 million was invested in social housing. Schemes completed during the year include: Ballymacoss Hill, Lisburn (£12.5m), Tesco Site, Broadway (£7.5m), and Bligh's Lane, Derry-Londonderry (£6m). A further 40 social housing schemes completed during the year.
- Opening of the Olympic size swimming pool in Bangor.
- The completion of 'The Venue', Ebrington marked a milestone in the transformation of the site and in Derry-Londonderry's preparations for the City of Culture 2013 and associated events programme.
- The Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter was officially opened in April 2012.

Environment

- Upgrade to or replacement of waste water treatment facilities at Carnmoney, Keady, Tullygarley and Brockagh Terrace and construction of a new pumping station for the Newtownards area.
- Other environmental measures such as flood alleviation and waste management.

Productive

- Opening of the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre and a further £6million investment in improving the region's tourism offering.
- Almost £2 million was invested in the Walled City Programme and Lighting in preparation for hosting the inaugural City of Culture.
- Over £35 million of enterprise support was offered to Invest NI clients.
- Over £30 million investment in the Rural Development and Primary Industries including significant processing and marketing, fisheries and woodland grants and the completion of a £2.5million new dairy unit and office block at Greenmount College, Antrim.

Justice

- Investment of £30million in new police vehicles.

The Strategy also gives structure and direction to the ongoing delivery of projects and the Executive is on track to invest more than £5 billion in infrastructure projects during the current budget period to March 2015. Since the publication of the Strategy we have benefitted from additional allocations of capital and borrowing flexibility. As a result we are now in a better position to deliver the £8 billion of capital investment that was originally set out in the Strategy for the period beyond 2014/15 and will aim to go further, improving on this. Recent agreements as set out in the joint document 'Building a Prosperous and United Community' and in the Chancellor's recent Spending Round 2013 announcement will allow us to further review our infrastructure investment plans to ensure that the maximum possible capital is spent.

A significant number of projects are also currently in the process of being delivered or are in the pipeline, for example:

- Regional Sports stadia at Ravenhill, Casement Park and Windsor Park.
- New build schools projects plus the new shared campus projects at Lisanelly.
- Significant road improvement schemes.
- Ongoing regeneration work at Maze Long Kesh and Ebrington.
- The Bank Square regeneration project in Belfast and planning for the major Royal Exchange scheme.

- Significant investment in social housing.
- Health and care centres in Banbridge and Ballymena, plus two revenue funded primary healthcare hubs in Newry and Lisburn.
- A new Royal Maternity Hospital and new Regional Children's Hospital and work at Omagh Local Hospital and the Northwest Radiotherapy Unit.
- In 2012/13 investment of £160 million in water and waste water was delivered and a similar level of investment is expected in 2013/14.
- A new Community Safety College at Desertcreat and the Forensic Science Laboratory Services Accommodation project.
- A new accommodation block at Maghaberry prison.

The Strategy also allows us to plan ahead so that projects are progressed at the correct rate to take advantage of capital funding when it is available. This planning is dynamic to allow us to respond to changes in priorities and policies, unavoidable delays in certain projects and changes in the level of capital funding available.

Since the launch of the Investment Strategy the Executive has been able to announce a number of additional capital projects. In January 2013 the Education Minister announced that he was making an additional £220 million available to advance planning for a further 22 primary and post-primary new build schools. The intention is that these projects will be ready to make full use of any additional capital funding available in the next budget period. The Executive also committed to part-funding a new gas infrastructure in the West with an input of some £32.5 million – potentially leveraging a total investment of some £200 million.

Effective investment is not just about quantity. In times when budgets are tight it is even more important that we make good investment decisions that provide the maximum possible benefit for every pound spent. To this end, world-class collaborative research is ongoing between the Strategic Investment Board and Queens University on new strategic infrastructure planning models. These tools will help to ensure we deliver the right assets in the right place by providing the best information possible to inform investment decisions. It is innovation like this that will set our Investment Strategy apart – an intelligent strategy driven by evidence of what works best.

We are also continuing to examine models that will allow us to accelerate investment in infrastructure by using revenue funds in addition to capital funds. These revenue funded approaches can be used where they are affordable, offer value for money and do not undermine the future delivery of frontline services. The Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety recently announced two revenue funded projects to deliver integrated primary healthcare hubs for the people of Lisburn and Newry. The acceleration of these projects will allow some of the important changes set out in Transforming Your Care to take place.

All of this investment not only allows us to deliver high-class and efficient public services but supports the re-balancing of our economy by creating the physical and educational environment which supports expansion of our own businesses and attracts inward investment. Investment in infrastructure and other public works delivered by the Executive is estimated to support some 30,000 jobs per year, more through the filtering of wages out into the wider economy and many more through creating the right environment to grow and attract businesses.”

The Executive values the support of the business community and is working with sector representatives to ensure that small and medium size enterprises across the region are helped to bid for public works. To ensure that everyone has the chance to contribute, departments now publish comprehensive up-to-date information on all planned capital works funded under the Investment Strategy. This information is freely available on the Executive's Investment Strategy website, www.isni.gov.uk.

We are determined to maximise the impact on jobs of every pound invested in order to speed up economic recovery and when it is appropriate, departments will seek to bring forward investment in those public works that are more labour intensive in preference to schemes that would deliver a lower employment impact.

A modern, user-focused infrastructure is critical to our future success. Improving quality of life and job opportunities for our people requires continued investment in essential infrastructure – and we are pleased to report progress so far to this Assembly and look forward to the increased investment which we can deliver as a result of recent economic announcements.



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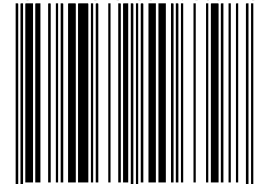
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