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Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 8 November 2010

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture Sectoral Format

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that she wishes to make a statement.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms Gildernew): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, and in compliance with section 52 of the NI Act 1998, I wish to make a statement on the fourteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in the agriculture sectoral format, which was held in Farmleigh, Dublin on Wednesday 13 October 2010.

Minister Edwin Poots MLA and I represented the Executive. The Irish Government were represented by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Brendan Smith TD, and the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, Pat Carey TD. The meeting was chaired by Minister Smith. This statement has been agreed with Mr Poots, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The Council welcomed the ongoing progress on the delivery of the initial activities of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy and noted an action plan for 2010-11. Ministers looked forward to receiving a further progress report at the next NSMC meeting in agriculture sectoral format.

We noted the progress made by Departments on the development of a work programme for a joint strategic approach to plant health and pesticides and looked forward to that being presented to a meeting of the NSMC in agriculture sectoral format in early 2011. We also noted the ongoing co-operation between

the Departments in dealing with a number of outbreaks of *P. ramorum* in Japanese larch forests.

The Council noted the European Commission's upcoming publication of its communication on the future of the common agricultural policy (CAP). It also welcomed the improvement in the dairy market situation.

On international trade, the Council noted the absence of developments at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha round of trade talks and the relaunching of trade negotiations with the Mercosur group of South American countries.

The Council welcomed a presentation by officials from the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) on their approach to their respective rural White Papers and the cross-border dimensions to that work.

Ministers formally endorsed the rural enabler project, which seeks to address issues of sectarianism and racism in a rural context, and which has been given funding of £2.7 million under the Peace III programme. The Council noted the launch of local action group guidance on North/South co-operation projects, which will be used by both Departments for the LEADER elements of their respective rural development programmes, and the planned seminar for early December whereby local action groups will be invited to network and to develop potential cross-border projects.

The Council noted the high level of interest in the €10 million that is available from the rural development element of the INTERREG IVA programme to address rural disadvantage and deprivation through strategic cross-border actions within the eligible area of the North of Ireland, the border counties of the South of Ireland and western Scotland, and that it is expected that funding awards will be made later in 2010. Moreover, the Council noted the

upcoming conference on combating rural poverty and social exclusion, which Minister Carey and I subsequently attended.

As part of the NSMC business continuity arrangements to deal with urgent decisions, the Council approved the 2010 business plans and budgets for the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission and the Food Safety Promotion Board. The Council agreed to schedule its next meeting in agriculture sectoral format in January 2011.

The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (Mr Moutray):

I thank the Minister for her statement to the House, which I note welcomes the ongoing progress of activities in the animal welfare strategy. I would be grateful if she outlined what those activities involved, particularly in the eradication of TB. Will the Minister also advise whether that strategy seeks to save face by removing failed targets that are aimed at reducing TB in Northern Ireland, as she did with the Executive's Programme for Government?

Will the Minister advise the House whether the Republic of Ireland has made any proposals or held any negotiations on the CAP that would provide its farmers with a competitive advantage over ours? What efforts will the Minister make to ensure that that does not happen?

I note that the European Commission announced a new round of penalties or CAP disallowances last Friday, which totalled some €578 million. Will the Minister tell the House what proportion of that disallowance is allocated against her Department?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I will take the Chairperson's questions in reverse order. Our CAP disallowances have been discussed previously in the House. I am not aware of whether Friday's announcement will significantly change those figures, but I will get back to the Member. However, our disallowances have been dealt with and are up to date.

I understand where the Chairperson is coming from on the CAP proposals. I am also concerned about how the CAP and the roll-out of its reform will affect farmers. I had a very worthwhile and useful teleconference call on Friday with Mr Georg Haeusler, the chef de cabinet to the Directorate-Generale agriculture and rural development, and I made exactly the same point as the Chairperson. I fear that a situation

could develop. The discussion that we had on the talks that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) held with the Commission did nothing to disabuse me of that notion. The Council touched only briefly on the CAP at its meeting, but I make no bones about the fact that the Department's position on the CAP is much closer to the South's than it is to DEFRA's. We will continue to lobby and to engage with DEFRA and Europe to ensure that they understand our position.

Mr Haeusler took the message back that we are on the island of Ireland and our farmers are competing with farmers in the rest of Ireland. I also impressed on him that I would be very concerned if the trade conditions on the other side of CAP reform ultimately disadvantaged farmers in the North. That topic took up quite a part of that conversation and it is part of our ongoing engagement with Europe. I am disappointed that DEFRA has taken that line and that the British Government and the Treasury have robustly attempted to diminish the CAP budget. Ultimately, that will take money out of the pockets of farmers in the North of Ireland.

The Member is aware that the targets for ongoing progress on animal disease were changed because, following the Public Accounts Committee report, we changed the way in which we work on TB and tried to ensure that we got part of the money for the EU TB eradication plan. Total funding is now proposed from the TB veterinary fund for England, Scotland, Wales and the North of Ireland. We had to change our figures to enable us to extract an amount of that funding to help us in the fight against TB. I know that the Chairperson will want us to do everything that we can to tackle this costly and complex disease. Changes were made to the targets to address the fact that we can draw down that money.

There has been considerable progress on animal health and welfare. Full co-operation on animal health is a big issue for us. It has the potential to help to reduce and to prevent animal disease spread to facilitate trade and to improve the sustainability of farming in the North. The ultimate objectives of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy are to facilitate trade through the free movement of animals on the island and to optimise the animal health status of the island through the alignment of policies to control animal disease. The island of Ireland should be recognised

internationally as a separate unit for disease control purposes to ensure effective traceability of livestock in the event of an outbreak. Now that the strategy has been agreed by the NSMC, I will work closely with Minister Brendan Smith to secure that recognition from Brussels and London.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she elaborate on the cross-border stakeholder event: when did the meeting take place, and who attended it?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The cross-border event took place in the Slieve Russell Hotel in Cavan on 12 April. The event was co-hosted by Minister Brendan Smith and me, and I was delighted that EU Commissioner John Dalli agreed to speak at it. The event was attended by key animal health and welfare stakeholders from across the island. I have been greatly encouraged by the constructive and helpful comments from organisations such as the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and NIMEA (Northern Ireland Meat Exporters' Association) since the event. The event was a good kick-start, and I hope that we will see great progress over the coming months.

Mr P J Bradley: I thank the Minister for her statement. As someone who has worked on all-island animal health since as far back as 1994, I certainly welcome its inclusion in the report. I thank our Minister and Minister Brendan Smith for ensuring that the matter is debated, and I want an assurance from the Minister that it will continue to be debated until a satisfactory outcome is arrived at. Will the Minister give me an example of what kinds of issues were discussed during the talks on the rural enabler project? I am not very familiar with that subject.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I assure the Member that all-island animal health will continue to be debated. It has been a key piece of work since I came into office and, indeed, before that. It will be worked on continually, and we will see great benefit to farmers across the island.

Last Wednesday, I spoke at the launch of the rural enabler project in the Cavan Crystal Hotel. I attended that meeting on behalf of DARD, and Minister of State Mary White represented the Irish Government. Many of the rural enabler stakeholders were there.

To give the House the context: some of the £2.7 million INTERREG funding is being spent on training people to be able to work in every county. There are six rural enablers in the North, and I think that there are also six in the border counties in the South. Rural communities have changed significantly over the past decade. We hope that we have welcomed people from different parts of the world and made them feel at home in our rural communities, but that is not always the case.

The rural enablers are trying to ensure that issues of sectarianism and racism are dealt with at a rural level. Although sectarianism and racism can be very obvious in an urban setting, like poverty, they may not be so obvious in a rural setting. However, that does not mean that they are not there. The project will, hopefully, enable those discussions and ensure that our rural communities are upfront and very much part of the development of a more welcoming approach to people from other areas and that there are no no-go areas in rural communities.

12.15 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. My question is about rural poverty. Paragraph 12 of the Minister's statement says that she attended a conference on rural poverty with Minister Carey. Were any dramatic remedies to overcome rural poverty adopted at the conference? Was there at least a positive way forward agreed for our rural communities?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: I really believe that there is a way forward. The fact that we are discussing the issue this morning is very helpful. The conference that I was at in Drogheda a couple of weeks ago was probably one of the best conferences that I have ever been to. A report was discussed that contained proof that rural poverty is under-reported and not as well recognised as it should be. Pride can get in the way for a lot of our rural dwellers when it comes to identifying their needs and being honest about those needs.

We recognised that rural poverty is a big problem in our communities. As part of the agreed Programme for Government, my Department delivered a £10 million package of actions to address rural poverty and social exclusion issues between 2008-09 and 2010-11. We consulted widely on that matter and commissioned independent research to

establish the priority issues that affect rural communities. As a result of that research and the subsequent consultations, a framework of actions to address poverty and social exclusion was developed.

The framework contains five strands: rural childcare, rural fuel poverty, rural transport, rural community development and a challenge fund for projects that address rural poverty or social exclusion. The intention of the anti-poverty and social inclusion framework is to identify key issues that affect rural communities, create a programme of actions that collectively address poverty and social exclusion and gather information from those activities. That is very important, because we need to gather information that will feed into policy-making processes across Departments. A number of focused actions are under way.

Given the week that is in it, there has been a lot of talk about benefits and about the most vulnerable people and the actions that could occur as a result of cost-saving measures across the water. My concern is that vulnerable people will be hit by those measures and that vulnerable rural people will be hit by them more progressively. If people are affected by social exclusion issues in an urban setting, at least they are around other people. It is very easy to become isolated in rural communities if the infrastructure, such as community transport, is not in place. It is very easy to stay at home, not see anybody and not engage with anybody. That isolation affects both physical and mental well-being. I ask the House to work with us on that and to recognise the needs of rural communities when making decisions.

I apologise if my answer has been a bit long, but there is a piece of work on demographics in rural communities that found that although there are children and young people and elderly people in those communities, the people who need to look for work or to go to university have taken themselves off. That demographic trend means that the most vulnerable — our children and young people and our elderly — are living in rural communities without the same amount of working adults in them to make them sustainable. That demographic trend concerns me, and it is an issue for the House.

Mr Gibson: I note that the Council discussed trade with South American countries. Recently, there have been a number of takeovers of

significant Northern Irish companies by Brazilian companies. Is the Minister comfortable that that trend is in the best interests of local agriculture?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: The Member is quite provocative in his questioning, and I will be careful how I answer, because I would not want anybody from, for example, Moy Park on the phone to me this afternoon.

I was concerned about the direction of the WTO talks and was relieved when they collapsed without progress being made. The reopening of negotiations with the Mercosur countries is of concern. The negotiations are about trade, and some of our European counterparts are looking to expand trade with South American companies, so South American companies are looking for a quid pro quo. It is a case of, "If you buy our cars, we will buy your beef".

Ultimately, that will affect farming in the North of Ireland and the price of beef that our farmers can get. Although import costs are high, prices need to reflect those costs. I am concerned that we could end up with a situation whereby our farming is badly affected. Again, we will keep a close eye on that. We talk not only to Brendan Smith but to other Ministers from Europe, where there is similar concern about, and fear for, the future of farming. Our farming industry cannot be sold off in the interests of trade. We have to protect farming at a European level, but very particularly at an Irish level, given that it is the backbone of the economy on the island of Ireland, and we want that to continue.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. In my constituency of South Down, members of the fishing and farming sectors tell me that they see sense in all-island co-operative working, and they want to move that further along. What are the positive outcomes to be achieved from all-Ireland co-operation?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural

Development: Many positive outcomes are resulting from the process. Some to date include the development of a largely similar system of sheep identification on the island; co-operation on the exchange of data to facilitate trade in bovine animals, following the lifting of the BSE export ban; broad alignment of border control policies aimed at preventing the introduction of animal disease; and co-operation

on contingency planning for exotic disease outbreaks, including agreement on a common chapter on epizootic diseases contingency plans for, for example, foot-and-mouth disease, avian influenza, and, more recently, bluetongue.

We have agreement on a protocol for welfare during transport breaches, and co-operation on testing regimes for TB and brucellosis in border areas. That strategic approach will enable the achievement of further positive outcomes this year, all of which will help to contribute to the key aim of the free movement of animals on the island.

Mr T Clarke: The Council noted the launch of the local action group guidance on North/South co-operation projects. Although I am not particularly interested in North/South co-operation, does the Minister not share the disappointment of those on the ground that the guidance has taken so long to compile? We are two years or more into the programme, yet here we are again getting guidance only now to assist us — possibly — to get money. Why has that taken so long?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: That guidance is separate but complementary to the work that is going on in rural development. I gave a robust answer at Question Time some weeks ago, when I said that I was taking a good look at how we are getting our rural development programme money out.

The guidance that I talked about earlier is to help local action groups along the border to develop ways in which to maximise spend. Therefore, although our rural development programme budget is reasonable, it is not anywhere nearly as good as the rural development programme budget in the South. If our local action groups on either side of the border can work together, that will maximise spend to rural communities. If we stop working back to back and start to work in a more integrated and cohesive way, we can help to get more money into border areas and into some of the projects that very much cross the border and do not recognise the border.

I absolutely agree that we need to maximise the spending, but if there is a way of further maximizing it, it would be silly to work on a back-to-back basis. We can work with the local action groups in the South to maximise the potential for rural border communities on both sides of the border.

Mr Dallat: My question is also on international trade, but I assure the Minister that it is in no way controversial.

When discussing international trade, are there opportunities to consider the plight of African countries that, under fair trade, are trying desperately to sell their products in a developed world? On a cross-border basis, are there opportunities, or will there be opportunities, to encourage fair trade, because it is my experience that the housewife and house husband are increasingly looking for fair trade products when out shopping?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The consumer is more minded to look for fair trade products and is increasingly aware of the need to get a fair price to farmers for their produce. I am keen that the ethos of fair trade is also extended to our farmers. We have seen a situation over the years where the input costs for producing beef or milk in this country were not reflected by the price that consumers paid. Charity begins at home, and we should not forget that sometimes the implications can be that our farmers are producing their produce at a price that does not reflect the cost that it took to get it there. Notwithstanding that, we want fair trade to be developed, and we want to encourage people to get a fair price for their product.

In the discussion that I had with Mr Haeusler on Friday morning, it was clear that it is recognised in Europe that its standards of welfare are extremely high, and it is difficult to compete on a global basis with countries whose standards might not be what European farmers are asked to meet. Therefore, there is recognition at a European level that our farmers are being held to a welfare standard that is higher than that in other parts of the world. We need to take into consideration that welfare standards must not override the need for a fair price for a product. In the Mercosur countries, such as Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, those talks have reopened.

The Member is probably also thinking of the trade that we could have with northern African countries. There is a need across Europe and across the world to recognise the input costs of a product. Consumers have had it good for a long time, and the fact that we can still buy milk in our local shop or supermarket for less than it costs to produce it is not a sustainable way to do business. Consumers are benefitting from

some of the policies that have driven down the price of food, while farmers are not getting a fair return for their effort and labour.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she explain what practical outworkings are expected in the short to medium term as a result of the new all-Ireland strategy?

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The practical outworkings in the short to medium term will be to continue with the fortress-Ireland approach. That is, to protect the island from the threat of serious animal disease; to work towards achieving brucellosis-free status throughout the island; to have further co-operation on strategies to tackle TB; to achieve Aujeszky's disease-free status throughout the island; to continue the ongoing work on EU animal health law and on animal identification; and to work towards broadly similar primary legislation on diseases of animals and welfare of animals. Therefore, there is a lot ongoing on the short to medium term, as well as recognising that there are more long-term benefits as well.

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment Sectoral Format

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of the Environment that he wishes to make a statement to the Assembly.

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poots): In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the eleventh meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 20 October 2010. The statement has been agreed with the Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy, who also attended. As Minister of the Environment, I chaired the meeting, and with Conor Murphy MP, MLA, Minister for Regional Development, represented the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Irish Government were represented by John Gormley TD, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

12.30 pm

The Council received a joint presentation on environmental research by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency. Ministers welcomed proposed actions in areas including exploration of mechanisms to align and/or co-fund ongoing work; essential research into priority areas; data management and sharing of joint working by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to enhance sharing of experience and knowledge between regulators and researchers in both jurisdictions; and the development of an application for a joint headline project by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

It was also reported that Northern Ireland's central statistics and research branch, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency, has commenced work to develop a common set of environmental indicators, which include a web-based approach to presentation and the publication of a brief statistical bulletin. Ministers noted that the Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency are working together to access funding for priority environmental research under the Seventh Framework, INTERREG and LIFE programmes. They

welcomed the proposal from the two agencies to develop a candidate research project to be advanced for EU funding during 2011.

Ministers received a report on the progress of the repatriation of illegally dumped cross-border waste. They welcomed the successful removal of waste from the site at Slattinagh, County Fermanagh, and the commencement of work and good progress that has been made at a second site near Trillick in County Tyrone. It was noted that there are plans to commence work at the remaining 18 sites following an evaluation of work that has been conducted on the two priority sites.

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

Ministers welcomed the continued concerted enforcement actions to target shipments of waste and noted that future action is planned. Ministers also received an update on the waste framework directive and noted that regulations are being taken forward in both jurisdictions for the transposition of the waste framework directive. Ministers also noted progress in developing a resource management approach to waste management, which includes the launch of the £5 million Rethink Waste capital fund in Northern Ireland and the new waste policy statement in the Republic of Ireland, which is at public consultation stage. Ministers welcomed progress on the work programme of the North/South market development steering group and noted Northern Ireland's inclusion in the Plastics Arisings study.

The Council welcomed the publication of river basin waste management plans in both jurisdictions. A North/South working group on water quality will oversee co-ordinated implementation of the plans, including a joint document entitled 'Working Together: Managing Our Shared Waters', which will accompany the river basin waste management plans.

The Council agreed to meet again in the environmental sectoral format in March 2011.

The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment (Mr Boylan): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the Minister's statement. The co-operation on environmental issues that he has indicated is constructive and productive, and it will continue.

The Minister has outlined work that is ongoing to repatriate illegally dumped waste. The Committee welcomes the successful removal of waste in Fermanagh. Will the Minister assure the House that a proper, agreed protocol will be in place before the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill becomes law, which will ensure that there is clear definition of responsibilities for local councils in dealing with illegally dumped waste in the North?

The Minister of the Environment: The Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill will help us to establish the protocol that the Member has mentioned. It will also assist us in the development of a protocol for fly-tipping, which is a huge problem in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, the repatriation of waste is progressive. We need to ensure that waste is not illegally dumped again. In that area, we can work together for the common good of both jurisdictions to ensure that such dumping does not happen again and the public are not left to pay a huge bill because of the actions of criminals.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the proposed joint research action. Will he outline the difference that will make or, indeed, the added value it will produce over and above what is being done at present?

The Minister of the Environment: Making decisions relating to the environment can, very often, be expensive, so we want to make decisions that are based on sound information. That will help us to make effective decisions and decisions that are more strategic by nature. Under direct rule, we had a habit of gold-plating European directives. I do not think that we should do that. We should implement them and do so efficiently in a way that achieves the outcome but does not impose unnecessary burdens on the public or on business. In the past, the South of Ireland's approach to that has been different to that of Northern Ireland. I would like to see this devolved Administration be much more progressive in how it responds to EU directives. Rather than say that we will apply an EU directive here better than any other that has been applied, let us make it more practical and deliverable.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the river basin management plans. In Northern Ireland, we sometimes have three or four Departments,

along with various agencies and groups, involved with the management of rivers. Does the same apply in Ireland? Will the Minister be discussing with other Ministers how he can best reorganise Northern Ireland's river management and look at the use of our resources?

The Minister of the Environment: Waters and rivers do not stop at borders, so there is a practical benefit in managing our waters, particularly in border areas. The river basin management plans were required to be published in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in December. However, for internal reasons, the Republic of Ireland was unable to confirm its plans until July. That has delayed things.

Co-ordination at policy and technical level is taking place between the jurisdictions. A working group on water quality is considering the issues regularly, with advice from environmental agencies. On a technical level, co-ordination of a practical implementation is also taking place through a subgroup comprised of representatives from Donegal and Monaghan county councils and representatives from the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency. The NIEA will attend future meetings of the North Western and Neagh Bann Public Authorities Forum. In all of that, we are trying to have a more co-ordinated approach between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Within Northern Ireland, we also need to have a co-ordinated approach with joined-up thinking and joined-up working between the Departments that have responsibility for water quality and water management.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware that we have been told that environmental issues will create opportunities for thousands of jobs north and south of the border. Have discussions of that type taken place at the meetings that the Minister attends? Does he plan to raise them in the future?

The Minister of the Environment: No such discussion took place.

Mr B Wilson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Measures have been taken to restrict the cross-border movement of waste. Have they been successful? Have they prevented further dumping? We are talking about the 16 sites that are still to be cleared. Is funding available? Is there an indication that the Irish Government have the funding to achieve that?

The Minister of the Environment: I will deal with the first point first. I believe that that is the case and that there have not been significant shipments of waste from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland in recent years. I think that that predates devolution. Certain actions were taken, and they have been found to be very punitive, particularly for the Republic of Ireland's Government, who, let us be honest, took their eye off the ball. They were not watching where their waste was going and created a system from which criminals could benefit. As a consequence, Northern Ireland suffered. I believe that they have the funding in place; it has been agreed. That is absolutely essential. In any event, if the Republic of Ireland were not to proceed with the repatriation of the waste in the way that has been defined between the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency and its counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, it would be in conflict with the European Union.

Mr Ross: I thank the Minister for his statement. He obviously knows about the number of EU directives on waste. Although I acknowledge the genuine concerns of some residents, does the Minister believe that we can meet those directives without using incineration or some other energy from waste options as we tackle waste?

The Minister of the Environment: We have specific targets to meet by 2020, and we are doing well thus far. Once again, I commend the public for their response in recycling waste. A few years ago, less than 5% of waste was being recycled; today it is 35%. That is a demonstration that the public are with us on the issue. We can use waste much more effectively than simply tipping it into a hole to produce leachate and methane, and we can use it in a much more financially beneficial way by recognising that in waste we have a resource.

We are aiming for a target of 50% recycling by 2020. I would like to go further than that, but, even then, I believe that it is absolutely essential that we have energy from waste. My notion at this point is that Northern Ireland has too small a population to go down the route of incineration; however, I am open to that suggestion from groups if they believe that it is the best way forward. Incinerators need a lot of material to keep them going, and in some senses incineration can, therefore, encourage the production of waste. Nonetheless, I believe that it is a proven and safe technology. It is being used in countries across the world,

particularly in Scandinavia and Germany, which have a much better record on environmental issues than we have in Northern Ireland.

There are other opportunities — gasification, anaerobic digestion, pyrolysis and so on — for the handling of waste and the recovery of energy from waste. All of those will have to be investigated, and the bids will have to come in. If the bids do not stack up as providing value for money, I will not allow them to go through. We have to get value for money from energy from waste projects. We are planning to spend £600 million of public money on it, and that has to produce the right results.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. My question relates to the cross-border movement of waste. The Minister said that he is going to evaluate other sites. Does he have a time frame for the work to commence on the other 18 sites? How will he prioritise them?

The Minister of the Environment: There are issues arising from the sites that have been cleared, and that work has given us valuable information about how we should handle the rest of the sites. It would not be appropriate to start work on any of the other sites in winter given the weather conditions, short working days and so on. Once the sites are open, it will be good to get in, work long hours and get them cleared as quickly as possible. We will probably not start on the next site until spring. The Member will be glad to know that the proposed site is the Gaelic Athletic Club at Ballymartin, which will be dealt with next, after Trillick.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Minister. In response to my colleague Alastair Ross, the Minister referred to the value for money aspect of waste projects. Where does he see the value for money in having a single waste authority in Northern Ireland?

The Minister of the Environment: The benefits of a single waste authority include the development of efficiencies in management systems and in procurement. Northern Ireland is a small place with a population of 1.7 million people, and we need to work as closely together as possible to drive through those efficiencies.

12.45 pm

Particularly in the management and procurement sector of a single waste authority, we could obtain real benefits. Instead of

separate councils or organisations procuring bin lorries and so forth, a much better method of procurement would be to have a single waste authority. In all that, we identify benefits. That work will be published in the not-too-distant future. We can bring that work to the table and demonstrate that there are financial benefits to be had from having a single waste authority.

People can then ask themselves whether they want better services or a single waste authority and poorer services. We want to ensure that we go down the route of the single waste authority, which can save money to be spent on other services or on keeping rates at a level suitable for both businesses and the community. However, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot say that there are benefits to be derived from efficiencies but we do not want to go down that route, and then complain about it afterwards.

Mr Savage: I am glad to see that the two organisations, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency will work together on research and development from 2011. At what stage in 2011 will that be? Will we have to wait to this time next year, or will it happen in the early part of the year?

The Minister of the Environment: We may have to wait a little longer than the Member wants for that; it may not be until this time next year.

Mr Gallagher: My question is about the removal of illegal waste. I noted the interesting exchanges between the Minister and Sinn Féin and the use of the term “repatriation” in those exchanges. I ask the Minister about the cost of this. Whether to the Irish Government or our Government, the cost is borne by ratepayers. Is the Minister taking steps to get to grips with the situation and ensure that it is the polluter who pays? Is there any hope of improved legislation to deal with that?

The Minister of the Environment: A lot of those issues are dealt with in the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Bill. If the Member is not satisfied with the content of that Bill and thinks it can be beefed up and made stronger, I will be happy to look at any amendments to it which the Member or his party colleagues may wish to propose.

Mr Molloy: I welcome the Minister’s statement that incineration is unsuitable to this part of

the world. I hope that we can work towards delivering an alternative to it. However, NIEA appears to turn a blind eye to fuel laundering materials which have been dumped on unnamed land. It takes no action and leaves the Bill to councils. Will the new Bill on contaminated land deal with that problem?

The Minister of the Environment: Let me clarify: I did not say incineration was not suitable, I said it may not be suitable. I am open to be persuaded either way, but I do not necessarily believe that it is the way forward.

The dumping of this waste is the responsibility of the landowner. There are no proposals to change that at this time. I understand that there is a problem where this has taken place in Northern Ireland and that, very often, local government, out of goodwill, ends up bearing the cost of cleaning up this toxic waste — a cost of around £1,000 per ton. We do well to remind the public of the nature of this problem and the costs associated with it. The costs of cleaning up this dumped toxic waste may be around £250,000 per annum to local authorities. It is up to people to report such activity to the forces — the PSNI, HMRC and Customs and Excise — and report the criminals involved in this activity who damage our environment and economy and supply substandard goods to the public, which is not in anyone's interest. Let us, the Northern Ireland public, step up to the mark and clamp down on the individuals involved in the criminal activity of fuel laundering.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the commencement of and the progress made on the removal of waste from the Trillick site in my constituency. Will the Minister outline what problems or difficulties were experienced during the removal of waste from the sites in Fermanagh and Trillick? How can those experiences be utilised to benefit the process of waste removal from the other 18 sites?

The Minister of the Environment: The site in Fermanagh is in quite a remote location, and that presented communication difficulties. We wanted to ensure that our staff were always able to communicate with others. The mobile phone signals were not reliable, so we resolved that through the lease of a satellite phone over the period of work to enable staff to remain in contact with headquarters and with the PSNI as necessary.

The actual removal of the waste presented problems with site safety and access. Haul roads had to be constructed within the site to enable vehicle movement. The Trillick site posed different problems, in that harmful gases were being released from the waste during excavation. Hydrogen sulphide, which can be lethal, was detected at the site. That necessitated a review of gas monitoring and working procedures to ensure continued safety, especially for excavator operators. The landowner at Slattinagh is engaged in correspondence with the Department via solicitors regarding the condition of the excavated site.

It is essential that we learn from those experiences, particularly that in Trillick, where we learned that the gas appears to come from garden waste-type materials. We have to deal with the other sites in a way that is not harmful to the environment while carrying out the job that we wish to do, which is the repatriation of the waste.

Mr McHugh: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly in relation to my constituency of Fermanagh and also Trillick, where waste dumping seems to have been going on for some considerable time, given the emission of various lethal substances. There is evidence that waste came to the area from as far away as Dublin hospitals. That should give Members an idea of the problem.

Has the Southern authorities' strategy changed? Rather than introducing a local strategy for the disposal of waste, they almost encouraged private individuals to deliver waste into other areas, because of the landfill costs. Is the Minister satisfied that areas where waste has been dumped or where tip-offs have been given about waste have been dealt with?

The Minister of the Environment: First, I believe that the authorities in the Republic of Ireland have responded. The way that they handled waste made this circumstance almost inevitable, because it threw up pound signs to unscrupulous individuals. When such an offer was made, those people immediately moved in to take advantage. We suffered the consequences of what the Republic of Ireland Government did at that time. However, the greatest consequence now is for the Republic of Ireland Government. The cost associated with

the problem is some €30 million. They have to bear that huge cost as a result of their past inactivity.

We have identified 20 sites. I cannot definitively say that every site where illegal waste was tipped from the Republic of Ireland has been identified. However, I can say that, if any Member or member of the public wishes to make the Northern Ireland Environment Agency aware of sites in which material has been deposited, that will certainly be followed up. We will seek to ensure that all such waste is removed from Northern Ireland. If there is evidence of any further sites beyond the 20 that have been identified, we will take action. If the Member is aware of any other sites, I encourage him to make those in authority aware of them.

Committee Business

Statutory Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Danny Kinahan be appointed as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister; and that Sir Reg Empey replace Mr John McCallister as a member of the Committee for Education and Mr Tom Elliott as a member of the Committee for Justice. — [Mr Armstrong.]

Standing Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Tom Elliott replace Mr Danny Kennedy as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Mr Armstrong.]

Private Members' Business

Autism Bill: First Stage

Mr D Bradley: A LeasCheann Comhairle, iarraim cead ort an Bille uathachais a chur faoi bhráid an Tionóil. I beg to introduce the Autism Bill [NIA 2/10], which is a Bill to amend the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and to require an autism strategy to be prepared.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Bill will be put on the list of future business until a date for its Second Stage is determined.

Assembly: Running Costs

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 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. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr P Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the likely reduction in the block grant that will be brought about by the comprehensive spending review; and calls on the Assembly Commission to reduce its running costs in line with the level of reduction faced by Executive Departments.

At the outset, I make it very clear that I move the motion as a Member of the Assembly and as leader of my party, not as First Minister or on behalf of the Executive. That is not to say that there are not Executive colleagues who will agree with the motion, but it is for a very strong principle. The distinction is important because the Assembly has the role of scrutinising the Executive.

Back in the late 1970s, the House of Commons took a decision about its costs. Until then, there were apocryphal stories of how the executive sought to put pressure on the House by having control of supply. The net result was that the executive were open to the accusation of putting pressure on the House by holding back on money for Clerks or other expenses that were required. As a general principle, although we do not have any legislative or legal requirement for that same practice to be in place, it is a proper practice to be followed here. By and large,

whatever funds are required by the Assembly to run it should be made available to it.

1.00 pm

However, we are faced with a special set of circumstances in which it is clear that, although the Assembly, as the legislature, should act at arm's length from the Executive, we must recognise that, despite such rationale being clear and sound, the Executive should not be in a position to exercise, nor should it be perceived to be exercising, pressure on the legislature by threatening in any way the funds available to it. Yet, when we have an Executive consisting of the five major parties in the Assembly, it is unavoidable that the Assembly will speak through its Members on the Executive.

The debate is not, therefore, about exercising any ministerial muscle: it is about the Assembly stating its view on its own expenditure. The motion is about conveying to the people of Northern Ireland, whom we represent in the House, that, as we enter into an era of unprecedented, stringent economic difficulties, this institution and we in political office are willing to share the pain that will be extended elsewhere in our Departments. We know something of the impact of the spending review. The Chancellor has made clear his intention to cut to our Budget, and that will amount to a real-term reduction of 8% in our resource expenditure and of more than 40% in our capital expenditure. By looking at those figures, we can see the extent to which there will be pain and programmes will be cut. There is apprehension in Northern Ireland about what this new age of austerity will mean for hard-working families and our more vulnerable citizens.

The Budget negotiations are ongoing. We know the broad elements of the settlement, however the Executive dispute some of them because of undertakings that were previously given, and we intend to continue to press on those issues. Our newspapers are full of rent-a-quote economists, opinion-formers and newspaper editors telling us precisely what will have to be done. No doubt they, particularly the economists, do so from the perspective of looking at the balance sheet and various heads of expenditure and seeing what makes economic sense to them. However, Budgets are about much more than spreadsheets. They are about much more than economic policy. They are even about much

more than balancing the books. They are about the lives of real people.

A Budget is about those who are most in need trying to make ends meet. It is about the fear of people losing their jobs. It is about the uncertainty that surrounds whether critical services and programmes survive, and it is about whether we produce an outcome that is seen to be balanced, fair, compassionate and measured. It is against those values that I put forward the motion.

I make it clear that I do not, in any way, propose the motion because I believe that other parties hold any less commitment to reaching a just outcome. I do not expect any departure from the general principles that are enunciated in the motion. I again stress that I propose the motion, not because I have any lack of confidence in the Assembly Commission or, particularly, in the Speaker, who chairs the Commission, to do the right thing in the circumstances. Indeed, I was pleased to see that the Speaker communicated to Members the steps that Assembly staff are taking to look at the Assembly budget.

The motion gives the Assembly the opportunity to publicly state that it will face the same, harsh economic storm as everyone else without seeking any special or privileged position. The Assembly must be seen to take a leadership role. I do not intend to set out which heads of expenditure should be cut and by how much. That is the job of the Commission, which will make its recommendations in due course. I am, however, tempted to make public some of my general principles. If there is to be freezing and restraint in the Civil Service and, more generally, in the public sector, it is right and proper that that should apply to the Assembly.

The need to look at those issues applies not just to Assembly staff but to us as Members. However, we need to be very careful. Each of our parties agreed, I believe rightly, that Members should not be in the business of setting their own pay and expenses. To ensure that that would never happen again, we set up an independent process, and, I believe, supporting legislation will go through. To take any decision about our own pay and expenses, even to reduce them, would run counter to that principle. However, there is nothing to stop the voluntary freezing or the reduction of ministerial and Assembly costs. I have made my position clear as a Minister, and some of my ministerial

colleagues have made clear their positions. Furthermore, we will ask Assembly officials to reduce by or to return by cheque the amount that we have stated. That is the position that should be followed voluntarily, rather than interfering in a process that has all sorts of dangers attached to it if we go back to Members setting their own pay and expenses.

The second point that the Commission might want to take on board is about the restaurants and other provisions around the Assembly. I find it very hard to justify, particularly at a time of austerity, there being some kind of subsidy for meals on these premises. I am not saying that we should not be competitive, because we do not want Members and staff to go elsewhere, but we should not be subsidising services when people out there are having massive difficulties and, in the months and years ahead, will have even more difficulties in having sufficient money to pay their food bills. Therefore, I ask the Assembly Commission to look at the issue.

Comments have been made about the number of people employed in the Assembly. Some of those comments were unfair, because comparisons were made with a time when the Assembly was not up and running fully under devolution and its present circumstances. However, steps need to be taken to ensure that Assembly staff numbers do not rise exponentially. There should be enough staff, and no more, to do the job.

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

Mr P Robinson: I commend the motion to the house.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. When I first read the motion, I was somewhat concerned by the fact that it appeared in the name of the First Minister. My concern was not alleviated when I heard that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will make the winding-up speech. Both Ministers should have declared a conflict of interest at the beginning of the debate.

The motion should not be reduced to a debate about meal subsidies — it is much more fundamental. The First Minister said that it was about principle and that he did not want to be open to the accusation of putting pressure on the Assembly. I fear that that is exactly what he did. The Commission is the servant

of the Assembly, not part of the Executive, and that distinction must be kept in mind. The Commission develops its budget based on its view of how it can best and most efficiently provide the services that the Assembly requires. In the interests of using public money properly, like other non-Executive public sector entities, it does so in frank and constructive dialogue with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). However, the Assembly Commission is not part of the Executive. It is the servant of the Assembly. That clear distinction must be made at all times.

Of course, we are entirely aware of the economic situation that exists. The First Minister referred to the letter that went out in the Speaker's name on 20 October.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will note that Mr Robinson is speaking as a private Member and not as First Minister. I ask the Member not to refer to Mr Robinson as First Minister.

Mr Doherty: Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle, but I did note that. The point that I was trying to make was that there was a bit of sleight of hand in trying not to show a conflict of interest. It is quite clear, I believe, that there is a conflict of interest here.

The letter was sent out by the Speaker on 20 October 2010. I am sure that the Member's representative on the Assembly Commission had made his party aware that we had started the process of looking at the Commission's budget as far back as May 2010, more than five months ago. We are not remiss, or trying to dodge the real world outside the House. However, my key point is that we have been looking at cutbacks, and although we will look at the matter seriously, it must be kept in mind that the Assembly Commission has a different constitutional remit and is not part of the Executive. The Commission is mindful of living in the real economic world. The Member who proposed the motion is on very dangerous ground, because he is threatening the constitutional independence of the Commission.

Rev Dr Robert Coulter: I fully support the motion. However, the problem with motions of this nature is that they carry with them the implication that, somehow, the Assembly Commission is not already active in making spending cuts and in taking its share of the collective pain that the comprehensive spending

review (CSR) and spending cuts will inevitably mean. Nothing could be further from the truth in this matter. As we have heard, the Commission is already active in that regard. Each Assembly directorate has been tasked by the Commission to identify reductions.

My understanding is that the operational costs of the Assembly are already significantly below those in both Scotland and Wales pro rata. The running costs for the 108-Member Northern Ireland Assembly are £50.8 million. In Scotland, running costs are £95.6 million for the 129-Member Scottish Parliament, and in Wales, running costs are £45.1 million for the 60-Member Welsh Assembly. In simple terms, the cost per Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly is £0.47 million, compared with £0.74 million in Scotland and £0.74 million in Wales. The Northern Ireland Assembly is already running at only 60% per Member of the running costs in Scotland and Wales, even before savings are made here. What is more, we can look further into the figures and see that the Assembly Commission is already very active in carrying out its own review of how savings can be made. I ask the Assembly and the wider public to take note of that, and give the Assembly Commission the credit that it deserves for already being busy in saving public money.

I find it somewhat strange and even incongruous, not to say unusual, that the motion has been proposed by our First Minister in his capacity as a private Member. The problem with that is that the Assembly Commission is tasked with providing services to Assembly Members that are aimed at holding the Executive to account. It could, therefore, be said — it has been suggested outside of the House today — that for the head of the Executive to seek to curtail Commission expenditure could be construed as a move to reduce the ability and capacity of the Members of the Assembly to hold him and others to account. I am glad that the Member has made it clear that that is not the directive of his motion but rather that it is more a humanitarian reaching-out.

1.15 pm

As has already been said, the Assembly Commission is not a Department but a statutory body appointed by law with a definite remit that should be judged only in the delivery of its legal responsibility. I welcome today's motion;

it gives the Commission an opportunity to show the House, the press and members of our community that the Commission is already setting the example that has been asked for in the motion.

Mr A Maginness: At the outset, I want to say that I am surprised that Mr Robinson proposed the motion, given that Mr Robinson is the First Minister. He cannot, in my respectful view, divorce himself as the author of the motion from his office as First Minister. As a Member of the House, he is within his rights to propose the motion, but it is not appropriate for him to do so. Effectively, he is — whether he likes or not and whether he purports to not be doing so — putting pressure on the House as a member of the Executive and, indeed, as a member of the joint Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

It is most peculiar that he proposed the motion, and it is potentially damaging to the House. It is an interference with the workings of the House. We should be jealously proud of the independence of the Commission and the House, and we should resist any interference by the Executive. Our role is to hold the Executive to account and to scrutinise the decisions and decision-making of Ministers. When that line is blurred and an Executive Minister of senior standing comes to the House to propose such a motion, we sense the heavy hand of the Executive. That is precisely what has happened. Moreover, Mr Robinson proposed the motion without the deputy First Minister. It is a wee bit like the Lone Ranger without Tonto. He has come to the House on a solo run that affects the integrity of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The SDLP is confident that the Commission will carry out a thorough review, and we support it in doing so. Indeed, the Commission is doing that and has made considerable progress. We are confident that it can make savings and efficiencies without interfering with the fundamental function of the House. We should not in any way diminish, obstruct or weaken the House's function to hold the Executive to account. That is our basic guide for any Commission proposals. However, we are confident that the secretariat and the Commission are taking seriously the need for strict economy in the House.

The First Minister made a number of points, some of which I agree with such as the need for economies and efficiencies and not to overburden the people whom we serve. However, coming from Peter Robinson, it is a bit rich to talk about removing the restaurants' subsidy here when he applied for and was given £400 a month for food when he was at Westminster.

Mr Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: No, I am not giving way.

He claimed that when he was attending only a few days a month, so, coming from Peter Robinson, it is a bit rich to bring that point to the House. The SDLP will co-operate with the Commission and with other Members to consider any reasonable proposals to review the way in which the House works and is administered to make whatever savings we can to relieve the burden on the taxpayer and to carry our share of the burden of meeting the economic stringencies that have been imposed on us as a result of the crisis and of Westminster's actions. I emphasise the point to you, Mr Deputy Speaker —

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

Mr A Maginness: We will do so in defence of the House's integrity and autonomy and in preserving its right to hold the Executive to account.

Mr Neeson: I was absolutely astounded to learn that the Member had tabled this motion. I know that he is not trying to dictate to the Assembly Commission, but I remind him that, in fact, he does not have the power to do so, thank God. Nevertheless, I will support his motion.

The Assembly Commission is well aware of its responsibilities to Members and staff. We are well aware of the impact and implications of the CSR. As other Members said, we have had a series of meetings to discuss where we can reduce spending. We have planned a special meeting for 23 November, and the directorate will draw up plans for areas that can be considered for cuts. I have given up my place at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly at the Isle of Man on that date so that I can be present for the meeting.

Of course we can make savings, especially if the Assembly Finance Office were to vacate Annexe C at Dundonald House and be accommodated

at Parliament Buildings, where there is much better accommodation. In fact, rooms in this Building have been booked by OFMDFM and the head of the Civil Service, which could be more adequately accommodated in Stormont Castle. That could save up to £150,000 a year on rent and the cost of security at Annexe C. Savings can be made, and, of course, OFMDFM and the head of the Civil Service can assist the Assembly Commission in that.

I also recognise that there are upward pressures for the Commission to meet, none more so than the necessary repairs and improvements to the flat roof of Parliament Buildings. I assure Mr Robinson that the Assembly Commission is prepared to play its role to face up to the likely reduction in the block grant.

From an Alliance perspective, major reductions could be made by reducing the number of Departments. I know that the First Minister will agree with that. We could also reduce the number of Members. The Alliance Party is totally supportive of that, and we could make reductions in that area fairly quickly.

Mr Robinson also spoke about food subsidies. However, bottled water is provided at every Committee meeting. How much is that costing the Assembly? Savings can be made there.

As a member of the Assembly Commission, I am prepared to face up to my responsibility to ensure that the Commission acts in a responsible manner and deals effectively with the major pressures that are coming. I will, therefore, support the motion.

Mr Weir: After listening to some Members who spoke previously say that they support the motion and then launch into issuing a large number of caveats, I am tempted to say that with friends like these, who needs enemies? There has been an awful lot of tilting at windmills here. In fact, there has been enough that Don Quixote would have been satisfied that he was seeing imaginary problems. Members have been getting on their constitutional high horses about this. However, the DUP leader is not attempting to impugn the rights of the House. Nonetheless, this House has a responsibility to send a very mature message to the public.

I am slightly disappointed by the response to the motion so far. This motion was an opportunity for the House to unite. There will be

other motions — indeed, there is one coming up today — on which I suspect that there will be fairly sharp divisions. I do not see any particular difference between the position of the DUP leader and that of the Commission, which a number of Members indicated. I am not going to steal the thunder of Mr Ramsey, who will sum up on behalf of the Commission, but I think that there is a unity of spirit among Commission members and that, largely speaking, we are singing from the one hymn sheet. People might not have deduced from the debate so far that there can be a degree of unity. However, we have an opportunity today to send out a united message that the Assembly is showing leadership in facing up to the situation in front of it and is taking responsibility for that.

A lot good work has been done in the Assembly, and I pay tribute to the staff who helped to bring that about. In my brief period as a member of the Commission, that good work has been highlighted through engagement with the public, schools and a range of organisations. If we were to send out one signal to the public today, surely it should be that Assembly Members do not believe that they live in some form of ivory tower. There is no doubt that there will be tough times ahead, and, although some negotiations are still taking place, we will be in a much tighter financial regime. Therefore, if we were to send out the signal — I think that the Commission and the Assembly as a whole are united on this — that Members and the Assembly are exempt from that in some way, the public would regard that with incredulity. We want to send out a signal that this Assembly is prepared to bear the same amount of pain as Departments. That is the right message. It is that sort of leadership that the people of Northern Ireland are looking for. That is why this is a golden opportunity for the Assembly to show that it is prepared to take action.

As others indicated, the Assembly budget breaks largely into two categories. About one third of it relates to members' pay, office costs and those types of things. It has been rightly pointed out that it has been agreed that an independent commission will oversee members' pay, and I think that everyone in the House agrees with that. That is fundamentally right, because it is wrong for Members to set their salaries. The rest of the budget, however, presents clear opportunities for the Assembly, through the Commission, to look at where it can make changes to find efficiency savings. Various

ideas have been put forward. However, the changes required go beyond trimming a little bit here and there off the budget. We need to look at things with a fresh perspective and a little bit of blue-sky thinking.

It is wrong to say that everything that we do in the Assembly needs to be done precisely the way it is. Perhaps we need to look at the Assembly's structures and at what innovative ideas we can bring about to provide more efficient service delivery. We want to protect that service as much as possible, but given the scale of cuts that we will probably be faced with, there is no doubt that MLAs, and indeed, those throughout this body, will almost certainly have to face up to some degree of pain.

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

There is no cost-free option. As Assembly Members, we should be prepared to take the lead and to show the general public that we will face up to those responsibilities as well. If that makes it difficult for us as individuals, so be it. We have to bear a degree of pain.

1.30 pm

In the rest of the debate, I hope that we will see a more mature approach and a common acceptance that we, as Assembly Members, albeit protecting our sovereign position in the Assembly, are prepared to play our parts. We cannot say to the general public that they must bear their share of the cuts and that we should be in some way immune. I support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Mitchel McLaughlin.

Mr McLaughlin: I was on my feet in anticipation of you calling me to speak.

I find this to be a curious motion. I am not on the Commission, but the motion, on careful reading, seems to anticipate an outcome to the Budget discussions. It would make sense to me only if we had some clear outline of what is eventually to be agreed by the parties in the Executive.

The second curious element is the manner in which the motion is being proposed by the leader of the DUP. Of course, each party is perfectly entitled to table a motion. However, as some Members have said, it is impossible to ignore the DUP's influence in the Executive. So, to talk about the Commission adopting a position in line with the cuts to be faced

by Departments, seems to me to indicate a pre-empting of what should be an open and democratic process in the Executive and the Assembly.

There is a deficit of information. We have heard complaints about Departments not bringing forward all their projections on the impacts and, probably more importantly, the responses to that, particularly the identification of efficiencies or new ways of raising revenue. All that has to be part of the whole. It has to be the underpinning of the Programme for Government for the new term and the Budget that will pay for that programme.

In many ways, therefore, the motion is way ahead of the game. The information deficit completely undermines the validity of the proposition, because no one actually knows how that system, which could well run into the early part of next year, will be completed. As I understand it, since May 2010, the Commission has been looking at the current profile of its spending and has been developing its own propositions for its contribution, presumably to be reported to the centre. If we were to respect the current relationship and the management line, it is quite clear that the Commission is in a unique position to serve the overall Assembly. It is not part of the Executive. Whether that is the shadow game that is going on, we should make it clear in the Assembly that we are not wearing that. The Commission has a vital role, and its ability to take an overview of the entire Assembly superstructure should be preserved.

I question how those promoting the motion can set a baseline not just for the Commission but for any Department if they do not know the outcome of the negotiations on the Budget with any degree of authority. Let us get on with that work, and let us allow all the parties to provide their inputs. I hope that those inputs reflect realism about the reduction in the block grant and our ability to find even more efficiencies and to come up with new ways of generating much-needed revenue in order to protect the vulnerable in our society and essential front line services. In those circumstances, people can, perhaps, expect that there would be the same kind of reciprocal and respectful position from the Commission.

I respectfully argue to those who proposed the motion that it is premature, they are taking an unusual approach to prosecuting the argument

and they do not seem to have taken any account of the different perspectives that would have to be applied in these circumstances.

Mr Bell: The arguments for financial prudence that the Member for East Belfast advanced will resonate strongly in that community, a community that is perhaps ahead of the game, having already started to put in place some of those arrangements in its household and business budgets. Their expectation, rightly, is that the House will take responsibility for making the necessary reductions in its budgets, because, otherwise, it will be a case of our telling them to do as we say but not as we do. The cheap shots that have been made on the subject will not be responded to in any way by a community that knows the job that has to be done and expects the House to get on with doing it.

In our United Kingdom, we are passing on to our children and grandchildren the debt that has been accumulated. Is anybody suggesting that we do that without first having looked to see whether we can do better? Are we going to fail our children and grandchildren because we want to play politics with the motion or fire off cheap insults?

I have heard many a good sermon in which it has been said that judgement must begin at the house of God. Well, financial judgement must begin at this House. It must set the example. Forget the billions and the trillions involved, which nobody can understand. A report from Oxford Economics made extremely clear that, by 2012, every household in the United Kingdom will carry a debt of £47,000 and every individual will carry a debt of £19,000. Given that that debt has to be serviced before any money can be put into health, education, benefits or social security, is it not crazy that we would hand on a debt burden to our children and grandchildren, as a deadweight around their necks, and prevent them from getting the services that they require because this House failed to make the necessary judgements?

The Member for West Tyrone Mr Doherty advanced the argument that it is a constitutional issue. It is not, although I am tempted to say that this is not the first time that the Member has been on the wrong side of a constitutional question. The situation is real, and real situations require real leadership.

Let us look at what has happened in the course of the debate, from which people are genuinely looking to us to make real decisions. I grew up drinking good east Belfast tap water. It is absolutely right to suggest that the House should not be spending £25,000 on bottled water. This is an appropriate debate, and it is entirely appropriate that the DUP leader raise such issues.

I listened to the Member for North Belfast Mr Maginness. I was always taught to be sure before pointing the finger at somebody, or else three fingers would be pointed back at me. Perhaps Alban Maginness —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: I will give way presently. Perhaps Alban Maginness, with his double-jobbing, will tell us what he has earned from legal aid and from being a full-time MLA. What has he earned as a barrister while he has been a Member of the House?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind Members not to point fingers across the Chamber, and that we are discussing Assembly running costs.

Mr Bell: I am responding to what the Member said, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: No, you did not give way. If the Member comes forward and tells us what he has earned at the Bar while also being a Member, he will escape the charge of hypocrisy.

The situation is that everybody has to look at what he or she can reasonably and proportionately do in the circumstances. There will be major pressure on public service jobs and, if we want to protect those jobs, savings will have to be made somewhere. That is not the economics of la-la land but the reality. The public are looking for a clear steer. The Member for East Belfast has given a clear steer that is directly proportionate to the situation that we are in. I hope that the House will give the motion its full support.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Member for tabling the motion today, and I am more than happy to support it. Whatever money can be saved on Assembly running costs will mean that less will need to be clawed back from other areas of government spending. Although the £50 million that it took to run this place last year makes

up only a small amount of the Executive's overall expenditure, it is a significant amount by any measure. How can we genuinely ask the people of Northern Ireland to share the pain of spending reductions if the Assembly and the Commission fail to acknowledge the role that they must play?

There are obvious and achievable savings that the Commission could make and should have made long before now. For a Building that claims to take sustainable development seriously, we still waste a scandalous amount of paper. Aside from the environmental impact, it is costing money that could have been invested in new pieces of equipment for Committees and the like years ago. I also dread to think what it costs to heat the Building, and I would not like to be the one who opens the electricity bill. Those are all significant but practical measures that the Commission should consider looking into.

It has been mentioned, but it is worth mentioning again, the travesty surrounding the purchase and subsequent maintenance of Ormiston House. The Commission bought that historic building for £10 million in 2001 and has spent £1.35 million on it since. However, at the beginning of last year, when it is fair to say that property was generally more expensive than in 2001, the property was valued at only £6 million. Public money is being held up in a dilapidated building that is sitting on 13 acres of prime development land. It is unfortunate that the foresight was not there two or three years ago to put the building and the land on the market, but I hope that the Commission is at least looking at offloading some of it to retrieve some money.

The number of people who seem to work in this Building, as compared to the beginning of the current mandate, will not have passed many of us here by. Indeed, for those who were elected in 1998 and 2003, the numbers seem even more augmented. During the past five years, the number of people employed by the Assembly secretariat has increased from 263 to 391. Although many of those new positions may have been necessary as a consequence of the return of devolution and the workload that came with it, a further 16 new positions were created during the 2009-2010 financial year. The secretariat does a fair and straight job, and this place would not be able to operate without it, but the Commission must remain conscious of its expanding salary bill. Last year

alone, secretariat salaries totalled well over £15 million, and the time has well and truly come for the end of the £1,000 bonus that members of the secretariat receive automatically every year. I welcome the fact that the Commission has at last begun to address that issue, and I look forward to the project teams' making their final recommendations shortly.

Although I began by thanking the First Minister for tabling the motion, I am a little confused by his intentions for doing so. That is for no reason other than the fact that it is the Minister of Finance and Personnel who decides the Commission's funding. That situation in itself is a little peculiar: an Executive Minister deciding the funding for an Assembly that is meant to hold the Executive to account. If and when this is raised in the Executive, I hope that the First Minister will be able to obtain support from all parties for a reasonable reduction in the Commission's costs, and I emphasise "reasonable". He will certainly receive that support from the Ulster Unionist members of the Executive.

1.45 pm

Mr Durkan: Like others, I support the motion. In a sense, it calls for what is happening anyway. The Assembly Commission is conducting its own review of the Assembly's costs and the structure of those costs. Last year, during the engagement that the Speaker and the Commission had with all the then party leaders on the future regime for Members' salaries and office cost allowances, the Speaker made it clear that the exercise would also look at wider Assembly costs. The Assembly was acting responsibly, and the Assembly Commission was moving ahead on the issue even before the comprehensive spending review, and so on.

It seems to me that the debate is an opportunity for Mr Robinson to have a Tea Party moment and to be seen as the man to come in to try to take on and to shake up big government and the cost of the political class. Mr Weir accused those who questioned the motives for the motion of "tilting at windmills". However, the motion itself tilts at a windmill. It tries to pretend that there is a massive resistance to looking at costs in the Assembly. That resistance simply does not exist.

One Member mentioned Ormiston House. Mr Deputy Speaker, you and I had a past life involving the Department of Finance and

Personnel. When the Assembly Commission moved to purchase Ormiston House, I, as the then Minister of Finance and Personnel, was briefed by my departmental officials, who expressed concerns. Fully respecting the Assembly Commission's independence, I ensured that those concerns were shared with the Assembly Commission. The Commission called me to meet it along with the then DFP permanent secretary. We were left in absolutely no doubt by the Commission's assertion of its independence. However, we never questioned that. We respected it then and have done so since. We may now ask, with hindsight, whether the Commission would have been better to have taken on board some of the information that we gave it as well as asserting its independence. It was not a case of DFP or the Executive trying to tell the Commission what to do. It was a sensible sharing of information. However, we are now left with Ormiston House, its costs and its current value.

Similarly, early in the life of devolution, the Assembly Commission wanted its vote to be separate from the vote for the devolved block. It wanted separate votes in Westminster for the NIO, the Executive and the Assembly Commission. There were discussions between us and the Commission. We agreed on the existing protocols under which the Executive receive the Assembly Commission's bids through the Minister of Finance and Personnel, but the Assembly Commission tries to have its own controls.

It is clear that, in recent times, the Commission has worked to curb and to control such expenditure. It has been suggested that we should look at Assembly subsidies, and I believe that we must. We must bear in mind that it is not only people on MLA salaries who eat in the Building. Indeed, we must remember the fairly low-paid people in the Building in all that we do. A question may also arise about car parking: if MLAs and Ministers are happy for various people who work in the public service to pay for their car parking, perhaps we should do the same. Those are some of the hard choices that the Assembly Commission will have to make.

As well as controlling costs, we have to enhance the value of the Assembly. Questions arise about whether we deliver sufficient scrutiny and accountability. I have said that the Chamber does not have enough control and oversight of budgetary matters, not only of the overall

Budget but of individual Ministers' spending decisions. Why are Ministers' spending plans not announced, scrutinised and questioned in the House?

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

Mr Durkan: Similarly, why do we not have a permanent Committee, without the cost of a Chairperson or anything else, that constantly interrogates to deal with the cost of government and the capital spending performance?

Mr P Ramsey: I am responding to the motion on behalf of the Assembly Commission. I welcome the opportunity to outline the general work of the Commission, to remind Members of the cost of that work, and, in particular, to update them on the work that the Commission has been progressing since early this year.

As a number of Commission members outlined, since May, we have been dealing with any possible changes in the block grant. In every Assembly Commission meeting since May, we have deliberated on that and instructed and mandated the directorate to bring forward effective efficiency savings, not just through staff costs but through restructuring and looking at a number of other elements that will have an impact on efficiencies.

It is important to recognise that the Commission is the corporate body of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has responsibility under section 40 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to provide the property, staff and services that are required for the Assembly to function and to carry out its work. The Commission's vision is of an Assembly that strengthens democracy and engages the people of Northern Ireland in creating a better future for all.

A number of questions were raised by Members. If I do not get round to answering them, I will ensure that there is a written response to them from the Assembly Commission.

The Commission's strategic priorities include supporting Assembly business, engaging with the public, supporting and developing staff, ensuring the effective governance of the secretariat and accommodating the Assembly. The budget to meet those responsibilities covers the cost of all the services that are provided to the Assembly and its Members, including services provided to Members in

Committees and in plenary sessions of the Assembly; research and library services; property management services; explaining the work of the Assembly and its Members to the public; IT services in Parliament Buildings and Members' constituency offices; and progressing salary and allowance payments.

A number of Members raised the issue of an independent body being set up. Hopefully, the Business Committee will be asked to approve the introduction of a Bill to set up such a body now that we have agreement and consensus on a way forward and on how it should be set up.

Services also include the education programme, legal advice on constitutional and corporate affairs and a wide range of associated support services. As well as the services that are delivered by the Assembly secretariat, the Commission's budget includes the cost of Members' salaries; Ministers' salaries; Members' allowances, including office cost allowances; and payments under the financial assistance to political parties scheme.

The Assembly Commission's budget is split between those categories of expenditure in the Main Estimates. However, the Commission manages the cost of each item in its budget to ensure that it is utilised in the most effective manner. For the current financial year, the Commission forecasts that the total resource expenditure will come to £40.4 million, with approximately one third of those costs relating to Members.

As with other public sector entities that do not form part of the Executive, the Commission works closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel to develop an annual budget to meet the Assembly's running costs. The Commission recognises that budget cuts will affect all areas of the public sector and that the Assembly must play its part in ensuring that it operates efficiently and in line with the cuts applied to —

Mr P Robinson: Will the Member repeat the figure that will be necessary for the next financial year?

Mr P Ramsey: It is £50.4 million.

Mr P Robinson: You said £40.4 million.

Mr P Ramsey: It is £50.4 million.

The Commission recognises that public cuts will affect all areas of the public sector. It also recognises that the Assembly must play its part in ensuring that it operates efficiently and in line with the cuts that are applied across the wider public sector. However, any more significant cuts will undermine the ability of the Assembly to function effectively and will severely impact on services that are provided for plenary meetings, Committees and individual Members.

In May, in anticipation of the wider review of public sector spending, the Assembly Commission, at an away day, started a process of reviewing expenditure across the Assembly. The Commission is all too aware that the cuts make a reduction in service levels to Members and users of this Building inevitable. It is seeking the co-operation of Members and parties in taking that forward.

However, there is a question of balance, and the Commission is equally aware that any reductions in services must not undermine the effectiveness of the Assembly, particularly at a time when the scrutiny of Departments, their budgets and the stewardship of public finances is of such importance. We are aware that a number of Committees are looking for particular expertise to enable them to have the capacity to understand and to progress, and to make Departments and Ministers accountable. Those pressures are there.

Since restoration in May 2007, the Commission has worked to develop and improve services to Members, including providing clerking services to plenary sittings and Committees, establishing a new team to support the Justice Committee, and resourcing the demands of a heavy legislative programme.

The development and implementation of an engagement strategy has led to significantly increased public engagement. In the year from November 2009 to October 2010, 427 school groups, comprising 13,500 students, participated in the Assembly's education programme. Our events staff facilitated 814 tours for 15,600 guests. A total of 525 functions were attended by 37,000 guests. The opening up of Parliament Buildings to the wider public has been a great success.

Major refurbishment works have been undertaken to refresh the IT equipment, upgrade the Chamber and improve facilities for Committee meetings, to name but a few.

The Commission also continues to work to improve the governance and accountability of the Assembly through the development of the Members' financial services handbook and the allowances regime. The quarterly online publication of Members' office allowance costs has led to greater transparency.

I want to highlight some future major expenditure categories. Members will be aware of the proposed creation of an independent financial review panel, which is to be established by an Act of the Assembly in the spring of 2011, subject to Assembly approval. The panel will independently set the standards and salaries of, and levels of financial support to, Members. The outworking of that will involve initial set-up and running costs for the review panel, which will be kept to a minimum, and the costs associated with any future determinations of the panel.

Members will also be aware that salaries have not been increased for a number of years, falling behind levels recommended by earlier external reviews. The decisions of the review panel will be outside the control of the Commission and the Assembly, and any future impact arising out of those decisions will have to be funded.

It is worth noting that the level of secretariat staffing set out in the secretariat review report in late 2007 was 463 full-time employees. I am sorry that Danny raised the issue of staffing levels here. The secretariat has never reached that level. The current staff complement of 440 full-time employees has also not been reached. Given the outworkings of the spending review, it now appears unlikely that that figure will ever be met. The current complement figure reflects additional responsibilities and functions placed on the Assembly, including a sustainability programme, an enhanced education service, a new Justice Committee and a reorganised usher/security service.

Members may also wish to note that the number of secretariat staff per Member for the past financial year was 3.6. That compares very favourably with 3.8 for the Scottish Parliament and 5.9 for the National Assembly for Wales over the same period.

2.00 pm

For capital expenditure, the Commission gave initial consideration to a major programme of capital works arising from the independent

review of the Assembly secretariat, including a proposed extension to Parliament Buildings, estimated at £35 million. That area of work was not taken forward, and the Commission has sought to make modest changes to make the best use of Parliament Buildings, with only minor refurbishment taking place. However, there remains a substantial future commitment to repairing the roof, which it is estimated will cost in the region of £3 million.

At this stage, I would like to inform Members of the work being undertaken by the secretariat, on behalf of the Commission, to address the issue of reduced funding. Each directorate has been tasked with identifying reductions in two scenarios — 2.5% and 5% — in each of the next four years. A project team has been tasked to evaluate those submissions with a view to making recommendations to the senior management group and the Commission.

We are examining how we might do things differently and more economically, for example, moving to electronic formats for a number of publications. I made that comment in the context of a Member's contribution in respect of waste of paper. I have been lobbying and championing the cause in the Commission for a long time that we should become more IT friendly, providing access to IT equipment at Committees and at plenary sittings.

Additionally, the Commission is fully aware of the future commitments to consider the number of MLAs, Committees and Departments. Although it is outside the control of the Commission, any changes in those areas are likely to result in cost savings. Indeed, that issue is under discussion by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

At this point, I would like to draw attention to an issue that we will need to return to in the next mandate, that is, the issue of the separation of powers between the legislature and the Executive. Currently, funding arrangements for the cost of running the Assembly may not fully reflect that constitutional principle, and we will have to address that in the near future.

I will now acknowledge some points raised by Members. The Rt Hon Member for East Belfast said that the strong principle point was that there was a special set of circumstances here and that we should recognise that the Executive were not putting pressure on the Assembly. I am glad that he made that point, although Members

will suspect that, indirectly, in his primary role as First Minister, he was certainly doing so.

Pat Doherty made the point that he was disappointed that the matter has come to the Floor. One of the main points made by the Member who proposed the motion related to the subsidy for meals. Robert Coulter made the point that the Assembly Commission was setting examples and that we have taken the lead for some time. Alban Maginness was very heavy-handed over the Executive allowing the First Minister to come forward with a private Member's motion. He thought that it was most inappropriate for the First Minister to do so, and he thought that the First Minister could not divorce himself from that role. He made the point that the First Minister was the Lone Ranger without Tonto.

Sean Neeson was astounded that a private Member, who is also the First Minister, would bring forward such a motion. He made the point that we have already discussed the issue and are preparing to play a significant, responsible role in making those savings.

Peter Weir said:

"with friends like these, who needs enemies?"

He knows that there is a lot of good work going on. We are playing our parts, as he rightly said, and the Commission is united in the changes. Mitchel McLaughlin made a valid point that this is way ahead of the game, we do not know the significance of the efficiency savings, and it is quite a unique position to be in. Jonathan Bell talked about prudence coming from the Member for East Belfast, and he said that the House must make necessary reductions for the sake of our legacy to our children and grandchildren.

I have already made a couple of points about Danny Kinahan's speech, but, nevertheless, he said that the Assembly had to share the pain. Mark Durkan, in supporting the motion, made the point that, in essence, we already had what the motion was calling for and that it was already happening. He said that, during the successful road show, the Speaker made the point that the Assembly Commission was looking very radically at expenditure across the board. The Member also talked about the Member for East Belfast having a special Tea Party moment.

The Assembly Commission will be responsible, will show leadership and will make changes, as the Departments are expected to do. It will not be found wanting. It is already preparing the ground for that. In essence, it will support the motion.

Mr S Wilson: At the outset, I want to make it clear that the motion is not the DUP's Tea Party moment. I must say that some Members have made a bit of a meal of my party's motion in their attempts to explain away the ambivalence of their responses to it. This is a very important issue. Let me make it clear that, in bringing forward the motion, I am speaking not as Minister of Finance and Personnel but as a member of the DUP.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: Will the Member let me say something before he intervenes, for goodness' sake?

Perhaps I can look at Members' responses to the motion. The most bizarre one has been adopted by Mr McLaughlin, who, normally, has a sensible attitude to many of these things. He talked about our being ahead of the game and anticipating something that may not ever occur. I do not know whether Mr McLaughlin has been reading newspapers or listening to debates in the Assembly and the points that I have made as Finance Minister. The game is half over. The announcement has been made. We know what the Budget for the next four years is going to be. It may well be that Sinn Féin has got some magic by which it will be able to fill the gap in the Budget. However, the truth of the matter is that we know the game and the quantity. Therefore, the issue needs to be addressed.

I suppose that the lead proponent of the second response was Mr Maginness, although it was also expressed by Mr Doherty and others. That response dealt with constitutional niceties. Indeed, we have had our own version of 'Strictly Come Dancing' to see who can dance on the head of a constitutional pin. I must say that some of the performances have not even been as elegant as Ann Widdecombe's. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?
[Laughter.]

Mr S Wilson: I hope that the Member is not going to talk to me about Irish dancing.

Mr McElduff: Will the Member join me in congratulating Stevie McDonnell and Michelle Rafferty on winning Armagh's Strictly Come Dancing competition, which Conor Murphy and I judged?

Mr S Wilson: I should have known it would be a relevant intervention. *[Laughter.]*

Let us be clear that, first of all, this is not an Executive motion. Secondly, the Executive do not put pressure on the Assembly. Indeed, Mr Durkan showed that, often, there are useful interchanges to be had between the Executive and the Assembly. Indeed, had his wise counsel been heeded back in the days when he was Finance Minister, the Assembly would not be left with a capital asset that is worth considerably less than was paid for it at that time. It appears that the project, which was intended to create an extension to the Assembly on the Belmont Road, did not even have much chance of getting planning permission at the time. Mr Durkan probably pointed that out.

There is a useful opportunity for us to have that exchange. Let us face it: I do not believe that the general public, when looking at the Assembly's budgetary considerations, will appreciate very much a discussion about whether there should be pressure or independence. The fact of the matter is that there is a budgetary consideration from which no part of the public sector should be exempt. There should be no sacred cows. That includes the Assembly.

The third reaction has been to bamboozle us with figures. I have a lot of time for the honourable Member Mr Coulter. He gave us the comparators and everything else between here, Scotland and Wales. I could take one of two views. He was either chancing his arm, or he knew exactly what he was doing and was using the skills that he has as a scientist to use figures. We come out of it very well: if one looks at the issue on a per Member basis, the Northern Ireland Assembly does brilliantly. Everyone knows that the denominator gives an outcome, and if one puts a denominator under the total figure, which is about two and a half times that in Scotland and Wales, one will, of course, get a good comparison. Since we have an over-inflated Assembly with 108 Members, which is considerably more than in Scotland and Wales, the figures will, of course, look good. However, if one looks at this from the

perspective of the size of the population and the kind of Assembly that we have, it does not look good, and we have to accept that.

The fourth reaction from Members is that they know that there is a problem, are fully aware of the issue and are addressing it. I could take that if there were some evidence of it, but let us look at the figures for the past four years. During that time, there has been no evidence that the Assembly has tightened its budget. In 2007-08, the total budget was £49.6 million; in 2008-09, it was £47.9 million; and, last year, it rose to £52 million. That is not evidence of a downward trend or of belt tightening.

We can look at the future bids for the Assembly. In the current CSR period, the bids go up considerably to a total of £50.8 million for 2014-15. That is for current budget only. Therefore, the current budget is being increased from £48.4 million to £50.8 million in 2014-15. That is not an indication of a Commission that is looking to tighten its belt, to get into this period of austerity or to do the same as the Departments are being required to do. For that reason, it has been useful to have this motion here this morning.

I found Mr Kinahan's speech useful. Even though other Members protested about not having interference and everything else, they were at least able to identify areas where we could save money. If those things have been identified, why have we not started doing them? That is a question that I ask myself.

Everyone knows the environmentalist that I am. I was the first to raise the issue of paper in the Assembly. I remember coming into the Chamber about three years ago and being upbraided by whoever was in the Chair. I do not know whether you were in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker. I came in and hid behind the mound of paper, which I had acquired that month. It was quite high. I worked out that if the papers that Members received in a year from the Assembly were stretched end to end across the front of Parliament Buildings, they would reach halfway up the wall. Despite assurances that it would be dealt with, we have heard complaints about it here this afternoon. There are ways in which savings can be made, and I welcome the fact that Members have identified them.

The motion is meant and designed to be a serious motion to concentrate the minds of the Assembly, because do not forget that it is the

Assembly that votes the budget for this body. It has also been designed to concentrate the minds of Members to send out a warning from the Assembly to the Assembly Commission that this is an issue that needs to be taken seriously, because this is where the debate has taken place.

Our constituents will be asking us about health, education, roads and all other kinds of spending cuts, and they will want to know what we have been doing. Through leadership in the House this morning, the leader of my party has shown that we want to be serious about the motion so that no area is exempt.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the likely reduction in the block grant that will be brought about by the comprehensive spending review; and calls on the Assembly Commission to reduce its running costs in line with the level of reduction faced by Executive Departments.

2.15 pm

Private Members' Business

Irish Language Strategy

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. A valid petition of concern in relation to the motion was presented on Thursday 4 November. The effect of the petition is that any vote on the motion will be decided on a cross-community basis.

Mr McElduff: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that correspondence sent to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure by the NI Human Rights Commission on 17 August 2010 stated that the Minister's failure to introduce Irish language legislation is not human rights-compliant; and calls on the Minister to bring forward his proposals for a strategy to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language in accordance with obligations agreed in the St Andrews Agreement 2006.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The motion contains two parts. It reminds Members that the Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) wrote to the Minister in August this year, saying that his failure to introduce Irish language legislation and an Irish language strategy is not human rights compliant because of the manner in which he is going about his business, particularly his citing a lack of community consensus. The motion calls on the Minister to bring forward his proposals and a strategy to enhance and to promote the development of the Irish language in accordance with obligations agreed in the St Andrews Agreement 2006.

Tá mé an-sásta, a LeasCheann Comhairle, an rún seo a chur chun tosaigh agus a mholadh.

Our party is pleased that the amendment has been tabled. It adds value to our motion.

Táimid an-sásta glacadh leis an leasú chomh maith.

The petition of concern is a device open to parties — for example, the DUP — and it is not entirely surprising that it has been deployed in this instance. The vexed issue of the Irish language seems to bring out irrational opposition from the DUP, often at the mere mention of an *Ghaeilge* — the Irish language. It often has that effect, as observed in a book written by Ian Malcolm called 'Towards Inclusion: Protestants and the Irish Language' — 'i dTreo na Cuimsitheachta: Protastúnaigh agus an Ghaeilge'.

I want to outline the framework of support for the Irish language. It is the oldest written language in Europe and survives as a written community language today. In places such as Carntogher in south Derry, it is alive in the community. Although I am speaking in a private capacity, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure recently received a presentation from the Carntogher Community Association about how the Irish language is a community development tool for people in that area.

Irish is, of course, the first official language of the 26-county state, and it is an official language of the European Union. It should be actively promoted by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). The Department and the Minister should not have to be dragged squealing on the issue. As for interest in and demand for the Irish language, thousands of children attend Irish-medium schools in the North alone, and there is increasing interest in establishing Irish-medium units in some English-medium schools. There are Irish language officers employed in a number of local government authorities, reflecting the level of demand in those areas.

Foras na Gaeilge, established in 1999 on foot of the Good Friday Agreement, forms part of the North/South Language Body. It provides a range of support to Irish language groups and to public sector organisations on an all-Ireland basis. The Gaeltacht quarter in Belfast is a very exciting proposal and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure should be doing everything in its power to assist, facilitate and encourage it, as opposed to finding fault.

International obligations in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the

St Andrews Agreement of 2006 mean that it is obvious that legislation, *Acht na Gaeilge*, is the way forward. That is a given. It commands Sinn Féin support and the support of other parties in the Chamber.

I remind the Minister that, following two DCAL consultation exercises, the message came back from people that they wanted an Irish language strategy. The then Minister was unhappy with the first consultation exercise and a second took place. He needed a second opinion. That consultation said the same thing: people expect and demand Irish language legislation to protect their rights as Irish speakers. There is an onus on the British Government to proceed if the DCAL Minister is unwilling, but evidence from the Administration in Dublin, the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament is that legislation is the way forward to protect people's rights and to depoliticise an issue that has been politicised.

There is an absolute requirement for the Minister to move in the short term to develop a strategy. It is my understanding that the DUP Minister, on paper at least, is committed to taking forward a strategy for the enhancement and promotion of the Irish language, even if he has been slow — his previous ministerial colleagues have been incredibly slow — to do that.

I will give an example of how slow the DUP Ministers have been in taking the matter forward. On 25 October 2007, the then Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Edwin Poots, attended a meeting of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure to brief it on his decision not to take forward the introduction of Irish language legislation. At the end of January 2008, Minister Poots attended the Committee again and said that his Department was considering drawing up a strategy that would protect the development of the Irish language and Ulster Scots in line with the St Andrews Agreement. On 4 December 2008, Minister Gregory Campbell attended the Committee and said that an interdepartmental group was involved in taking forward the strategy, it had received an early draft of a skeletal strategy in October 2008, and the comments of the group would be considered carefully. The Minister then said that he intended to submit a paper to the Executive in January 2009, setting out the high-level principles on which a strategy might be based.

On 22 October 2009, the Committee received a briefing from DCAL officials who said that Minister McCausland had reviewed the existing draft Executive paper and had undertaken some investigation and research into language issues. His next step would be to submit a paper to the Executive, setting out the high-level principles on which a strategy might be based. Minister McCausland had been scheduled to attend a Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure meeting on 10 December 2009. However, he said that, because the paper had not yet been submitted to the Executive, he was not in a position to update the Committee. Minister McCausland was scheduled to attend a Committee meeting in late March 2010 to brief the Committee on the draft language strategy. However, his officials cancelled his appearance and stated that he was out of the country on that day. During Question Time on 2 March 2010, Minister McCausland stated that strategies for Irish and Ulster Scots would be ready by the end of that month. Minister McCausland was then scheduled to brief the Committee on the draft language strategy on 3 June 2010, but his officials advised that the paper had not yet gone to the Executive and the Minister was not in a position to brief the Committee.

Eventually, that briefing took place on 1 July this year. I recall that, at that juncture, Raymond McCartney, a member of the Committee, made an observation, and he hit the nail on the head. He said that he found it difficult to ask the Minister a question because the situation was like the scene in the 'Wizard of Oz' where there is a big, booming clear voice — then someone pulls back the curtain and there is nothing behind it.

He would not ask a question in those circumstances because the pretence had been going on for a long time. We have seen endless delay mechanisms — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members in a sedentary position not to intervene. If a point of order is raised, I am sure that the Member would give way.

Mr McElduff: There have been endless delay mechanisms and great dishonesty on this matter over a lengthy period. Sinn Féin sticks to and honours political agreements and commitments. It appears to me that the DUP has been messing about on this matter for a long time. That does it no credit whatsoever.

We now know that the Minister is engaged in correspondence with the Department of Education and the BBC in further attempts to stall the strategy. That is game-playing, and it is not acceptable. People are quite angry about the lack of respect for Gaelic culture and the Irish language. The Human Rights Commission's letter to Minister McCausland stated that his approach is not human rights compliant.

I expect that there will be spurious arguments today about the cost of a strategy at a time of economic difficulty. Of course we all want to minimise costs, but there is a duty to respect people's rights. So far, DUP Ministers have been totally dishonest on this matter. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Are we allowed to use the word "dishonest" in this Chamber?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Let me check the terminology that was used. The Speaker will come back on that point.

As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. *[Interruption.]* Order. I was asked for some information. Now I am giving you other information. I ask Members to listen.

The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Dominic Bradley. I call Mr Bradley. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; my mistake. The next person to speak, after Question Time, will be Mr Dominic Bradley.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 1 and 2 have been withdrawn.

Lignite Prospecting: North Antrim

3. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the extension of the moratorium on lignite prospecting licences in North Antrim. (AQO 429/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs Foster): The moratorium on mineral prospecting licences for lignite expired on 25 October 2010. I propose to extend the moratorium for a further three years. The strategic energy framework for Northern Ireland 2010 states that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) will maintain a watching brief on the future role of lignite. The extension of the moratorium is consistent with that policy.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for her announcement in the House today that the moratorium on prospecting for lignite in north Antrim is to be extended. Will she have discussions with her colleague Mr Poots, the Minister of the Environment, about Planning Service restrictions that have inhibited local farmers from gaining approvals in the area where there is lignite? That unfair situation has prevailed for the past number of years, since the area was designated for lignite prospecting.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Yes. The Member has, on many occasions, raised with me the issue of the whole area around Ballymoney. The lignite issue is a very emotional one, causing a great deal of angst in the area. When I was the Minister of the Environment, I remember meeting the Member about the planning policy issue. It merits discussion. I certainly do not believe that the entire area needs to be “sterilised”. There could be some development. However, I make it clear that that is a matter for the Department

of the Environment. I understand that a meeting between my officials and officials from the Department of the Environment will take place later this week to discuss the issue. We need to protect the minerals that are there, but in-depth discussions are needed about the other planning issues.

Mr O’Loan: I support the extension of the moratorium, although it is only a short extension. An alternative to lignite mining as a source of fuel is geothermal energy. Does the Minister share my regret that Ballymena, which was in the lead on this island in developing a geothermal energy system, is likely to be supplanted by a site in Dublin, because the necessary legislation and regulation is in place in the Republic of Ireland, while we have work to do in that regard? Will she confirm that that is the case, and will she give us a timetable for regulation being implemented here?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I presume that the Member is referring to the renewable heat incentives. Just recently, the Westminster Government announced that a considerable amount of money would be put into the renewable heat incentive scheme. The Member will know that we are conducting an evidence-based inquiry on renewable heat so that we can proceed on an evidence basis. However, I very much want to be able to take advantage of the money in Westminster for the Northern Ireland economy.

As I understand it, some research is ongoing in Australia and in the United States of America to determine whether lignite resources can be used without the need for surface mining. I know that that issue causes the most concern in and around Ballymoney and the other areas affected by the moratorium. The moratorium was introduced in 2004. It was then extended by my colleague Nigel Dodds when he was the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I am now further extending it for three years. That is a sensible amount of time. If there are developments in ways in which lignite resources can be used, that is something, as the strategic energy framework states, on which we need to keep a watching brief. I am very content with the amount of time that I have put on the moratorium.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the extension of the moratorium on lignite mining. Undoubtedly,

if such a mine were given the go-ahead, it would have a huge environmental impact on my constituency. It would produce 4.8 million tons of CO₂ a year, the equivalent of 1.2 million cars on the road. Given that and the fact that the Executive are committed to reducing greenhouse gases by 25% by 2025, should not surface mining be banned for far longer than three years?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: It is not a case of banning surface mining. We are saying that no mining at all is to be carried out in the Ballymoney area or in the other two places affected. However, as I indicated, if evidence emerges from countries researching other ways of getting lignite out of the ground, we need to be open to looking at that. I said in my strategic energy framework that we would keep a watching brief on nuclear energy, and we will keep the same brief on lignite developments. That is what I intend to do.

Tourism: Strangford Lough

4. **Mr Gibson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to a tourism strategy for Strangford Lough.

(AQO 430/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I value Strangford Lough's contribution to Northern Ireland's tourism offering. Regarded by many as purely an environmental resource, Strangford Lough has the opportunity to further develop its water-based activities and other related tourism products. The draft tourism strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 identifies Strangford as one of nine potential key tourism areas. The local authorities of Down District Council and Ards Borough Council are leading on the development of a Strangford Lough destination forum and draft tourism action plan.

Mr Gibson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Strangford Lough is indeed a unique environment that is set in an area of rich history and offers an excellent opportunity for specialist tourism. Under the NITB strategy, will the Minister consider the aquarium in Portaferry and the surrounding area as part of an integrated management zone, similar to that which we have on the north coast?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Kieran McCarthy.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I think that I had better answer first. I was not surprised to see Mr McCarthy get up as soon as Exploris was mentioned, because he mentions it frequently.

Mr Gibson probably knows that an integrated coastal management zone is led by the Department of the Environment and is a concept aimed at addressing issues in an area that extends 3 km inland and 12 nautical miles out to sea. It is an innovative way of planning for the future along the coast and is, again, something that was started when I was in the Department of the Environment. The concept applies to the entire length of the Northern Ireland coast, but, at the moment, no specific zones have been declared. As I repeatedly say in the House, Exploris remains a key attraction in the Strangford Lough area, and I hope that it continues to be one.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her comments so far. On numerous occasions in the Chamber, the Minister has, rightly, acknowledged the potential of Strangford Lough and, in particular, Exploris in Portaferry, Castle Espie, outside Comber, the canoe trail around the lough and many others. Will the Minister and her Department consider including in the tourism strategy the history and story of the lough? We all know that many have come to the lough, including invaders, settlers and smugglers, all of whose stories would contribute to a welcome tourist package. Will the Minister consider that as part of a future strategy?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: And that is just the invasive species in the lough. Absolutely, and the Member will know that part of the St Patrick signature project comes into the Strangford Lough area. Historically, one can talk about no greater invader than St Patrick. There is work going on between all the district councils in and around that area on that project and on the Mourne signature project, which also falls into that area. Mr McCarthy is fortunate to have two signature projects very close to him. Some of us have none, but that is beside the point.

We are pleased to see the progress that is being made on the St Patrick and Mourne signature projects. As I said in my initial answer, to some, Strangford Lough is merely of environmental interest or a beautiful prospect. However, a great amount of work could be

carried out for tourism as well. As the Member mentioned, the way in which Castle Espie has been developed is a great example of how the lough and its surroundings can be made available to everybody who wants to visit.

Ms Ritchie: Given that, as the Minister said, the Tourist Board is promoting the St Patrick signature project and that St Patrick's landing place at the mouth of Strangford Lough is not yet included in the signature project, will the Minister ensure that discussions take place with the Tourist Board, the board of trustees of the St Patrick Centre and Down District Council so that that valuable patrician asset is included for development? That would concur with the overarching tourism strategy for Strangford Lough and St Patrick country.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I am more than happy to pass those comments on to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and to request a meeting with the various parties that the Member mentioned.

I shall update the House. At the moment, seven letters of offer have been issued for financial assistance totalling £418,000. Other projects are in the pipeline, and we are very hopeful that the rest of the money will get to the St Patrick signature project. Sometimes that signature project is not talked about as much as others. Nevertheless, it is a critical tourism development project, particularly for the Member's area in Downpatrick but also stretching up the coast. If there is a link into Strangford Lough, we should take advantage of it.

EU Economic Development Assistance

5. **Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress her Department has made, in conjunction with local councils, to ensure the maximum uptake of economic development assistance from the European Union.
(AQO 431/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In recent months, officials from my Department have engaged extensively with local councils to maximise their uptake of the European Union funds that are available for local economic development. The focus of that engagement has been to encourage greater collaboration between councils and Invest Northern Ireland in the development of

support initiatives that will meet the needs of local economies across Northern Ireland. Work is progressing well, and our aim is to have a partnership agreement in place by April 2011. I am determined that all the European Union funds available to us will be utilised for the benefit of Northern Ireland businesses, and we will seek to redeploy resources to other economic development priorities if councils are not in a position to commit to drawing down the full allocation.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for her answer. What European Union funding is available for economic development? In addition, what uses can it be put to by local councils?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In total, £25 million of European regional development funding is available to local councils to support initiatives aimed at strengthening local economies across Northern Ireland over the period 2007-2013. To date, councils have drawn down less than £3.5 million of that money. As far as the Department is concerned, the main focus for the funding is to encourage innovation, research and development and entrepreneurship in the small business sector by bringing money down to the local level. Although uptake has been slower than I would have liked, some councils have brought forward excellent projects, which demonstrate clearly the potential of the programme. Nevertheless, I recognise that some projects are having difficulties with match funding, and that is a theme throughout the available European funds, whether through my Department or, indeed, through DARD to local action groups. I recognise the difficulty; however, I am afraid that, over the next couple of months, we will have to struggle with it.

Mr Butler: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the Department doing to ensure access to the new European funding programmes — JEREMIE and JESSICA — in order to help small and medium-sized enterprises?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The joint European support for sustainable investment in city areas, JESSICA, falls under the Minister for Social Development's remit. Therefore, I have had no discussions about that programme. The joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises (JEREMIE) initiative has been extensively

researched by my officials, in consultation with colleagues in the Department of Finance and Personnel, other United Kingdom regions and the European Investment Bank. JESSICA belongs to the Minister for Social Development, JEREMIE belongs to me, and we will, hopefully, take both forward to make sure that they make a difference to the people of Northern Ireland.

2.45 pm

Mr Cree: On the issue of wider European assistance levels, is the Minister aware of the continuing difficulty in getting INTERREG Iva funding? Is she satisfied that enough is being done by the funding body to progress the issue with vigour?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: Yes, I am aware of the difficulties, and I have spoken about them in the House. The requirement to have match funding seems to be the most fundamental difficulty at present. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is accountable for tourism, energy, telecoms and enterprise, and some good projects seem to be coming forward in those sectors, which we hope will get the match funding and will be able to move on. We have looked at the issue to determine whether we can use other European funding as match funding, but we cannot, because it has to come from national resources. We learned of that recently, and it is a difficulty.

Mr A Maginness: It is disappointing that there is not as good an uptake as there should be. The Minister has pointed out the lack of match funding. Is there any other way in which the Department could encourage councils to participate in such funding? It seems that some additional assistance may be necessary, because a lot of applications are very technical.

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Member is absolutely right. Since the start of the programme, officials from DETI and Invest Northern Ireland have engaged extensively with councils to assist the development of initiatives. They have looked at the needs that exist and at how to address them. Indeed, just last week, on 2 November, DETI hosted a workshop in Dungannon, which was attended by Invest Northern Ireland, DETI and the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to determine how we can work together even better to maximise the impact of

available funding and to ensure that the best possible value for money is achieved.

I want that money to go to local government, because it makes a real difference at a local level. I have seen how, in Craigavon, Cookstown and Dungannon, councils have been able to put together tailored programmes to make a difference. However, later on, in 2012 or whenever, if we come to a determination that the money is not being spent, we or whoever is in post will have to try to redeploy it in other economic development fields. To be clear, however, I want the money to go to local government.

Employment: Private Sector

6. **Lord Browne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to create jobs in the private sector, in light of the recent cuts announced by the Chancellor. (AQO 432/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Executive are currently considering the implications of the 2010 spending review for Northern Ireland. However, it is clear that the local labour market was already under severe pressure even before the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced his spending cuts. In response, I have asked my officials to investigate ways of increasing job opportunities in the short term that would be considered as part of the local Budget process. The aim is to minimise the time spent by individuals in unemployment, which can result in the loss of skills, motivation and employability. I also continue to chair the Executive subcommittee on the economy, which will shortly publish a consultation document on the priorities for growth, in which the increase in employment is a key priority.

Lord Browne: I thank the Minister for her answer and congratulate her, along with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, on attracting Citibank to the Titanic Quarter in what is a very competitive global marketplace at present. Is she taking any steps to attract further investment from China and India to the Titanic Quarter to join Citibank?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: I am pleased that the Member mentioned those two economies because, while we continue to look for jobs in North America,

China, India and the whole Asian piece will be very important for us as we move forward. I was out in India last year, and, as a result of visits and trade missions there, a real partnership has developed between us and India, and Hanif Lalani has become an ambassador between the two countries. He has taken up that job for us and is working closely with Invest Northern Ireland. I am hopeful that product will come forward from India in the near future. I also hope to visit China before the end of the year to assess the prospects in that jurisdiction.

I thank Lord Browne for his comments on Citibank. Its presence is indicative of the way in which Citi views the Northern Ireland economy and its workforce here. It came originally in 2004 with a target of 375 jobs. It has now brought us 950 jobs and will bring us more than 501 jobs in the future. That is a tremendous commitment for a global company, and it sends out a very strong message across the world that Belfast is open for business and has the workforce, the skills and the capabilities and that people should invest in Belfast.

Mrs McGill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the Department doing to implement the green new deal proposals with a view to creating jobs?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: That will not bring enterprise opportunities only, although we are obviously looking at the manufacturing opportunities of the green new deal. We are also looking at it from an energy policy point of view, and I recently had a meeting with the Northern Ireland Manufacturing Focus Group to talk about the opportunities based on energy policy, offshore renewables, anaerobic digestion and so on. However, the manufacturing piece that comes from that is important for us, and, as I said in the House before, I am delighted to see the way in which Harland and Wolff has managed to diversify into large-scale renewables and uses its facilities to build large substations for offshore wind farms. We want to see more of that diversification in that sector, and we will certainly give it the policy framework to do that.

Invest Northern Ireland has a strong team working on the renewables sector. My Department has a sustainable interdepartmental working group, and part of its remit is to look at and work to develop the green new deal. The green new deal includes

proposals to create 2,300 new jobs and, on the back of what it has put forward, we very much want to work with it and try to deliver that.

Mr Durkan: I commend the Minister for her efforts to source new investment and employment from the markets that she mentioned. I note that she said that she has asked her officials to look at ways to increase job opportunities. Has she also asked her officials or others to map existing jobs in the private sector that are highly dependent on public expenditure or public sector contracts so that we can anticipate the possible impact of cuts on them and so that she and colleagues, during their Budget consideration, can look not only at the need to protect front line services but at the need to protect existing economic and employment multipliers?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I thank the Member for his well-put question. When we talk about being able to meet job targets, we talk about jobs created, jobs offered and jobs sustained, which is a very important figure that is sometimes overlooked in a lot of the media coverage. A huge number of jobs, nearly 2,000, have been sustained over the past two years, and we have already hit our Programme for Government target to create 6,500 jobs. We have created 6,600 jobs.

I take very much what he is saying about mapping out. I want to look at public procurement practices and, instead of looking at current public procurement practices, we very much need to consider the Finance and Personnel Committee's suggestion that we move away from that and look at smaller public procurement practices. That is the message that comes through to me very strongly from SMEs across Northern Ireland. They want the opportunity to offer services to government, and we need to look at that.

Employment: Grant Aid

7. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money has been provided in the current financial year as grant aid for large companies to encourage them to locate operations in Northern Ireland; and how many jobs have been created as a result. (AQO 433/11)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Between 1 April and the first week

of November 2010, Invest Northern Ireland offered £25 million worth of assistance in support of foreign-owned companies to enable them either to locate here for the first time or to expand their existing Northern Ireland-based operations. The projects that were supported included businesses such as the Dow Chemical Company, the Terex Corporation, Mercer, MITIE Security and Citi, which made its announcement last week. Together, externally owned projects intend to invest £124 million in the local economy and create over 1,300 new jobs. Although most of those multinational corporations are large businesses, Invest Northern Ireland's focus remains on attracting high-quality jobs, which often tend to be created by higher-value projects that are smaller scale in employment terms.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her answer. In her reply to the previous question, she mentioned small and medium-sized enterprises. Local businesses here have had the experience of huge textile manufacturers upping their plants and machinery and moving to eastern Europe once the grant had expired and the date came for the return of moneys. Given that concern and the fact that £25 million has been spent, what guarantees will the Minister give that the companies will remain loyal to the workforce in Northern Ireland? Over and above Invest NI's criteria, what help can be given to small and medium-sized enterprises?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: If I thought that the only reason that companies were coming here was the grants, I would not have that security of mind, but I know that they are not coming here only for the grants. The grants are nice and help companies to make a decision. However, many of the companies that I mentioned — Dow, Terex, which has taken over Powerscreen, and MITIE Security, which has started a new operation in Mrs Kelly's constituency — are coming here for the workforce and the flexibility of the Administration. They are coming here for the skills and because, if they say to the Minister for Employment and Learning that they need skills, he can look at ways in which he can bring those skills about. They like the flexibility of this small Administration, and we need to take advantage of that.

A discussion continues about foreign direct investment from large companies versus our indigenous SMEs. Many of our indigenous

SMEs are in the supply chain for those large companies. For example, at least 20 small companies exist to feed into Bombardier. Therefore, when we help Bombardier, we also help the supply chain. I wish only that the media would consider that when looking at a lot of those companies. The perception is that they get a large amount of money, and the perception needs to filter out across the region that that helps companies across Northern Ireland.

Mr Bell: Will the Minister comment on the two reports that were published this morning, one from the Ulster Bank and the second from the Northern Bank? Will she comment on the Ulster Bank report in particular, which showed a sharp decline in business activity?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Although one would not think it from listening to some of the media outlets, two reports were published this morning. One is from the Ulster Bank, which, from a survey of businesses across Northern Ireland, says that confidence is very low and that the recession will continue. The Northern Bank report says that GDP growth in Northern Ireland of 1% is expected in 2010. It states that there have been positive data on manufacturing jobs and that the hospitality sector has grown by 3%. As Eddie O'Gorman said this morning, if two economists are asked a question, there are three responses. It is difficult and confusing for businesses across Northern Ireland when they hear that sort of conflicting evidence from the banks. It frustrates me when I hear banks talking about the lack of confidence in small and medium-sized enterprises throughout Northern Ireland. Who is causing that lack of confidence? The banks are causing that lack of confidence throughout Northern Ireland.

Every single Member in the Chamber has had people come to them to say that they have experienced severe difficulties with their banks because of fees, overdrafts or business loans. Then we have had economists from the banks coming to tell us that there is a lack of confidence. Physician, heal thyself: that is what I have to say to the banks today. It is about time that they helped the Executive and the whole of the Northern Ireland economy, and the way to do that is to start to lend money to people who have innovative ideas and who want to be entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland. It is hugely frustrating to hear one side of the story and not to get the rest of it.

3.00 pm

Environment

Local Government: Savings

1. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of the Environment how the local government improvement, collaboration and efficiency programmes will achieve savings similar to those envisaged under the review of public administration.
(AQO 442/11)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr Poets):

At a strategic leadership board meeting on 25 February 2010, the then president of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), Councillor John Matthews, advised me that local government was fully committed to making efficiencies in the order of the £438 million that was outlined in the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) economic appraisal, subject to further detailed work on the figures as recommended in the appraisal.

Colleagues will recall that the PWC economic appraisal estimated the implementation costs of local government reform to be £118 million. The work that the sector is carrying out through its improvement, collaboration and efficiency programme is aimed at ratifying those costs and developing business cases to justify expenditure. From the recent discussions that I have had with local government representatives, there appears to be a realisation that efficiencies can be driven out of the system incrementally to allow for transformation to progress through to eventual restructuring on a self-financing basis. NILGA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers NI (SOLACE) have undertaken to report to me before Christmas on the detail of how they propose to do that.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that he has made the case for the review of public administration (RPA) in the past, does he agree that implementing RPA would, in fact, be a better approach to driving out those savings and efficiencies than voluntary collaboration between councils?

The Minister of the Environment: For anything to happen, the structure has to be correct in the

first instance. If people are not prepared to set the right foundations and create the scenery against which savings can be made, there is no point in going through an amalgamation process other than simply to say that we have done something. Therefore, let us put in place foundations that can make real, tangible savings. That will include councils working together much more closely and collaboratively than is the case.

Mr Givan: Can the Minister confirm whether Sinn Féin, having previously blocked the creation of a single waste authority and of a business services organisation that would have allowed for savings of over £400 million under option 5, has now lifted that blockage and is allowing this to proceed?

The Minister of the Environment: I note that Sinn Féin has referred to that £400 million saving in recent weeks. Therefore, given that it keeps referring to that £400 million, it has clearly moved away, in its public pronouncements, from supporting the option 2 model and must now support the option 5 model. The model that it initially supported saved only £168 million, with £140 million being spent up front. That did not make financial sense to anybody. If Sinn Féin is now on board with making £400 million savings, it is very welcome. Maybe we can now start to move things forward, and, hopefully, Sinn Féin will not hold things back any further.

Mr O'Loan: Given the withdrawal of funding for transition committees, what support is the Department giving to inter-council work in order to produce greater efficiencies? Does the Minister see that leading rapidly to a further attempt to get RPA, as it affects councils, under way?

The Minister of the Environment: The change managers are being supported until March 2011. We expect that those change managers will produce considerable work in that period and that they will be able to identify real, tangible and significant savings from which councils and ratepayers can benefit, either in the form of better services or lower rates. Given that people and business are finding it very difficult these days, we need to control public spending as far as possible, and that is certainly one method of doing so.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Planning Application Fees

3. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to apply the same reduction in planning application fees to churches as that which applies to clubs and societies.
(AQO 444/11)

The Minister of the Environment: I am reviewing planning fees, and this matter will be considered in the context of that review.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his fairly curt response. Given the community contribution made by churches, will the Minister confirm that he is willing to consider a review of that differentiation and perhaps give us some indication as to why the differentiation exists?

The Minister of the Environment: It is a historical differentiation, and it is certainly not one that I am particularly sympathetic to. We are reviewing planning fees. Planning fees are not fit for purpose and need to be changed. It is an area in which we can make a substantial difference as regards raising the income to the Planning Service and having a much fairer fee structure than is the case.

Mr Campbell: The Minister has confirmed the review, but will he look at the possibility of extending the reduction in planning application fees to charitable institutions beyond churches?

The Minister of the Environment: I am prepared to look at everything relating to planning fees. Ironically, we have a planning system whereby the North/South interconnector is costing as much in planning fees as it would cost a farmer to build two chicken houses. We have developers who are building on sites that may yield them £60 million or £80 million, with a maximum planning fee of just over £11,000. We are in situation in which we are robbing the poor to assist the rich. I would like to reverse the role, to be more of a Robin Hood-type character and to create a planning fee structure that does not subsidise the rich to make more money but recognises what can be of real, tangible benefit to communities on the one hand and charges a fair fee on the other.

Mr K Robinson: At the risk of portraying the Minister as the Sheriff of Nottingham, I will ask him whether, given the extremely arduous nature of securing planning permission for even the most minor of changes to historic and listed

buildings, including churches, he would consider applying such reductions in fees to those types of building as well?

The Minister of the Environment: I have another curt answer that is coming the Member's way: yes.

Mr Dallat: In relation to robbing the poor, does the Minister agree that a constant increase in planning fees for ordinary domestic houses at some stage puts people beyond the first rung of the ladder? Is that something that he is bearing in mind and will address?

The Minister of the Environment: Absolutely not. There was a lot of criticism last year because planning fees had not been raised for four or five years and were then raised by 15% following consultation. We recently announced a 2.9% increase in fees, which is commensurate with inflation. I indicated last year that we would be doing that on a yearly basis, because it is not good policy not to raise fees over a period of four or five years. It is much more consistent to raise fees incrementally with inflation, which means that people do not have shocks coming their way. It is a much better way of doing things, and it is also a better way of ensuring that the Planning Service has an income that is more capable and better placed to resource the planning officers that are required to make good planning decisions in an appropriate timescale.

Planning Policy Statement 21

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to reconvene a meeting of the Executive subgroup to progress the issue of the non-farming rural dweller within PPS 21.
(AQO 445/11)

The Minister of the Environment: I remain committed to reconvening a meeting of the Executive subgroup on that issue. However, there are other planning-related matters that need to be tackled before dissolution, such as the planning reform Bill and other planning policy statements. As those are settled, it will be easier for me to give due priority to the non-farming rural dwellers issue.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I am a bit disappointed by what he said. In light of what is going on with Planning Policy Statement 21 (PPS 21) and the present deferrals and the increase in the Planning

Service's workload, it is lucky that we are not bringing anything forward on the issue of non-farming rural dwellers because the Planning Service would not be fit to deal with it. Will the Minister outline when he proposes to have proper workload and financial models to ensure a fit-for-purpose Planning Service?

The Minister of the Environment: All that work is continuing. In the first instance, we have identified that there are 271 surplus planners as things exist. They are surplus not because there is not work for them but because there is not the finance to keep them in place.

On the one hand, I am attacked in the House because not enough planners are doing the work, and, on the other hand, I am attacked because I am seeking to introduce further income to the planning stream. At the same time, I am told that I will not get any further money. If I listened to everybody in the House, we would be in an impossible fix. We need to ensure that there are sufficient planners to take on the work that is there. In adopting the new fee structure, we will be better placed to do that.

The issue of non-farming rural dwellers is one from which we do not need to move away. We need to continue to work on that issue, and I put it to the House that I will work with every party, other Ministers and Committee Chairpersons to try to identify a satisfactory resolution. The issue will be very difficult to resolve and there will not be a perfect solution. However, I am committed to continuing to work to find a solution.

Mr Gallagher: In relation to the Planning Service's workload, does the Minister agree that the longer we try to put off the subgroup meeting, the more cases will be referred back to the Planning Service and, indeed, the Planning Appeals Commission? Does he agree that to create more efficiency and savings, it would be better that the subgroup met to have a further discussion and, hopefully, to agree a better way forward?

The Minister of the Environment: PPS 21 is a final document. When we arrive at a resolution to the issue of non-farming rural dwellers, the decision will be applied as an addendum to PPS 21. The planning reform Bill would give planning powers to local government and put decision-making in the hands of locally elected people who know, for example, Fermanagh and south Down better than I do. I am committed to the

planning reform Bill coming before the House. I hope that others are as committed to ensuring that we pass that form of local democracy down to local people so that they can make those decisions. I am very happy to do that on the basis of checks and balances, as identified in the local government reorganisation Bill, being put in place. That is the way forward.

Mr McCrea: I welcome the Minister's commitment to working with all parties, Committees and Members to ensure that PPS 21 and the issue of non-farming rural dwellers are kept on the table. The Minister referred to other planning policy statements that he has had to bring forward. Will he be so gracious as to inform the House which of those are outstanding and explain any reasons why he has been unable to bring them to the House so that the people of Northern Ireland can benefit?

The Minister of the Environment: We are looking at a number of planning policy statements, which will need to go out to public consultation. One planning policy statement relates to enabling development, which would help us to deliver something that would benefit local communities through tourism, recreation and built heritage. Another relates to economic considerations and would give substantially stronger powers to planners to make determining decisions when there are real, tangible economic benefits to applications or when there is an economic downside. For example, some planning applications may result in the loss of hundreds of jobs. We do not have as much power as we could have for ensuring that determining decisions are made. Those planning policy statements are all in the mix, and I trust that they will be brought before the Executive very soon, to allow for public consultation.

The planning reform Bill will be the mechanism to fundamentally reform planning and to make the system much more responsive and beneficial to the needs of local communities than is the case.

Mr Cree: Could the Minister give his assessment of the number of planning applications for new houses in the countryside that have been granted since the introduction of PPS 21? What controls are in place to ensure that development does not become disproportionate to the level that was envisaged during the formation of PPS 21?

3.15 pm

The Minister of the Environment: I do not have that figure with me. However, I know that it is several thousand, and I will write to the Member to confirm exactly how many have come through.

As designed, PPS 21 is a policy that will lead to sustainable rural development. I accept that there is an issue with non-farming rural dwellers. That was assisted in some ways by the proposed developments on community facilities, the rounding off and the more relaxed proposals on infill dwellings. Indeed, I also believe that it is now easier to get replacement dwellings than was previously the case. If that is not happening, planners have not listened to policy. It should be happening, Members should find that on the ground, and, if it is not happening, I want to know about it. With all that, the policy is not having a negative impact on the countryside. We are not going down the route of bungalow blight, as happened in Donegal, because we are linking two existing clusters or there is already a building on the site to be replaced.

Sudden Oak Death

5. **Rev Dr Robert Coulter** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on how the sudden oak death disease has affected parts of Northern Ireland; and what action he is taking to curtail the spread of the disease in the North Antrim area.
(AQO 446/11)

The Minister of the Environment: I understand that question 5 was transferred to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is still on our list.

The Minister of the Environment: Apologies for that. I understood that it was transferred to DARD, and it was removed from my file as a consequence.

Planning Policy Statement 7: Applications

6. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been refused to date under the new guidelines contained in the addendum to PPS 7.
(AQO 447/11)

The Minister of the Environment: To date, my Department has refused 21 planning applications under the guidance contained with the addendum to Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7).

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer. How effective does the Minister feel that his policy is in preventing overcrowding in residential areas?

The Minister of the Environment: A lot of the problems that arose with the demolition of, very often, quality period dwellings and their replacement with apartments went back to the regional development strategy, its 60% target for brownfield development and the view that houses with large gardens were brownfield sites when it was clear to the wider community that they were not. We needed to do something to challenge that. The addendum to PPS 7 is an effective mechanism for that, and a number of planning applications — 21 that the Department is aware of — have been refused so far. It is important that, through a stack-them-high policy, areas of quality residential development are not allowed to lose their character and be transformed from predominantly family-based large dwellings with large gardens to apartments.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. The addendum to PPS 7 included measures to help to reduce flash flooding in urban areas by encouraging the greater use of permeable paving in new residential developments. Will the Minister detail exactly how such actions will be encouraged? In large areas, or areas with a higher than average flow of water, are there ways in which that permeable paving could be made mandatory rather than just encouraged?

The Minister of the Environment: It was my preference for it to be mandatory, but, having taken advice from people who know about these things, I understand that that could not happen. It is up to planning officers on the ground, when negotiating with individuals who are lodging planning applications, to ensure that as much permeable paving is installed as possible, and to attempt to reduce the amount of water that runs off as a result of flash flooding. No one wants homes to be flooded, and if actions can be taken that mean that that will not happen, it is up to us to ensure that those are pursued.

Ms Lo: As the Minister is well aware, the residents of south Belfast warmly welcome the

addendum to PPS 7. Will applications that were submitted before the implementation of the addendum be subject to the same guidelines?

The Minister of the Environment: There may be some flexibility depending on how old a planning application is. However, by and large, it is this planning policy that is relevant when a decision is being made. If a decision has not been made heretofore, the addendum to PPS 7 should be the planning policy that is used. There may be other things, such as planning history, that are applicable to a particular site and create greater flexibility. However, most decisions should be based on the addendum.

Local Government: Transition Committees

7. **Mr Savage** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the recent work of the local government transition committees.
(AQO 448/11)

The Minister of the Environment: I have been impressed with the work that voluntary transition committees have done to date. I consider them to have made a very valuable contribution to preparing the councils in their clusters for amalgamation. The work of the voluntary transition committees has also contributed to the development of the sector's proposals for their improvement, collaboration and efficiency programme. The Northern Ireland Local Government Association and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers have undertaken to report to me before Christmas on the detail of their proposals. That will include what future role, if any, is envisaged for transition committees to deliver the improvement, collaboration and efficiency agenda.

In the absence of Executive clarity on the way forward for reform and in light of the budgetary pressures faced by the Executive, it is hard to justify my Department's continued funding of transition committees. I, therefore, decided to suspend the funding from 31 October 2010, with the exception of funding for change managers, which will continue until 31 March 2011.

Mr Savage: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister accept that, if RPA boundaries were finalised within an agreed timescale, the

scope for co-operation and potential for savings would be quite significant? Does he see an opportunity to enable councils to move forward with what they intended to do initially?

The Minister of the Environment: We are looking at three options. One is to go ahead with council elections next year and to have new councils for a shadow period. Another option is to have council elections in 2014 for a shadow period of a year to come in in 2015, with the transfer of powers in advance. The other option is to hold off the transfer of powers until 2015. However, making savings must be our fundamental direction. We must look at the services that councils deliver to ensure that what we do makes the public better off.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his answer. The Minister stated in the House recently that if the party opposite to him had wanted RPA back on the table, he would put it back on the table. There has been a lot of talk about the savings that could have accrued from RPA. I understand that a lot of those savings related to the single waste authority and the single business unit organisation. Will the Minister have ongoing discussions with NILGA and local government about where savings can be made and whether people can be convinced of the merit of those organisations?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes. NILGA is working on proposals for how it can deliver the equivalent efficiency savings, without having a business services organisation. Those will be submitted to me. That is our direction of travel.

Mr Bell: Does the Minister agree that it is important that, even though the finance has been withdrawn from the transition committees, councillors still work together to see where they can deliver real efficiency and real change to put more money back into the pocket of the ratepayer?

The Minister of the Environment: I have said nothing to indicate that transition committees should not meet. Councillors will not be paid for participating in transition committees. However, if they decide to continue to meet to identify savings that will be passed on to ratepayers, I warmly welcome that.

Taxis: Licensing

8. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of the Environment when the operator's licence will be introduced under the Taxis Act (NI) 2008. (AQO 449/11)

The Minister of the Environment: Subject to legislative and Assembly processes, I plan to introduce the new taxi operator licensing regulations by March 2011.

Mr P Maskey: The Act was passed in 2008, and the Minister is telling us that it will be introduced some three years later. Why has it taken so long to implement the secondary legislation?

The Minister of the Environment: The first part of the secondary legislation — an extension of the Driver and Vehicle Agency's powers to the Belfast Harbour — was done in October 2009. The second part was to provide the powers necessary for the introduction of new and more modern taximeters by June this year, which was postponed as a result of advice from the Departmental Solicitors' Office — we do not want to be operating ultra vires. The introduction of powers that allow for a taxi operator permit scheme is being put back from December this year to March next year, which is a fairly short period.

All the other elements that were supposed to kick in in August 2011, June 2013, July 2012, September 2012 and September 2013 are on schedule. The other element is support powers for a single licensing system. That was not supposed to be introduced until September 2014, but it has been brought forward to August 2011.

Those elements are complex and have to be done properly and correctly. They are being rolled out, albeit a bit slower than taxi drivers would like to see.

Magherafelt Area Plan

9. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Magherafelt area plan. (AQO 450/11)

The Minister of the Environment: The last session of the independent examination of the draft Magherafelt area plan took place on 17 June 2009. I await the Planning Appeals Commission's (PAC) report on the examination. The current PAC advice is that the report should

be delivered by the end of this calendar year. My Department will consider the report and provide a programme for the adoption of the Magherafelt area plan, which we expect to complete during 2011.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that the longer the process lasts, the more detrimental the effect will be on the future of the economy in the Magherafelt area? Does he have any idea of timescales for when this will actually happen?

The Minister of the Environment: There was an inordinate amount of objections to the Magherafelt area plan. I think that a lot of them were contrived. There were in and around 3,000 objections to what should have been a relatively small area plan. There was probably too much cognisance of the objections, given that they were very similar in nature, and they were allowed to delay the process unnecessarily.

However, we have got to the point where we should have the report back from the Planning Appeals Commission this year, which should allow us to move ahead with due process next year and have it released in its final form by my Department. I will encourage my Department to respond as quickly as possible to this particular area plan once the report comes back from the PAC.

Waste Management

10. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made by the three waste management groups in meeting their EU landfill diversionary targets. (AQO 451/11)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland landfill allowance scheme (NILAS) translates the EU landfill directive targets for reducing the amount of biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) that is sent to landfill into annual allowances for each district council in Northern Ireland. It does not set annual allowances on a waste management group basis.

Good progress has been made by district councils since NILAS started operating in 2005. In 2008-09, the latest date for which finalised figures are available, all district councils met their NILAS targets. In that year, councils collectively landfilled 475,080 tonnes of BMW, against the allowance of 626,925 tonnes, which represented a 7% decrease on the previous

year. It is expected that district councils will meet the 2009-2010 target of 470,000 tonnes.

The NILAS targets for 2012-13 — 320,000 tonnes — and 2019-2020 — 220,000 tonnes — represent more of a challenge for district councils. However, there is a good prospect of meeting those targets through continuing efforts to reduce waste, increased recycling rates and the implementation of appropriate waste infrastructure programmes.

Mr Brady: Is the Minister considering any incentives to ensure that targets are met?

The Minister of the Environment: Yes; we have introduced incentives for councils. One of those is Rethink Waste, where we offer around £5 million. I have no doubt that, as a result, councils will be able to recycle considerably more waste than they currently do.

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Irish Language Strategy

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly notes that correspondence sent to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure by the NI Human Rights Commission on 17 August 2010 stated that the Minister's failure to introduce Irish language legislation is not human rights-compliant; and calls on the Minister to bring forward his proposals for a strategy to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language in accordance with obligations agreed in the St Andrews Agreement 2006. — [Mr McElduff.]

Mr D Bradley: I beg to move the amendment: Leave out all after "compliant" and insert

“; acknowledges the legislative requirement of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 for an Irish language strategy; further notes the commitment in the agreement at Saint Andrews that ‘The Government will introduce an Irish Language Act’; and calls on the Minister to bring forward proposals for an Irish Language Bill.”

Éirím leis an leasú ar an rún a mholadh. Gabhaim buíochas leis na Comhaltaí ar thaobh mo láimhe deise a thug an rún faoi bhráid an Tionóil. Tá áthas orm gur glacadh leis an leasú uainne. Is rún tábhachtach é seo, agus tá gá le díospóireacht chiallmhar a dhéanamh air agus beart a dhéanamh ó thaobh reachtaíocht teangan a thabhairt isteach anseo sa Tuaisceart a luaithe agus is féidir.

I thank the colleagues to my right who tabled the motion before the Assembly, and I am grateful that they have accepted my amendment.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The report of the committee of experts on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was published in Strasbourg in April 2010. It records the restoration of devolution since the previous monitoring round following the St Andrews Agreement in 2006. The committee noted that the Northern Ireland Executive had failed to deliver a report to it on matters that were devolved to Northern Ireland. The reason given for that non-compliance was the failure of the

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to agree on the text to be included in the report. A promise was given that the missing supplementary report would be provided at a later stage, but apparently, to date, that supplement has not been received.

The committee of experts also notes the failure of the Assembly to legislate since the restoration of devolution. The committee makes the point that it is its belief that legislation is needed in Northern Ireland similar to that for Welsh in Wales and Scottish Gaelic in Scotland. The experts also expressed their agreement with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission that a legislative basis is even more important in the environment of political conflict as a means of achieving reconciliation. That view is also supported by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. If legislation is not forthcoming from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the committee of experts proposes that the UK Parliament could bring it forward under its parallel legislative competence. It would be a sign of the maturity of this House if it could legislate for the Irish language, but it seems to me that, at the moment, that maturity is some way off, and that is to be regretted.

The committee of experts observed that the progress of the measures to support the Irish language and Ulster Scots are being held up because of inappropriate claims for parity of treatment for both languages. The European charter is based on treating each regional or minority language in accordance with its specific situation. It notes that the situation of the two languages is quite different here in Northern Ireland and that language measures directed towards each language individually are needed. It says that that is the only way that both languages can be protected and promoted according to their specific needs. I agree with that view.

The Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 places a statutory duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt a strategy to enhance and protect the Irish language. As noted in the motion and the amendment, that work has not yet been done. The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has not yet brought forward a strategy, and the committee of experts says that any strategy that attempts to strive

towards parity between Irish and Ulster Scots will not serve the speakers of either language but will hold back the development of both languages. It is abundantly clear from the report of the committee of experts that the obligations and commitments under the St Andrews Agreement and the 2006 Act have not been met. Not only do we not have an Irish language Act, we do not have a strategy. Those matters need to be addressed without further delay. The Minister should abide by the views of the committee of experts, which is an independent panel that reports on the situation as it is.

Language legislation would uphold the rights of Irish speakers and help to make the issue free from contention. Mr McElduff outlined many of the developments that have taken place in the Irish language in Northern Ireland. Many of those developments are products of the enthusiasm of the Irish-speaking community. One such development is Irish-medium education, which has blossomed here in recent years, with some support from the Department of Education of late. Initially, it was largely as a result of the voluntary work of many individuals throughout Northern Ireland. That sector of education is producing Irish-speakers who are growing up from an early age using the language every day. When they mature into adults, they will want the same rights as their English-speaking counterparts. In my view, the only way to deliver those rights is to introduce comprehensive Irish language legislation.

The introduction of Irish language legislation is not, as some may view it, a hostile takeover by the Irish language community; it is merely a demand by Irish speakers for their rights to be recognised. I do not think that that is too much to ask. As I said, it would be an indication of the maturity of the House if we could look on the issue dispassionately and afford those who speak Irish in Northern Ireland and want to live their lives as Irish speakers the rights that are their due.

A Cheann Comhairle, críochnóidh mé leis an smaoineamh sin. Sílim féin go bhfuil gá le reachtaíocht teangan sa chuid seo den tír. Tá sí ann cheana sa Deisceart, sa Bhreatain Bheag agus in Albain; ní fheicim cad ina thaobh nach mbeadh na cearta céanna ag cainteoirí Gaeilge sa chuid seo den tír. Mura n-éiríonn leis an rún seo faoi mar atá sé leasaithe, ní dóigh liom go mbeidh deireadh leis an scéal ansin. Tá rún daingean ag Gaeilgeoirí i dTuaisceart Éireann

leanúint ar aghaidh lena bhfeachtas go dtí go mbainfear amach na cearta a ba chóir a bheith acu.

Even though the motion and the amendment may not be successful, that will not be the end of the story. I know that Irish speakers throughout Northern Ireland and throughout the whole island are firm and resolute in their belief that one day they will achieve what they want, which is legislation that affords them the rights that are their due.

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Molaim an rún don Tionól, faoi mar atá sé leasaithe.

Lord Browne: I oppose the motion and the amendment. I fully support the Minister in his decision not to introduce Irish language legislation. To do so would be a grave error. It could both damage community relations and impose significant economic costs at a time of severe financial difficulties. It has been estimated that legislation in that area could cost around £290 million. I believe that the public would rather that that money was employed to address much more serious issues, such as unemployment, funding of schools and hospitals and financial support for the regeneration of businesses.

There is no mention of introducing Irish language legislation in the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006. One must, therefore, ask where the term “Minister’s failure”, which is in the motion, has come from. However, section 15 introduces a commitment, through insertion of section 28D into the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which requires the Executive to adopt a strategy to protect and develop the Irish language and, indeed, Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture. The Minister has already proposed the introduction of a strategy for regional minority languages. That approach has my full support. I know that he is fully engaged in bringing that strategy forward. Again, I must say that none of the Act’s provisions stipulates that the Executive should bring forward an Irish language Act. I can see no compelling reason for doing so.

There can be no doubt that it is a devolved matter. Some Members have suggested that there may be an obligation on the British Government to bring forward such legislation. If Sinn Féin members take that view and seriously believe that an Irish language Act would be

beneficial, perhaps they should take up their seats at Westminster and argue their case there.

The case for the legislation appears to rest on an assumption that, at present, Irish speakers suffer some form of discrimination. In fact, the reverse is true. The Northern Ireland census returns in 2001 revealed that 10.4% of the population claim to speak Irish. The proportion of fluent speakers is, undoubtedly, considerably less. Despite that, the local media provide a substantial number of Irish language programmes. In addition, similar programming that originates from the Irish Republic is readily accessible. We are all aware that state funding is provided for the establishment of Irish language schools for people who wish their children to be educated in that language. Therefore, I ask where evidence of that discrimination is to be found. In fact, what supporters of the legislation really seek is a privileged position for the Irish language that is impossible to justify.

Moreover, I am firmly convinced that an Irish language Act would have damaging social consequences. Although we live in a divided society that comprises two contested national identities, the Irish language has never been the sole preserve of one of those identities. It should be remembered that Presbyterians helped to keep the language alive in earlier centuries. Enactment of that legislation would politicise the language and further add to the perception in the unionist community that the Irish language is a political symbol. That should not be allowed to happen. Politics should not be allowed to subvert cultural diversity.

Turning to the human rights question, I find it amusing and, indeed, ironic that the Human Rights Commission chooses to cite the prevention of freedom of worship in Russia to support the case for the introduction of an Irish language Act to protect minority language interests here. In recent years, freedom of expression has been severely curtailed in that country. In particular, demonstrations of support for separatist minorities, such as the Chechens, have been suppressed. Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights states that enjoyment of rights and freedoms set forth in the convention shall be secured without discrimination on any grounds, including language.

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

Lord Browne: For those reasons, I strongly oppose an Irish language Act.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Lord Browne: I commend the Minister's proposal to bring forward a strategy.

3.45 pm

Mr K Robinson: I oppose the motion and the amendment. Certain subjects are extremely sensitive in our divided society, and, unfortunately, the Irish language is one of them. That is why it is important that we address Irish language issues in the least divisive way and why inclusivity rather than exclusivity should be our watchword. Given the sensitivities involved, today's motion betrays a legalistic mindset among its supporters. That is totally inappropriate and will serve only to divide the Assembly in an unhelpful and, ultimately, unproductive way.

The Minister has outlined his intention to introduce a strategy for regional and minority languages, which include Irish and Ulster Scots. The Minister needs to step up to the plate on that matter and go ahead and bring forward that more inclusive and less politically divisive strategy as soon as possible. In his efforts, he needs to be aided by some of his ministerial colleagues who, up to now, apparently, have not responded to his request for information to let the process proceed.

The Belfast Agreement or Good Friday Agreement of 1998 included a commitment to linguistic diversity. It stated:

"All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities".

Those are all part of our cultural wealth. In the case of the supporters of the motion, I wonder how much time and effort has gone into protecting, enhancing and valuing the ethnic languages, which are live languages that are used every day.

The agreement went on to list eight further specific UK Government commitments in relation to the Irish language. They included commitments, where appropriate and desired,

to take resolute action to promote the Irish language; to facilitate and encourage the use of Irish in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand; and to seek to remove, where possible, any restrictions that would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of Irish.

The St Andrews Agreement, which was really the work of the DUP and Sinn Féin, to the exclusion of other parties, stated:

"The Government will introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting on the experience of Wales and Ireland and work with the incoming Executive to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language."

It added:

"The Government firmly believes in the need to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture and will support the incoming Executive in taking this forward."

The Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 listed three strategies to develop the Irish language. Section 15 lists them as:

"(1) The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.

(2) The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture.

(3) The Executive Committee —

must keep under review each of the strategies and may from time to time adopt a new strategy or revise the strategy."

Mr Speaker, note the use of the phrase "shall adopt a strategy". It does not say that the Executive will introduce an Act. A strategy and an Act might or might not be the same thing. Not every strategy involves an Act. It seems to me that there is an agreed need to develop strategies and that we need to keep those under review.

I oppose the motion for all of the reasons that I have outlined. It is poor, divisive, exclusive and, ultimately, unhelpful. Furthermore, as other Members have said, given the serious economic restrictions on the public purse, it is a matter that, I believe, is well down the public's list of priorities. They wish the Assembly to address other issues.

Ms Lo: The Alliance Party supports the thrust of the motion and the amendment but with some major caveats. I am disappointed that the Alliance Party's amendment was not selected. I was hoping to widen the debate beyond tribal discussions around Irish and Ulster Scots to discuss a language strategy that is inclusive of all ethnic minorities and sign languages.

Mr O'Loan: Will the Member defend her use of the word "tribal" in relation to the Irish language? I find it most inappropriate and unhelpful.

Mr Speaker: The Member has one extra minute.

Ms Lo: To me, they are like two different tribes. That is why I used the word "tribal".

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: No. I have already given way to one of your colleagues.

I was certainly hoping to widen the debate beyond such discussions around Irish and Ulster Scots to discuss a language strategy that is inclusive of all ethnic minority languages and sign languages and to address real needs, rather than parity of esteem.

Mr P Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In a speech on the use of language, people were called "tribes". Is that a good term to be used in the House? I would like to hear your views on that.

Mr Speaker: It is certainly not unparliamentary, and I see it very much as part of the cut and thrust of debate in the House.

Ms Lo: The Alliance Party respects the position of Irish and Ulster Scots in the cultural heritage of this region. I understand that the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages are regarded as regional minority languages, which receive protection under the European Convention on Human Rights. That said, the context in which minority languages exist in Northern Ireland is considerably different from most other situations in Europe, where there may be geographical areas in which the official language of the state is not the first language locally, and there is a real need to ensure equity in access to services.

Furthermore, the position of Irish and Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland is not the same, and there are differences in the level of interest and

demand for use. The Alliance Party is happy to facilitate and support the participation and enjoyment of languages through an inclusive language scheme. We are, however, wary of any legislation that imposes an onerous rights-based approach to language issues. That could create costly and disproportionate burdens on public bodies, especially when few people use Irish or Ulster Scots as first languages and virtually everyone can use and understand English.

Much of the European human rights protections regarding languages apply only to minority languages that are indigenous to the area. That is a somewhat narrow view that neglects the much wider diversity and language need in our midst. Since the EU expansion in 2004, we have seen a huge increase in the number of migrants coming to Northern Ireland whose first language is not English. It is estimated that there are up to 80,000 migrants from across the world in Northern Ireland. It is likely that there are more people speaking Polish or Chinese than speaking Irish on a daily basis in our towns and cities.

Ethnic minority communities — both long-established and more recent arrivals — would like to see a wide-ranging minority language strategy to address two issues. First, they require more information on services to be available in their language to make it easier for them to understand governmental structures and access essential services in order to better integrate into society. Since 2004, for example, Northern Ireland Health and Social Care's interpreting service has received over 150,000 requests for its services in more than 40 different languages. Services such as those are vital for the day-to-day lives of residents of Northern Ireland. It is a matter of need, rather than ideology. A minority language strategy could mainstream translation and interpreting into all government Departments and statutory bodies that have contact with ethnic minorities to ensure that services are easily available to everyone.

Secondly, they would like some recognition of mother-tongue teaching for the children, as those communities are entitled to keep their language alive by passing it from generation to generation. That is no different to learning Irish or Ulster Scots. Currently, community organisations such as the Polish Association, the Chinese Welfare Association and the Belfast

Islamic Centre provide mother-tongue teaching to children without any public funding at all, compared to the £6 million given by DEL in 2009 to the Ulster Scots and Irish language bodies.

There is one other aspect that I want to emphasise that falls into a discussion of language: the need of those who rely on the various sign languages.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member please bring her remarks to a close? Her time is up.

Ms Lo: This raises the issue of a real need for communication.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Humphrey to speak, I advise the House that this is his maiden speech. The convention is absolutely clear: maiden speeches should be heard without interruption.

Mr Humphrey: As I begin my maiden contribution to the House, I am mindful of the gentleman I replaced. I pay tribute to Nigel Dodds, my predecessor, for the contribution he made to the Assembly, not just as a Member but as Minister for Social Development, Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Minister of Finance and Personnel. He is a politician of hard work, commitment, honesty and decency, and I am honoured to succeed Nigel, a man for whom popularity was never above principle. I wish him well as he continues to lead our party in Her Majesty's Parliament at Westminster.

I oppose the motion and the amendment. As we move forward, we continue to build a normal society and a tolerant community in Northern Ireland. Culture, history and tradition have long divided our community — and we do have one community in Northern Ireland. To facilitate the development and maturation of our society, we must all learn to appreciate, accept and tolerate our respective cultures, history, tradition and politics. If we, the parties elected to the House, are serious about a shared future, we must embrace those concepts.

There are those who seek to use an Irish language Act to be divisive. The question must be asked: why? Is an Irish language Act intended to genuinely improve community relations? Is it intended to improve recognition and understanding of the Irish language, or, as I suspect of some, is it to be used as a tool and a means of division or as a political football? I genuinely believe that an Irish language Act will

further polarise our divided community at this time. Some have used the Irish language as a tool. Sadly, they are not about promoting the Irish language but, instead and unfortunately, they seek to use the language for political reasons, often to the huge annoyance of those who truly love and cherish it. On occasion, many of those who speak loudest about an Irish language Act and their Irish culture are those who have peddled intolerance towards my culture and my tradition. What they need to appreciate is that Northern Ireland can move forward only with toleration and accommodation, not domination.

Yesterday, I listened to the new SDLP leader and Member for South Down, Ms Ritchie, speak at her party conference. She said that she and her colleagues needed to persuade unionists of the validity of a united Ireland. As a confident and convinced unionist, I will remain unconvinced of that and not least of the economic argument for it. However, I commend Ms Ritchie for her responsible attitude. I also listened to the deputy leader of that party talk of building trust and reconciliation. He, too, adopted a very responsible attitude. The same principle must apply to an Irish language Act. I do not believe that community consensus exists in Northern Ireland at present for such an Act. Members must realise that such an Act at this time would have the potential to polarise our community, increase division, heighten distrust and damage community relations.

We must build a society at peace with itself, encourage tolerance, embrace diversity, avoid cultural apartheid, unite our community and all act responsibly. The Assembly has an enormous responsibility to move society forward and give leadership to our community, because it is a community in transition. We must build a united Northern Ireland, and nothing that the Assembly does should harm that process or fail us in reaching that goal.

Our community deserves better. We must all act responsibly and focus on removing division and embracing diversity, because diversity, not least in the city of Belfast, threatens no one. I fear that some seek to use an Irish language Act or legislation to perpetuate division, and I regret that.

4.00 pm

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i dtacaíocht an rúin. Tá mé an-sásta go bhfuil muid ag

díospóireacht an ábhair thábhachtaigh seo tráthnóna inniu.

I support the motion and welcome the amendment, and I hope that both reassure the Irish language community that our work will continue in the promotion of its rights, in line with agreements made at St Andrews.

Anna Lo stated that the issue is tribal: indeed it is not. The promotion of the rights of any person is not a denial of another person's rights, nor should it be reduced to that type of tribal issue. Ken Robinson said that now is the time for the Minister to "step up to the plate" in line with the strategy. That is very much part of our motion and the amendment. It surprises me that his party is not supporting either. Ken Robinson has been a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for longer than I have been, and he knows that the issue has a long history of prevarication. An attempt has been made to pretend that something is being done when, in essence, nothing is being done. That is borne out by examination. The motion is not a legalistic attempt but is our pointing out that the Department has failed and continues to fail.

Departmental officials appeared before the Committee on numerous occasions. Several times, they told us that the proposed strategy was nearly ready to go to the Executive. We heard those words for the first time when Gregory Campbell was the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. Officials returned to the Committee when Edwin Poots was the Minister and said that the proposals had to be tweaked but that they were nearly, nearly ready to bring the strategy to the Executive. Edwin Poots moved on, and officials appeared for a third time, making the —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will.

Mr Campbell: I think that the Member's chronology of events is wrong. Edwin Poots was the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure before, not after, me.

Mr McCartney: I apologise for that. However, my point is that the Member's officials and Edwin Poots's officials told the Committee that the strategy was nearly, and then nearly, nearly, ready to go before the Executive. I note that the Member did not contradict my point.

Then we had the incumbent Minister. I do not want to convict people by their demeanour, but it was obvious on the day that his officials came before the Committee that they would tell us, for a third time, that they were nearly, nearly, nearly ready to present the strategy. That is why I told the Minister that I was not prepared to ask him a question because, as Barry McElduff said, it was like a scene from 'The Wizard of Oz', when the curtains were pulled back, and there was nothing behind them. That is where the Minister finds himself today.

In the interim, the Minister tried to introduce smokescreens in an attempt to pretend that the strategy had been delayed suddenly. The Minister is using the excuse that the Education Department or the BBC is to blame. Edwin Poots did not use that excuse and nor did Gregory Campbell. However, the Committee has not been provided with any evidence of that from the Minister. Indeed, the evidence is to the contrary.

That is what we are trying to state through the motion: we are here to promote the rights of the Irish language community and to highlight the fact that this Minister has not shown proper intent. In my opinion, he has almost done the opposite. Each time he appeared before the Committee, he gave excuse after excuse as to why he is not pursuing a strategy to the point that we have come to a standstill. Today's motion was moved to highlight that standstill.

There have been two consultations. The first consultation showed overwhelming support for an Irish language Act and a strategy. That result was rejected, excuses were given, and a second consultation took place, perhaps because the first did not provide the expected answer. The second consultation resulted in the same answer. In fairness, this Minister has not sought a third consultation — yet.

That is why we make the pledge today in the Assembly that our work to deliver an Irish language Act and ensuring that there will be an Irish language strategy will continue. We say that despite the fact that the Minister has had a dead hand in ensuring that that has not happened. Our work will continue.

Mr Campbell: The issue of an Irish language strategy has appeared from time to time in the Assembly, in the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure and elsewhere. Mr McCartney talked about the rights of the Irish language community. We need to look at the rights of

that community, and the non-Irish speaking community, which just —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: I will in a second. The non-Irish speaking community happens to comprise 99.8% of our population.

Mr McCartney: I made the point in response to Anna Lo. When one person's rights are promoted, the rights of any other person are not being negated.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

Mr Campbell: Thank you for that, Mr Speaker. I am up for that. It is about the first time that I have had anything out of Sinn Féin, but that is good. We are talking about the rights of the Irish language community and those of the non-Irish speaking community, which just happens to comprise 99.8% of the population. Since devolution, a number of us have examined whether anything that happens in the Assembly or Departments infringes on those rights. Frankly, I do not see anything that infringes, inhibits, restricts or prevents the Irish language from being spoken, pursued or followed as a concept, idea or language.

Flowing from that is a financial consequence. If people demand certain rights and express those rights in demands for funding, that has an implication. Just as there are Irish language enthusiasts in Northern Ireland, there are Ulster-Scots enthusiasts. During direct rule — thankfully less so under devolution — the money that was allocated to the enthusiasts of the Irish language far outweighed the money that was allocated to Ulster Scots. Not only is the Irish language not restricted —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: I do not think that I will get another minute, but, if I get a few seconds, I will give way.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Is he aware that during direct rule, the disparity between the funding between Ulster Scots and Irish was £8 to Irish for every £1 to Ulster Scots?

Mr Campbell: Yes. When I became Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I stated that that would need to change. Thankfully, that is in

the process of changing. Some Irish language enthusiasts may feel that they will lose out if there has to be some form of parity, but that is not necessarily true. One thing is for sure, however: Irish language enthusiasts will not get the barrel load of money that they used to get while Ulster Scots was deprived. That will not happen.

If there are no restrictions, inhibitions or deprivation for those who pursue the Irish language, what is the motion about? This is when I come to the nub of my comments. When I became Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I received a request from the honourable Member for West Belfast Mr Gerry Adams, who says he was never in the IRA. He asked to see me to discuss the Irish language Act. That meeting was held in this Building. He opened the meeting by saying that he wanted to discuss the Irish language Act. My response was very direct: I said that it would be a very short meeting.

From there, it went downhill. However, the relevance of my point is not the content of the meeting but what happened after it, when Mr Adams and others went to the Great Hall to give their version of what happened. I can stand over what I said and what was said in response in the meeting. It was very direct and very robust, and Mr Adams left under no illusion about the outcome. However, despite the very clear, precise and unambiguous wording of what he was told — that there would be no Irish language Act — he went to the Great Hall and said that he thought that the Minister realised there was going to be such an Act. That is what he said.

Therefore, that is the nature of some, although not all, of those who advocate the Irish language, and it demonstrates what they are after. We need to move on the basis of a languages strategy that gives recognition to people, whether they be Ulster Scots — if there is an ethnic origin and a language there — Irish, or people who wish to pursue any other language.

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

Mr Campbell: I will bring my remarks to a conclusion, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

We need to do that in a way that reconciles people and does not give offence, which,

unfortunately, some advocates of the Irish language have done in the past.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Burns: I will say a few brief words on the subject. This is a very important debate. I do not wish to repeat every point that party colleagues and other Members made. I am not an expert on human rights, so I will state simply and straightforwardly how I see things.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure has acted in bad faith towards the Irish language for a long time. I am certain that I am not the only person who thinks that. On the one hand, the Minister says that he is committed to the development of a single strategy for regional languages, in this case Irish and Ulster Scots. That is a fine statement. On the other hand, he delays and stalls on legislating. More than once, his party has belittled the Irish language and questioned its cultural value. It is no wonder that supporters of the Irish language, people in the nationalist community and now the Human Rights Commission do not trust him to handle the situation correctly.

As we all know, the St Andrews Agreement gave a firm commitment to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language, as well as a commitment to promote Ulster Scots. The DUP's behaviour towards the Irish language since the signing of the St Andrews Agreement flies totally in the face of the agreement and is contrary to its spirit. Therefore, it is of no surprise to me that the Human Rights Commission is taking the Minister to task on the matter.

I do not want to be negative, because there is no doubt that, when we look at the bigger picture since St Andrews, we have made a lot of progress on some key issues, such as policing and justice, which was a much more difficult subject to resolve than minority languages. However, the language issue remains a huge sticking point. All parties in the House are publicly committed, in good faith, to the spirit of genuine partnership. If we are to have a shared future in which the culture, rights and aspirations of all are respected and valued, we must have an Irish language Act. Whether he likes it or not, the Minister has a duty to the Irish language, and he should introduce a Bill as quickly as possible, not only to meet his obligations to recognise, respect, protect and fulfil human rights but because it is the

right thing to do. I support the motion and the amendment.

4.15 pm

Mr Adams: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin agus an leasaithe.

I speak in favour of the motion, and I accept the amendment. I listened to Members from the Benches opposite. For over three years, successive Ministers have refused to bring forward an Irish language strategy or an Irish language Act, putting forward very feeble excuses on both matters. I have spoken to many members of the DUP on the issue, and I have had one-to-one conversations with others, but none of them brought forward a rational reason for their opposition to the Irish language, which is a living language that is the legacy of all the people of this island. In fact, their position is totally contrary to the very proud protestant, particularly Presbyterian, patronage of the language.

I am a united Irelander, and they are United Kingdomers. Interestingly, there is a Welsh language Act in Wales and a Scots language Act in Scotland. This is the only part of the so-called United Kingdom in which native language speakers do not have the same rights as others. No matter how much I scratch at this, I have to conclude that their position is based on ignorance and good, old-fashioned bigotry. I say that with regret and some sense of disappointment. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Adams: Of course, the Member for Derry is entirely right when he says — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Adams: — that I said that he knows that there will be an Irish language Act, because he does. The strength of the Irish language, its connections and the vibrancy of its resurgence for some time are evidence and proof of that. On this side of the Chamber, we are optimists, so we are looking for somebody to take a — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Adams: — leap of imagination; a leap forward into space so that they look on language as non-threatening. The fact that they cannot

even listen to me speaking in English is proof of the silliness that goes on. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Adams: Those of us who support the Irish language and who come from Irish language communities need to keep doing what we are doing, and so long as those on the Benches opposite have a say in that Department, of course they will, in a futile way, continue to string things out.

I remember when the first Sinn Féin councillors went to Belfast City Council. They were not allowed to take their seats, park their cars or speak. Indeed, the entire council was stood down by those on the Benches opposite to prevent Sinn Féin councillors being on committees. Look at the situation now. Therefore, it is only a matter of time before we have an Irish language strategy and an Irish language Act, and if the chaps opposite would wake up to that reality, we would all be in a better place. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure

(Mr McCausland): I welcome the opportunity to clarify my position on minority languages in Northern Ireland, and, for that reason, I welcome the opportunity afforded to me by this afternoon's debate. There is no requirement in the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006 to bring forward an Irish language Act. I repeat: there is no requirement in that Act. However, that does not seem to register with some people, who have difficulty in reading the Act and, therefore, cannot quite grasp the fact that I am putting forward.

Section 15(1) states:

"The Executive Committee shall adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language."

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

Secondly, section 15(2) states:

"The Executive shall adopt a strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture."

I am not in favour of and there is no legislative requirement for an Irish language Act. I believe

that there is insufficient community consensus for such an Act. There are significant potential costs and there is a real possibility that legislation could undermine good relations and, in so doing, prove counterproductive to those who wish to see the language developed in a non-politicised and inclusive manner in accordance with the vision of a shared and better future.

As Members are aware, I have recently been engaged in correspondence with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on the issue of legislation for the Irish language. In the commission's most recent letter, dated 17 August 2010, it is suggested that the position that I have adopted in relation to community consensus is "not human rights compliant". I have sought legal advice on that issue and have been advised that the judgement underlying the opinion put forward by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has no direct relevance to the introduction of an Irish language Act in Northern Ireland.

As I understand it, the Barankevich case quoted by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is about freedom of religious assembly and so is not directly relevant to language rights. Furthermore, it must be remembered that article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights does not give a right to a language Act or even to the use of a language. It merely says:

"The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms...in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination"

on the grounds of language.

I want to make it clear that not a single individual has been denied the right to speak their language of choice in Northern Ireland. I would also like to add that legislation for the Irish language is by no means a panacea, as the example of the Official Languages Act 2003 in Éire clearly demonstrates. Legislation does not necessarily lead to a language revival. A language revival is brought about by many individuals making the decision to use the language on a daily basis, not by legislation. In fact, the decline in the Gaeltacht areas in Éire makes it pretty obvious that legislation is not the way forward.

I disagree with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's interpretation in this case. The commission is certainly not

infallible. It can get things wrong, and this is an example of an occasion when it has got things wrong. Furthermore, I believe that the lack of consensus on the issue of legislation for the Irish language would be detrimental to the protection and promotion of the language in the context of a shared future. I believe that the best way forward for both minority languages in Northern Ireland is through a strategy for regional or minority languages.

I intend to bring to the Executive a strategy to enhance and develop the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture and also to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language. That regional or minority languages strategy will meet the commitments contained in section 28D of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The strategy will recognise Ulster Scots and Irish as valuable parts of our shared cultural heritage. It will seek to promote wider understanding of the background to the languages through increasing understanding and awareness between sections of the community who feel a sense of belonging to the Ulster-Scots heritage and culture and those who identify with Irish heritage and culture.

I am keen that the language strategy will be grounded in the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 2008-2011, which gives effect to the cross-cutting theme of:

"A shared and better future for all: equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations"

It will include proposals and projects that are designed to promote that aspiration in the context of culture and language. The draft strategy is underpinned by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. That charter is an international convention that is designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages and contains detailed undertakings to support those languages. In addition to the charter, the strategy will take account of the Council of Europe's framework for the protection of national minorities and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The strategy will set out a series of shared strategic objectives for Ulster Scots and Irish and a set of detailed actions for each.

That structure simultaneously demonstrates that Ulster Scots and Irish are linked as a facet of our shared cultural heritage while also recognising that those languages and cultures must be protected and promoted according to their specific needs. However, although Ulster

Scots and Irish may have their specific needs, the key issues for the protection of minority languages are the same for all such languages, not just in Northern Ireland but across Europe.

People who are familiar with the development of minority languages across Europe will know that education and broadcasting are at the centre of any language development programme. One of the difficulties in Northern Ireland for many years has been that the BBC, as our public service broadcaster, has had a substantial, well-resourced and well-funded Irish language unit in-house. Unfortunately, over the years, its treatment of Ulster Scots has been derisory. That is starting to change. We had a reasonably constructive meeting with the BBC the other day, and the BBC Trust has made a number of commitments. I hope that all those are honoured, and I look forward to them being honoured.

As well as broadcasting, the other key area is education. I made reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes it absolutely clear that, in the education system, each child has the right to access to education about and the opportunity to enjoy and explore the culture of the community and the home from which that child comes. That is afforded through Irish-medium schools for the Irish language community. It is also afforded through the Roman Catholic maintained sector. In light of a very constructive speech by Mr Peter Robinson, the First Minister, I noticed several interesting newspaper articles in recent days about the significance of the Roman Catholic maintained sector as a sector with not only a religious ethos but an Irish cultural ethos. In other words, there is provision for those from an Irish background, culturally and linguistically, in the Roman Catholic maintained sector and in the Irish-medium sector.

However, children from other cultural backgrounds may not always have access to an education that bears the same focus on the culture of the home and community from which they come. Too often in the past, the culture has had to be left outside the school door and outside the playground. Again, I am glad that that is starting to change. There has been some excellent work in a number of schools. In fact, I will visit a school later this week where music from an Ulster-Scots tradition is being introduced in the school. That has already happened in Belfast Boys' Model

School in my constituency, and it is happening in some schools in Newtownards and Rathfriland. However, that is very much being driven by the local school and the local community. I want a strategy to take forward both languages and cultures, and I want commitment from the Department of Education. People ask me what is holding it up. The fact is that I cannot get that commitment. Therefore, if members of Sinn Féin want to know what is holding that up, it is the party's own Education Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In considering the overall strategy —

Mr McElduff: Will the Member give way?

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I assume that I will get an extra minute.

Mr Speaker: No.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Then I will not give way, sorry.

In considering the overall strategy, the Executive will also need to consider resource issues and whether additional funding can be made available. However, if additional resource is not forthcoming, Departments may have to consider the reallocation of current funding to resource work on minority languages in line with the priority that they give to the language agenda among and against other pressures.

Since taking up the post of Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I have reviewed the existing draft strategy paper and undertaken some investigation and research into language issues. That included a visit to our nearest UK neighbour, Scotland, to discuss the position there on the Scots language and Gàidhlig, which are the sister languages to Ulster Scots and Irish. I also had further discussions with the Welsh and Scottish Ministers about language issues, and those meetings were positive and constructive. I believe that the Ulster Scots and Irish languages are valuable parts of our shared cultural heritage and that Northern Ireland can learn important lessons from the Scottish experience, such as how to depoliticise language issues and develop the community's perception of the languages.

4.30 pm

I noticed that two Members from the other side of the Chamber commented on depoliticising language. Therefore, the other day, I was interested to notice on the Ógra Shinn Féin — if that is how it is pronounced — blogspot a report on the Tí Chulainn cultural centre. As I understand it, that is an Irish language centre in south Armagh, and perhaps Members opposite can confirm that. Sinn Féin says that it wants to depoliticise the language, so what does it do? There is a report on the blogspot on the unveiling of a memorial for members of the Provisional IRA at the Tí Chulainn centre. My advice to Members on the other side of the Chamber is that if they want to depoliticise the language, do not go down that road.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you examine whether Tí Chulainn is an Irish language centre?

Mr Campbell: That is not a point of order.

Mr McCartney: Let the Speaker decide.

Mr Speaker: The Member has made his point, and it is noted.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: If one wanted to understand the answer to that question, one might, for example, go to —

Mr Adams: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The two phrases used by the Minister should have been pronounced most properly as “Ógra Shinn Féin” and “Tí Chulainn”. Go raibh maith agat.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: If I were looking for advice on speaking and pronouncing the Irish language, the Member for West Belfast would be about the last person to whom I would go. He is probably just slightly behind Sammy Wilson in that regard.

To know about the funding programme for the Tí Chulainn cultural activities centre, I have only to look at a number of sources' funding for Irish language programmes. I have information on the centre's funding, so I can confirm that it runs Irish language programmes.

We need to address politicisation of language as a matter of significance. Depoliticisation of language has to be a priority. Let us get away from the days when language and culture were used as cultural weapons. We have seen too

much of the past. It is not the way forward, and it is not the way to go.

I was confused by the fact that Anna Lo said that she wanted to support the motion yet questioned the need for a rights-based approach. The motion is to do with a rights-based approach, so the Member cannot be for it and, at the same time, against it.

I noticed Raymond McCartney's reference to failures. The failures lie with the Minister of Education for not delivering and the BBC for not delivering. We are now getting somewhere with the BBC. Let us see whether, over the next few weeks, we can at last see some progress from the Minister of Education.

I have less than a minute left, so I will turn to the historical point, by which I am always fascinated. We are always told about the great affection that Presbyterians had for the Irish language and how they were its great saviours. The fact is that a handful of Presbyterians were involved in the Gaelic revival, and a number of them quickly dropped out when they saw that it was being used and abused by Irish republicans. The few that remained were people from that religious background who happened to be republicans, so people were welcomed whatever their religion so long as they were republican.

The other point was made that there seems to have been some great commitment to the Irish language prior to that. The main use of the Irish language was by Presbyterians who were interested in carrying out programmes of evangelism in presenting the gospel to members of the Roman Catholic faith.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I wanted to take the opportunity to clear that up, and I think that I have addressed the main issues.

Mr O'Loan: I speak not as the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure but as an SDLP Member in support of the amendment. I am pleased that the amendment has been accepted by the proposer of the motion, and I thus support the motion as amended. It has not been a good debate for usefully moving the situation onwards. The proposers of the motion and the amendment have made reasoned and valued points, but I

have not been impressed by others' responses, including the Minister's.

The most recent phase of discussion on this matter arose from correspondence, as has been said, between the Minister and the Human Rights Commission. That was on foot of the third report from the Council of Europe on the UK's compliance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which included recommendations from its committee of experts; a source and body that needs to be taken very seriously indeed. The Minister told the commission that he would not introduce an Irish language Act because there was insufficient community consensus. It is important that that point was challenged by the commission, which informed the Minister that that was not a human rights compliant reason for not taking forward the recommendation to legislate, as set out by the committee of experts.

There is a very important principle involved here. The commission quoted a particular case, *Barankevich v Russia*, which was taken to the European Court of Human Rights, and in later correspondence, the commission corrected the Minister, because it did not suggest that the case was directly relevant to language issues. Rather, the commission highlighted that case because it sets out the broad principle that the human rights of a minority are not subject to the agreement of the majority. Human rights are critically important, and the point of them is to protect minorities. That is what the Minister is rejecting.

That brings us on to the broader demand, in human rights, that an Irish language Act be put in place, as sought in the European Charter, and that the commitment given in the St Andrews Agreement to a strategy for Irish, which is very much in the hands of the Assembly and this Minister, be brought forward. Many Members from Sinn Féin and the SDLP have made the case for bringing that strategy forward. Dominic Bradley, in moving the amendment, made it extremely clear why the Minister needs to supply his part of what is sought in the European Charter. He said that that would be a sign of maturity from the Assembly, and we should take that point very seriously. This is an opportunity for the Assembly to show that it respects all sections of the community here.

More than one Member said that Irish language speakers are not losing anything by not having an Act. I wish to put two points to those Members. First, the Irish language is the ancient language of this island. Those who speak and write in Irish are the successors of people who have spoken Irish and have written and produced a rich literature in the language for centuries. The right and opportunity to use that language is vital. That puts a particular responsibility on the state to provide the circumstances for that. Secondly, as Dominic Bradley argued, Irish language education is blossoming. Many parents and children have a deep interest in the Irish language. Those children are growing up, and they expect to live in an environment in which their primary language is respected and given every opportunity in the public sphere.

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

Mr O'Loan: The Minister should be bringing that forward.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Any Member who makes a winding-up speech normally expects to have some substance on which to wind. However, I am afraid that the calibre of debate this afternoon means that this is going to be more like trying to put mercury on a fork. It is extremely disappointing that after the proposers of the motion and the amendment set the scene for the debate, various Members accused us of using language and culture as weapons. However, it was those very Members who then doled out the weapons point after point after point.

The standard of debate this afternoon by those fighting against the strategy and the Act was, frankly, appalling. The Assembly is — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

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

Mr Speaker: Carry on.

Mr Leonard: Shall I carry on, and make my point of order if the interruptions come again? We will try to get through — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Leonard: We will try to get through this without the children playing up.

The proposer set the scene and spoke about the different Ministers and all the inaction. It really was a list of obfuscations, delays and stalling tactics. Mr Bradley talked about the sign of maturity. My goodness, the sign of maturity went through and down the pipes this afternoon. We had the recalling of the position of the various efforts that have been made to try to get the Act in place.

We then had the start of the cultural and language weapons. Mr O'Loan spoke about not being impressed. How could anybody be impressed? Community relations would be damaged: no argument. There would be a privileged position: no argument. There would be a series of political symbols and subversion: no argument. All the usual epithets — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Leonard: May we continue and forget about the serial ignorance?

We then, very unfortunately, had the Alliance Party referring to the language of tribes. I know many people who are devoted to the Irish language, and they are not tribal. They are good people who want to uphold a culture and a language —

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Leonard: No, I have heard enough hot air. I am just going to say it as it is. I make the point about tribes because Anna Lo's party made that point.

We then had talk about the need for tolerance for all. Yet, one of the hubs of the human rights argument is that it is about tolerance, and it is about pluralism. We had the negatives of the Irish language and a diminution — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Moutray: Will the Member give way?

Mr Leonard: No, I am sorry. The hot air has been pathetic to listen to, and I am not giving any place to it.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Leonard: We then had the usual stuff about the minimisation of the Presbyterians, so we had yet another Member — I think that it was

Lord Browne — referring to the good value of the Presbyterians saving everything.

The litany of cultural and language weapons was fired out as the debate — the excuse for a debate — continued. We had Members talking about community consensus. I think that Mr Humphrey and the Minister argued for community consensus. Again, the whole idea of the human rights argument is that it is not about majoritarianism giving permission to people on their rights. The biggest use of trying to destroy an argument is to go for the premise of the case that was quoted. That is not the way to look at it. It was about an argument against majoritarianism working against tolerance and pluralism; tolerance that some of the Members in the DUP were looking.

I cannot even give this summing up 10 minutes. We then had — *[Interruption.]* We still have some ignorance from a sedentary position.

Mr Speaker: Order. I really must insist that Members should not try to speak from a sedentary position. I have already indicated that a number of times. The Member is concluding on the motion. He must be heard and must not be interrupted.

Mr Leonard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. We then had the race to the bottom when Mr Campbell started his speech. He wants infringements before we have actions. Why not just give people rights? He complained about the giving of barrel loads of money. Now we are getting ready. That is grand. The main hub of Mr Campbell's speech, no less, was a little anecdote about a meeting with a Sinn Féin Member. Wow: that was the main hub. Despite all the human rights arguments, all the actions and inactions of Ministers, and the inky winky and nod of doing nothing, down through three Ministers, the hub of Mr Campbell's great argument is a little anecdote. If the Minister is looking to talk about the Gaeltacht, I advise him to get some information and learning on the socio-economic positions of the Gaeltacht areas instead of using it as yet another weapon to have a dig at the Irish language. He was way out of touch.

So, there we have all the weapons lined up by the very people who talk about language and culture being used as weapons.

4.45 pm

What we had here today was a litany of mediocrity that failed to address the motion. In summing up — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker, are you going to deal again with that ignorance?

Mr Speaker: I say to the Member, I will keep the order and you carry on.

Mr Leonard: That is fine. It is the rough and tumble of debate, if there was any debate.

It would be a shame to give this debate the credit of a 10-minute winding-up speech, given that there were not 10 minutes of value in it, because of the points that were not made and the points that were made across the Chamber. The debate was full of mediocrity; however, it will go on. The drive to get an Irish language Act and strategy in place will go on regardless of the hot air and mediocrity of this afternoon.

Mr Speaker: Before putting the Question, I remind the House that the vote on the amendment will be on a simple majority basis.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 37; Noes 48

AYES

Mr Adams, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley, Mrs M Bradley, Mr PJ Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty, Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McHugh, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Burns and Mr O'Loan.

NOES

Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Gibson, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Neeson, Mr Newton, Mr Poots,

Mr G Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson,
Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey,
Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr B Wilson, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Bresland and Mr G
Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 43; Noes 42.

AYES

NATIONALIST:

Mr Adams, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Mr D Bradley,
Mrs M Bradley, Mr PJ Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Burns,
Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Doherty,
Mr Durkan, Mr Gallagher, Ms Gildernew,
MrsD Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Leonard, Mr A Maginness,
Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr F McCann,
Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt,
Mr McElduff, Mrs McGill, Mr McHugh, Mr McKay,
Mr McLaughlin, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd,
Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie,
Ms Ruane.

OTHER:

Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr McCarthy, Mr Neeson,
Mr B Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCartney and
Ms S Ramsey.

NOES

UNIONIST:

Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr Bresland,
Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell,
Mr T Clarke, Rev Dr Robert Coulter, Mr Craig,
Mr Cree, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew,
Mr Gardiner, Mr Gibson, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr
Hamilton, Mr W Humphrey, Mr Kennedy,
Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland,
Mr I McCrea, Miss McIlveen, Mr McQuillan,
Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots,
Mr G Robinson, Mr K Robinson, Mr P Robinson,
Mr Ross, Mr Savage, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey,
Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Bresland and Mr G
Robinson.

Total votes 85 Total Ayes 43 [50.6%]

Nationalist Nationalist
Votes 37 Ayes 37 [100.0%]

Unionist Unionist
Votes 42 Ayes 0 [0.0%]

Other Votes 6 Other Ayes 6 [100.0%]

Main Question accordingly negatived (cross-
community vote).

Adjourned at 5.08 pm.



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