

# Official Report (Hansard)

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## Private Members' Business

### Neighbourhood Renewal

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

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I beg to move

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to bring forward proposals to secure neighbourhood renewal funding beyond March 2011.*

As we are all in confession mood, perhaps I should start with a mea culpa before I proceed. The motion is timely because many groups involved in neighbourhood renewal are wondering what their situation will be after March 2011. The uncertainty about funding for neighbourhood renewal seems to have been a continuing and recurring theme over the past number of years. It can be very disheartening to groups but, despite that, they continue to deliver. Communities have demonstrated a clear and energetic response to neighbourhood renewal.

Last night, I attended the annual general meeting of a community group in Newry that is very proactive. It has instigated innovative projects in the area that have led to very positive outcomes. Once again, this is a group trying to deal with future planning but very much in the dark when it comes to future funding for neighbourhood renewal-led projects.

With regard to funding and plans for a

neighbourhood renewal strategy, the Department for Social Development has stated:

*"It is the Department's intention to continue funding Neighbourhood Renewal after 2011."*

The Department's bid for funds for 2011-15, as part of the Budget 2010 exercise, demonstrates a continuing commitment to the programme. The DSD has once again reiterated that neighbourhood renewal is the Executive's flagship programme for tackling spatial deprivation and that it will seek greater collaboration with other Departments to reduce duplication, prioritise the needs of the disadvantaged and improve the value for money delivered by service providers, including those in the community and voluntary sector.

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

The Department for Social Development went on to say that it is unhelpful that funding for disadvantaged communities is worked out over the head of those communities without reference to other Departments in a way that fails to draw on those people's best experience and may ultimately fail to deliver necessary outcomes. I am not absolutely sure what that is intended to explain.

Considering the number of debates and questions over the past three and a half years on neighbourhood renewal, it seems that DSD has already made some efforts to deal with most if not all of the issues. In an answer to a question posed by my colleague Carál Ní Chuilín on whether neighbourhood renewal funding will continue after March 2011, the Minister stated:

*"It is my intention to continue funding the NR programme after 2011 and my Budget 2011-15 bid demonstrates a continuing increased commitment."*

However, we do not know what the bid is or whether the level of commitment depends on the amount of the bid. Perhaps we could get an

explanation of that.

As a flagship programme of the Executive in tackling disadvantage, the neighbourhood renewal programme is essential at a time of recession, with potentially fewer public sector jobs, and in order to maintain stability in addressing poverty and disadvantage. Executive colleagues should work collaboratively with the Government and with the community. The absence of that collaboration carries a risk of a fragmented, partial and unsuccessful approach.

In light of all the rhetoric, I ask the Minister for some detail of what papers etc, he has brought to the Executive. Has he spoken to other Ministers regarding their support, particularly in relation to funding for neighbourhood renewal? The Minister appears to have left questions unanswered, and that has created huge uncertainty in the groups that are tasked with the delivery of neighbourhood renewal. I have witnessed in my constituency the tremendous and essential work carried out by those groups and indeed groups throughout the Six Counties. Their contribution in helping to develop our communities is immeasurable. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr Beggs:** I beg to move the following amendment: After “renewal” insert

*“and small pockets of deprivation”.*

Small pockets of deprivation (SPOD) are an important part of the neighbourhood renewal programme, particularly in disadvantaged communities in my constituency. I will pick up on a comment from the proposer of the motion, who wanted urgent action so that future funding for neighbourhood renewal would be finalised. I agree that that needs to be completed quickly. However, it must be pointed out that that applies not only to neighbourhood renewal but to all public funding. Until the Budget is finalised, no community organisation, voluntary organisation, Department or statutory organisation knows what its funding will be. It is important that the Budget is finalised. While there is no Budget, there is uncertainty. I suspect that many people involved in this area may be receiving protective notices, possibly prior to Christmas, because they do not know their future. It is important that responsibility

is taken, that a draft Budget is put on the table and that decisions are taken.

**Mr Brady:** People in the voluntary sector being put on protective notice is nothing new. It is, unfortunately, a recurring and continuing theme, which should have been addressed a long time ago. I also say to the Member that we have no particular problem in supporting the amendment and the inclusion of small pockets of deprivation.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the Member. Although many are aware of large-scale areas of need, particularly in the conurbations of Belfast and Londonderry, there is an equally large number of pockets of deprivation. I understand that, using the NISRA reports and the Noble indices, 17 areas were identified where small communities were living in areas of need and required support. That has been recognised. Some 36 neighbourhood areas in the most deprived wards across Northern Ireland were identified, as well as those 17 areas with small pockets of deprivation. I was pleased that the January 2005 consultation report into developing new neighbourhood renewal policy addressed the inequality issues of possible exclusion and that it was agreed to proportionately fund those small pockets. To have done otherwise would have been discriminatory.

Although relatively small amounts of funding for those communities may be involved, nevertheless, it is significant in assisting them to improve their local area. To date, parts of the Sunnylands, Gortalee and Larne Central wards in my constituency have benefited from that fund. It is important that funding has been available. Rather than its being delivered by a formal strategy partnership organisation, which would involve administrative costs, it has been accepted that, given the small amounts of money involved, other and more efficient methods should be used to cut down that administrative burden. That could involve funding that comes directly from the Housing Executive and councils and even from the Department for Social Development-funded community forum.

Groups such as the Dixon Park residents association in Larne and the Riverdale residents association have benefited from the funding. Larne Borough Council was able to improve the local environment considerably by upgrading the

riverside walk, which enhanced access to the local community. The funding also gave additional support to Sunnylands Nursery School, Carrickfergus Community Forum, Greenisland Knockagh Youth Club, the library and the community council, which had a rather ageing hall. Relatively small amounts of money made a big difference to those deprived communities. In addition, support was given to the Alphabet Playgroup in Greenisland for, I think, an outdoor soft-play facility, which will benefit young people in the estate. Furthermore, the Greenisland scout hall received additional money. I am illustrating how a lot of small community organisations have benefited from the fund.

I noticed that, in 2009-2010, there were no applications from Larne. It would be helpful to have an understanding of why no funding went to Larne. I understood that it would still have qualified, but I am curious about why no funding was drawn down. At the same time, important funding is continuing to be delivered in the Carrickfergus area through a YMCA project that operates out of the Sunnylands Youth Centre. It works with parents and young children and provides additional educational courses that have enhanced people's confidence. Some have been encouraged to seek employment or to get on to an educational or employment ladder.

That element of funding has been important in that it has provided additional community support. Part-time development workers have been provided in some of those disadvantaged communities. It is an area in which Peace II funding has ended and full-time community development workers are no longer in place. The provision of support to the local community has been vital, particularly as there is a relatively weak community infrastructure. The support has enabled those communities to come together to apply for some other funding, which they would not otherwise have done. Therefore, there is an important need for that type of funding to continue in that area.

I think particularly of the work of Stevie Harrison, who operates through Carrickfergus Community Forum. He has worked with a group of young people who could easily have become young people not in education, training or employment.

He has gathered them together, increased their confidence, given them some life skills and anti-racism training and empowered them so that they could learn about their importance to their local community and contribute to it. I was fortunate to be present a couple of weeks ago when he brought a group of those young people to Carrickfergus town hall. It was clear that their confidence had grown, because they were able to speak to a group of over 100 people in a town hall. They had certainly been empowered. Therefore, neighbourhood renewal is an important element in my community.

### **3.15pm**

Areas at risk are another important aspect of neighbourhood renewal. I understand that about 20% of funding has gone towards other disadvantaged communities in the 10% to 20% identified areas of need, which has been quite significant for recent work in the Larne area, particularly in the Craigy Hill/Antiville area. During the summer, I was fortunate to go along and learn about the progress there, particularly the work of Patricia Brennan and Ledcom, which administers the scheme on behalf of DSD. Opportunities for volunteering in the area have been mapped, and people with time and skills have been drawn together to try to improve their local community. Local churches have also been drawn in to utilise their skills. So there is a real sense of community and hope there.

At the same time, one of the most positive aspects of change that I have noticed in the programme is that paramilitary murals are coming down. Individuals are gaining confidence in themselves and their community. Peace is being secured with relatively small amounts of money, and it is vital that that continues. Areas that have received funding are also covered by the Horizon Sure Start programme, of which I am a committee member. Other organisations recognise that there is need there, and they are working with different age groups. To ensure that change happens and improvements come about, it is important that a collective operation works with a range of individuals and young people in the area.

Having looked at the new NISRA indices, I recognise that there has been change. Some areas are now identified as being among the 10%

most deprived wards, whereas others have moved out of that category. Nevertheless, I note that a considerable number of wards in my constituency, East Antrim, appear to be in the 10% to 20% at-risk category, including Ballyloran, Love Lane, Killycrot, Antiville, Eden, Sunnylands, Gortalee and Blackcave: a host of places. If anything, conditions in my constituency have worsened. I view pockets of deprivation funding as being relatively small amounts of money. It is vital that it continues, in order to strengthen my community.

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

**Mr Beggs:** I ask Members to support my amendment.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development (Mr Hamilton):** I shall begin by outlining some of the views expressed by the Social Development Committee about neighbourhood renewal, before a quick costume change into a DUP MLA.

The House will be well aware that the Social Development Committee considered the implementation of the neighbourhood renewal strategy earlier in this mandate. The Committee produced a report that was debated and approved by the Assembly in March 2009. Among the report's wide-ranging findings, the Committee concluded that a neighbourhood renewal strategy was important for tackling deprivation in some of the poorest wards in Northern Ireland. As Members are aware, the idea behind neighbourhood renewal was to replace short-term, project-led interventions with a longer-term strategy. The strategy was supposed to tackle the multiplicity of factors that affect deprivation and the so-called quality of life gap between neighbourhood renewal areas and the rest of Northern Ireland. Those factors cover familiar social development territory, such as vacant housing, derelict industrial sites, income deprivation and low community participation. However, neighbourhood renewal was also designed to tackle related matters, such as high crime rates, low educational attainment and low life expectancy.

The motion refers to funding for the strategy. In its

response to the Committee's report, the Department gave a budget commitment up to March 2011 for projects meeting priority need. The Department also identified a list of capital projects designed to improve the physical appearance of deprived areas. In September 2010, the Committee was pleased to note a number of departmental capital bids relating to the neighbourhood renewal strategy for the next Budget period. The Committee also noted the Department's continued commitment to funding the strategy, as set out in correspondence in October. I hope that, in his response, the Minister will give further information on how, in delivering neighbourhood renewal, he will prioritise the needs of the disadvantaged and improve the value for money delivered by service providers, including the community and voluntary sector.

In my remaining time, I shall make some comments in a personal and party capacity. My earlier point about replacing short-term, project-led interventions leads me to highlight the lack of success that that approach has had in tackling deep-rooted disadvantage in some of the most deprived communities in Northern Ireland. Therefore, we should all welcome the replacement of that with a longer term strategy. Even though I have no particular direct experience of neighbourhood renewal in my constituency, I have experience of the small pockets of deprivation programme, which I will address in a minute or two.

I have met representatives from neighbourhood renewal areas, and, although they have the odd complaint — we hear regular complaints from them — they are as one in welcoming the fact that long-term commitments have been made to their areas. That gives them some certainty. The motion highlights the perpetual lack of certainty in that area of work, which is that there is no specific funding guarantee beyond March 2011.

I take Mr Beggs's point that this is, at its core, a Budget issue. As we speak, there is no agreed Budget. Even if I wanted to, I do not have enough time to open up that issue. However, it underlines the importance for us all of agreeing a Budget as quickly as we can. We are all aware of the uncertainty not just in tackling deprivation and disadvantage across Northern Ireland but in maintaining good projects that have delivered

land instigating new projects that will deliver in the upcoming financial period. We know that there are issues. We heard the First Minister yesterday, in response to Mr O'Loan, talk about the uncertainty caused by the issuing of protective notices. There is an onus on all Members to deal with the issue as quickly as possible. I am sure that the Minister for Social Development would, if he could, come forward today to give some certainty to people who are living with uncertainty at present.

I thank my friends in the Ulster Unionist Party for tabling their amendment. I have direct experience of SPOD in areas such as the Glen, Scrabo and West Winds in Newtownards, which the Minister visited recently. I have witnessed the transformation of those areas, which has been achieved principally through the drive and determination of the community but also through the assistance of programmes such as SPOD.

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

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development:** There is no certainty about the future funding of SPOD. I ask the Minister, even if he cannot outline funding, to say what his plans are for the continuation of that programme.

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

**Mrs M Bradley:** I support the motion and the amendment. Neighbourhood renewal is the Executive's flagship programme to address disadvantage. It is an essential strategy, and it is working. As we have heard, well over 600 individuals are engaged in delivering the services through more than 300 projects, and 280,000 people rely on the additional services that neighbourhood renewal funding supports. The public groundswell of support for the programme was made clear at the rally of neighbourhood renewal groups at Stormont only last week. At that rally, Minister Attwood told the groups that they should keep up their campaign and widen it to cover other areas of disadvantage, including social housing, child maintenance and welfare.

At a time of growing need, tackling disadvantage is non-negotiable. That is why the more voices that are raised in support and the more the

groundswell grows, the better. At every level and primarily through Minister Alex Attwood and Margaret Ritchie before him, the SDLP is committed to the neighbourhood renewal programme and to ensuring that funding is continued well beyond 2011. Indeed, Alex Attwood has made it absolutely clear that he will continue to advance the programme at the Executive in order to secure the £20 million a year in revenue that goes into the relevant communities that are in need.

The SDLP believes that those in need must not carry the burden of Budget reductions. Any loss in neighbourhood renewal funding could result in that outcome. We will continue to work to convince everyone that money should go into areas of need, and, as recent community support demonstrates, neighbourhood renewal should be the strategy for doing so.

That brings me to my next point, which is about the plans of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a so-called community renewal fund. In other words, it is a proposal that was developed by Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness to fund certain groups in republican and loyalist areas. The SDLP believes that such a fund would be exclusive and elitist in design and would be a backward step. It seems that the proposal was developed over the head of Departments and, indeed, over the head of the community. That is the wrong approach. A joined-up approach is needed, and neighbourhood renewal is now the established mechanism for the delivery of programmes to combat disadvantage. That is why I support continued neighbourhood renewal funding through 2011 and beyond.

I will address the need for a joined-up approach in a little more detail. Although the Department for Social Development has a key role in implementing the neighbourhood renewal programme, it is not the sole responsibility of DSD to address the needs of the disadvantaged here. Other Departments and, indeed, their agencies must work with DSD to address the needs that are outlined in the action plans for each of the 36 neighbourhood renewal areas. Therefore, I welcome the fact that other parties have shown their support on the Floor for the continuation of the renewal programme. My party and I hope that, in turn, all parties will make the case for the

continuation of neighbourhood renewal funding to all Ministers in the Executive.

**Ms Lo:** I support the motion and the amendment. I was heartened by the Minister's recent statement that the family of responsibilities in the Department, including neighbourhood renewal, was all about the people, families and communities who are in need and living in disadvantage. He also said:

*"If one essential value of the Budget is not to protect them, it will not be much of a Budget, and we will not be much of a Government."* — [Official Report, Vol 58, No 2, p63, col 1]

I hope that the Minister's response this afternoon will contain similar sentiments. The lack of Executive agreement on the Budget is causing a lot of uncertainty and concern for everyone, particularly for projects that await decisions on funding. If the Budget is not sorted out soon, staff will, come January, have to be given protective notices in case funding is not forthcoming.

The past few years have been difficult for neighbourhood renewal partnerships, which have received funding on a year-by-year basis. The lack of certainty about funding each year has meant that many neighbourhood renewal partnership projects have remained short-term. They have kept ticking over rather than driving forward strategic and longer-term actions. Those short-term actions, by their nature, may not have any substantial impact on their communities. The short-term funding has also resulted in the quick turnover of staff, as I have seen. Uncertainty about job security results in a lack of continuity not only in work programmes but in their relationships with project users in their community. It is important that funding continues beyond March 2011 and that the Minister makes a commitment that neighbourhood renewal will be given long-term stability through its funding for the next four years.

Neighbourhood renewal partnerships target communities in the 10% most disadvantaged urban wards. Those communities will be disproportionately affected by public expenditure cuts because they are more likely to use statutory services. They will also be hardest hit by the proposed welfare reforms, namely the benefit reductions. They will be pushed out to work when there is none. At a time of deepening hardship, neighbourhood renewal should be strengthened

rather than diminished to support those communities in need.

Despite some criticism, neighbourhood renewal partnerships have made positive inroads into lifting many people's quality of life. In my South Belfast constituency, numerous projects in education, training, community development and health and well-being have been highly effective and have benefited many people. We perhaps need to put new impetus into neighbourhood renewal partnerships to empower those communities to address the issues of deprivation that they have worked so hard to identify.

### 3.30pm

We also need commitments from other Departments, such the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, to stop paying lip service and to put more resources into realising the targets that are deemed necessary by partnership action plans. Departments need to send senior staff to the partnerships rather than personnel who are unable to make decisions on behalf of their Departments.

The South West Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership in south Belfast is proactive in assessing the action plans that identified what has been achieved to develop a revised action plan and to ensure that priorities are achievable and realistic. Perhaps there is a need for more collaboration between partnerships and projects to focus on issues across the whole area, such as health and education, to cut down on duplication and to focus resources. That may save statutory bodies from stretching their manpower and perhaps improve their attendance and participation.

**Mr Easton:** I support the motion and the amendment. Since the neighbourhood renewal scheme was launched in June 2003, it has helped many areas in Northern Ireland to tackle disadvantage in their communities. Deprivation exists in every country, but Northern Ireland is a special case after 30 years of community division, violence and sectarianism. That has had a profound effect on the social and economic opportunities that are open to people who live in areas of disadvantage.

My area is often referred to as the “gold coast”, but that is far from the case, and, since my election to the House in 2003 and re-election in 2007, I have worked hard for many communities in north Down, including Kilcooley, Rathgill, Bloomfield, Whitehill and Breezemount in Bangor, Beechfield in Donaghadee and Loughview in Holywood to name but a few. Many of those areas have never been included as part of the neighbourhood renewal scheme, despite having the same problems as Kilcooley.

Kilcooley has benefited greatly from neighbourhood renewal schemes, and those benefits are visible. However, it is still not finished, and much work remains to be done. There is now a strong and vibrant community there working for the betterment of its areas and the benefit of its people. That is down to the local community association, various groups and Kilcooley’s neighbourhood renewal community worker, Mark Gordon, who is doing a fantastic job. The Minister for Social Development has visited the area on numerous occasions and seen the benefits of the scheme for himself.

The scheme should be renewed. It is vital for the many areas of disadvantage across Northern Ireland, never mind north Down. The scheme aims to tackle the complex nature of social deprivation and has four main objectives. The first of those is community renewal to develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in the most deprived neighbourhoods. A second aim is economic renewal to develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and to connect them to the wider urban community. A third aim is social renewal to improve social conditions for people who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods through better co-ordination, public services and the creation of safer environments. A fourth aim is physical renewal to help to create attractive, safe and sustainable environments in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

OFMDFM’s programme for cohesion, sharing and integration is evidence of the fact that much work needs to be done and that deprivation is a factor in sectarianism and violence. We must not lose focus but enhance the work that has gone on in the past so that it continues after March 2011.

The report by the Committee for Social Development on the neighbourhood renewal strategy, which was completed in February 2009, came up with many recommendations. Much of those focused on setting targets and adhering to them. It was found that this had been lacking in previous years and that setting of targets would also contribute to measuring success. It was also noted that a significant amount of money had been set aside for the scheme and that it was important to keep track of spending. Implementation and better use of funding was considered to be down to good organisation reflected in governance, which has been lacking. There was also believed to be a severe lack of communication and support for groups from the top down.

As we move forward, all those recommendations need to be adhered to. That will be to the benefit of the local community in receipt of the scheme. I am not immune to criticism, as highlighted in the Committee report, but I am a firm believer that the scheme has benefited many communities across Northern Ireland since 2003.

I am glad that we are also talking about SPOD. It would be remiss of me not to mention the great work that Karen Worrall does on that front with the community in Rathgill, Bangor. It would also be remiss of me not to mention the new areas at risk initiative in Beechfield, Donaghadee, which the previous Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie launched almost two years ago. That also needs to be protected, and I hope that the Minister takes that on board.

**Mr O’Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún.

I support the motion and the amendment. It is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the motion. It states:

*“That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to bring forward proposals to secure neighbourhood renewal funding beyond March 2011.”*

The tone of the debate thus far has been positive, and I would like it to continue that way. The motion will assist the Minister in his dealings and discussions with Executive colleagues and in securing funding for areas of social deprivation and for targeting

social need.

Many examples of neighbourhood renewal have been given thus far, and, as I proceed through my contribution, I will give examples of areas in my constituency that have benefited from such renewal. If used wisely by any Minister, the motion and the Hansard report of this debate could be tools of persuasion in the Budget debate with other Ministers.

Neighbourhood renewal has brought great benefits to parts of the Upper Bann constituency, including Lurgan, Brownlow and Portadown. There are significant pockets of deprivation in each of those areas, and neighbourhood renewal has been used successfully by local community groups to provide funding. It is worth noting that the work done by those groups in Upper Bann is not paid. Rather, all the money received is directed either to capital infrastructure or to programmes on the ground.

Despite some ill-advised criticism from one of my Upper Bann colleagues in an earlier debate, it is worth noting exactly what voluntary community workers in Upper Bann have achieved with that funding. The Southern Regional College received £464,000 for a learning to employment programme, in which the community works with the local college. The college must be congratulated for its contribution to neighbourhood renewal projects in Upper Bann. It has been to the forefront of helping and advising the community and listening to its needs.

Multi-use games areas in the community have made small but significant infrastructural contributions to by providing sports facilities for young and old people. The total amount spent on such projects is almost £80,000.

Brownlow Ltd provides an economic regeneration programme in the heart of Brownlow. That area often receives a bad press, sometimes because of the acts of a small group of individuals and sometimes because of media prejudice. However, neighbourhood renewal has contributed £900,000 to Brownlow Ltd's economic redevelopment unit, thereby helping to create jobs in the area.

In addition, £769,000 has been provided to the

Southern Education and Library Board for literacy support. That came about after consultation and discussions with local schools on how neighbourhood renewal could best help them. There have been similar infrastructural projects in Portadown. One such example is Roads Service's collaboration with the neighbourhood renewal programme to make improvements in the area.

Therefore, despite the initial ill-advised criticism, neighbourhood renewal has made a significant change to the lives of the communities in Upper Bann's areas of deprivation. It has shown that local communities can work and provide for themselves when given the resources to do so. Neighbourhood renewal has not only made a physical contribution to those areas, it has given the communities a sense of self-worth. People in those communities have seen what is possible. They know that the way things were was not acceptable, and they now intend to move forward and to make improvements.

**Mr Easton:** Does the Member agree that if we did away with neighbourhood renewal, SPOD and areas at risk, it would lead to a gulf between the community and statutory bodies and between the community and the Government? Does he agree that that would be disastrous?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I agree with the Member. What we have seen with neighbourhood renewal is democracy at work. Through that scheme, local communities have made the statutory agencies answerable to them, and both sectors now work together in a co-ordinated way. As elected representatives, our role is to open doors and to ensure that agencies listen to communities. Through neighbourhood renewal, there is a constant flow of information and dialogue between those two sides.

I am concerned when I hear commentators, especially politicians, saying that we need to agree a Budget quickly, because that is code for saying that we need to agree their vision of a Budget quickly. I have no doubt that a Budget will be agreed, but a process must be gone through, and in these dire financial circumstances, that process must be more detailed and intense. A Budget will be agreed quickly if that Budget is designed to look after areas of need by providing for neighbourhood renewal and protecting the

vulnerable, including those who come from socially and economically deprived areas and those on low wages.

I have heard comments from all sections of the Chamber over the past number of weeks.

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

**Mr O'Dowd:** Those comments give me confidence that, at long last, we have a focus on and a vision of that type of Budget.

**Mr Craig:** I, too, support the motion and the amendment. Neighbourhood renewal has a vital role in assisting disadvantaged areas across the Province, and it reflects Northern Ireland's special circumstances after 30 years of violence. Deprivation in areas of disadvantage has long been linked to segregation, violence and sectarianism. Therefore, Northern Ireland is unique and a special case, and it is vital that the funding for neighbourhood renewal continues after March 2011. It is through that scheme that we promote social inclusion and seek to reduce the inequalities in our society.

Neighbourhood renewal ties in closely with the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, which was published by OFMDFM. Some of the goals of neighbourhood renewal are to promote equality of opportunity and to tackle disadvantage, and it is vital that we continue with that programme. It is also vital that we continue with the small pockets of deprivation scheme and with areas at risk, which was the scheme that I was most involved in with the previous Minister for Social Development. All those Members who have contributed to the debate have mentioned the special areas in their constituencies. My special areas are Seymour Hill and Derragh, and I pay tribute to the previous Minister who visited those areas, saw their needs and dealt with the situation. I was delighted to see that.

However, neighbourhood renewal needs some work on its delivery. In February 2009, the Committee for Social Development looked at the overall scheme, which was launched in March 2003. It found that, although much work had been done, there was little measurable improvement since the scheme's implementation. I remember

thinking at the time that the scheme was very much like a duck that paddles like mad underneath the surface but does not get very far.

There is an issue about how we see deliverable targets. At the time, there was a great deal of criticism of the statutory bodies for not working well enough with the community organisations. However, I am sure that the Minister will address those issues and will help people to move their communities forward so that they can get out of the deprivation that, unfortunately, they have found themselves in.

The Committee recognised that the scheme crosses Departments and involves the Department for Employment and Learning. It recommended that all budgets for the scheme be ring-fenced. However, in the current climate, budgets need to be adhered to and well-defined goals need to be set. If we are to look after the budgets and continue neighbourhood renewal projects, there must be well-defined and deliverable targets.

### 3.45 pm

I agree with the point made by the Member who spoke before me that neighbourhood renewal projects are critical to the communities that they serve. My colleague Mr Easton rightly pointed out that a gulf will open between communities, government and all the statutory bodies if the projects are not continued. In most cases, that would put communities back not only years but decades. As elected Members, we have all witnessed huge change in our areas. My constituency is unrecognisable today from the place that it was 10 years ago.

At the time, the Committee believed that governance arrangements for neighbourhood renewal were ineffective. If we are to continue to fund neighbourhood renewal, those arrangements need to be tightened up. The Committee for Social Development made 16 recommendations with regard to the neighbourhood renewal strategy. Those centred on targets, measuring results —

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

**Mr Craig:** — governance and better support. I firmly believe that the motion and the amendment are worth supporting.

**Mr McCallister:** It is encouraging that the Assembly is speaking about neighbourhood renewal in a united way. Despite differences as regards policy objectives, evaluation and welfare reform, we have spoken with a united voice today about our commitment to tackle disadvantage and to say that neighbourhood renewal funding should be fought for in the Budget. It is absolutely vital if we are to improve the communities that many Members have mentioned. It is vital that work continues both in neighbourhood renewal and in the small pockets of deprivation scheme, which my colleague mentioned.

I am not sure whether the Minister wants to be linked too closely with the CSI strategy. However, I take Mr Craig's point about the link between CSI and neighbourhood renewal. We will leave CSI for another occasion.

Many Members have spoken about the need to tackle neighbourhood renewal. Policies need to be continued right across the board. Those policies work, and it is right that they continue. Communities need help to get out of poverty. They need help with schooling, disadvantage and employment and to tackle not only need but needs. There are lists of indicators of poverty that show that those communities need and deserve help to get out of poverty.

Neighbourhood renewal has been an excellent example of government and the community and voluntary sector working together to deliver a common aim. Government setting out a strategy and using the community and voluntary sector as the delivery mechanism for much of it is a good model that should continue. I am sure that the Minister is fighting hard for neighbourhood renewal in the Budget review. However, I take issue with Mr O'Dowd's point. We need to agree a Budget. These issues have not arisen suddenly. The budgetary and financial difficulties have been with us for several years now. There have been excessive problems in the Republic —

**Mrs D Kelly:** Does the Member agree that Mr O'Dowd's comments were telling of Sinn Féin's anti-cut agenda in the South in preparation for

elections there and did not deal with the failure to deliver a Budget in the North?

**Mr O'Dowd:** We have won an election.

**Mr McCallister:** I agree with Mrs Kelly. His comments were more about fighting that election. I heard Mr O'Dowd say from a sedentary position that his party has won an election, but it has not won the general election that is coming down there. For all the citizens who live in the Republic, I hope that they do not win it, or else the country really will be up for sale. It will be like the old saying, "Would the last one leaving Ireland please turn out the lights?"

I have confidence that the Minister will fight to get and to maintain neighbourhood renewal schemes and will work to build on the successes that we have had, while taking on board the useful comments and recommendations from the Committee, although I was not a member of the Committee at the time. Committees play a very useful role by looking at policy objectives and how they play out on the ground. It is vital that the Minister and his Department take those recommendations on board to see how we can improve this, how we can deliver and how we can help more people out of poverty and disadvantage. That is the united cry going out from the Assembly.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that the election is not until next May.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I support the motion and the amendment. It is quite clear that neighbourhood renewal is targeted at areas of disadvantage, and it is right that areas of deprivation are included. It is also an issue in rural areas. Some rural areas have a number of commuters living in them who are not part of the indigenous community and do not often get involved in the local community. It is, therefore, important that all areas of disadvantage are tackled.

Does the Minister share my disappointment that OFMDFM is very much behind in its schedule to meet its legislative requirement on the child poverty strategy, which will have to have a quicker Committee consultation period than ought to be the case?

Other Members have said that neighbourhood renewal is not the sole responsibility of DSD. It is not substitution for other Departments, it is about additionality and about other Departments being able to bring to the table projects that they can deliver in a much more timely manner than would otherwise be the case, because they should all be bringing their resources to the table.

**Mr McCallister:** The Member talked about other Departments bringing projects. The Department of Education's recent nought-to-six strategy has been one of the most disappointing strategies because it looks more like a three-to-six strategy and has missed the mark dramatically in delivering some of what the Member is talking about.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an additional minute.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Member makes a valid point about education, because Mr O'Dowd highlighted the sterling work of the partnership, the Southern Regional College and the local schools in trying to tackle the literacy problem. It is obviously a failure of education that neighbourhood renewal money is having to be spent in that way. Had we got a timely early-years strategy, the money could have been put to other uses through the building of real and sustainable jobs in the local community.

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am glad that the Member has stepped into the field of education. I will educate her slightly. Numeracy and literacy factors is as much to do with education in the classroom as it is to do with your environment on the outside. If a child is coming from an area where there is not high educational attainment, the likelihood is that that child will not reach educational attainment itself. If you want to have a wee lesson on education, give me a shout some day and we will have a chat about it.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members that we are talking about neighbourhood renewal.

**Mrs D Kelly:** In deference to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will not point out the obvious grammar mistakes that Mr O'Dowd made.

The fact is that neighbourhood renewal ought to be about not only improving the environment and

the learning experience, but leaving a legacy. Mr O'Dowd was right about one thing: no jobs have been created in the Craigavon area. That is a feature that the Minister must look at throughout the neighbourhood renewal areas.

The whole point of community development is to enable and to empower local communities and to leave a legacy. When community development workers can leave the stage, they have succeeded. I pay tribute to many of the development workers, who often work long hours for no remuneration or for remuneration that is not sufficient and does not meet their needs.

Nonetheless, there is a real requirement, particularly in the Lurgan area. We have a town centre suffering the decline that is evident in many market towns across the North. There is a need for the neighbourhood renewal money to be spent on economic regeneration, and I want to see that happening.

Mr O'Dowd's other point was about how other Ministers will be all-singing and all-dancing in favour of neighbourhood renewal. He eloquently said that neighbourhood renewal is significant, opens the doors to democracy, and is very much a grass-roots, bottom-up approach to development. I hope that other Ministers will take note of those remarks, and that he will convey those remarks to his own Ministers in the Executive, because it is very important that other Ministers recognise the role, function and importance of neighbourhood renewal and support Minister Attwood in his bid for funding to be secured.

Other Members were right to say that there is a necessity for some certainty about the security of funding, because there are those who depend on neighbourhood renewal for their employment. They will be at risk if a Budget is not agreed sooner rather than later. Even if redundancy notes are issued only as a protective measure by employment organisations, they are nonetheless letters that people do not want falling on their mats at the mouth of Christmas. People need to have certainty around their employment, and I hope that the Executive will get over their current difficulties in trying to reach agreement on the matter.

One other feature of neighbourhood renewal is

that it supports areas that suffered at the hands of paramilitaries. Let us not forget that point. It is not about just poverty but about the fact that paramilitary organisations did not allow good work to be done in many of their areas. I hope that, now that peace is secured, everyone's voice across the neighbourhood renewal partnerships will be heard, and not just those of a select few.

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

**Mrs D Kelly:** I very much support the motion and the amendment.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members please not to shout from a sedentary position.

**Mr S Anderson:** I support the motion and also the amendment, which was tabled by John McCallister and Roy Beggs. The question of neighbourhood renewal is one that every Member could say much about. Many communities across Northern Ireland stand in need. There are a number of reasons why many communities are in that position.

Neighbourhood renewal is not about just targets and budgets. It is really about people from all sections of the community who live in some of the poorest areas of Northern Ireland. Many of those areas are often characterised by poor educational attainment, poor health and shorter life expectancy. Very often, they are accompanied by higher unemployment, lower economic activity, higher crime rates and infrastructure problems.

In 2003, Government, through the Department for Social Development, launched a strategy for neighbourhood renewal in the Province. Three of the areas targeted for neighbourhood renewal — Brownlow, Lurgan and north-west Portadown — are in my constituency around Craigavon. Three neighbourhood renewal partnerships were established across Craigavon and approximately £8 million was spent in those areas.

I should declare an interest as a member of Craigavon Borough Council.

In Craigavon, funding was provided for a health and well-being programme, a social renewal

education programme, multi-use games areas, environmental improvement schemes, training and employability courses, and economic and community development. That is to be welcomed, but, as with Upper Bann, so right across Northern Ireland, serious issues remain and serious problems still need to be addressed.

I note that, in response to a question for written answer, the Minister said that he intends to fund the neighbourhood renewal programme after 2011 and that he is making bids to enable him to do so.

Only last week, the Minister indicated his intention to explore the issue of parity with respect to the welfare budget. I am concerned, and I am led to ask the question: if he were to gain breach of parity on the welfare budget, and if the consequence of that breach were that some, or all, of that budget were removed by the Treasury, with the Executive left to pick up the tab, how would the Minister finance not only this programme but a number of other programmes? Since the debate is about the continued funding of the programme —

**4.00pm**

**Mr F McCann:** I am confused. Are you asking the Minister to breach parity, or are you saying that he should not breach it?

**Mr S Anderson:** I am not asking the Minister to breach parity.

The debate is about the continued funding of the programme. We cannot unhitch that funding from the Minister's intention to chisel away at parity. If that is his intention, maybe he can give us some clarity on the issue.

I will turn now to the amendment tabled by John McCallister and Roy Beggs. It addresses what is a widespread issue across multiple constituencies in the Province. By that, I mean that it addresses those pockets of deprivation that are often overlooked, through no fault of their own, but solely because of the areas or housing developments that are along their boundaries.

Although I welcome the investment already made in my constituency, I have to point out that,

in Upper Bann, there are numerous pockets of deprivation, where the levels of poverty, educational underachievement and poorer health are comparable to elsewhere, yet they fall through the net because they are bordered by what are seen as more affluent areas. Clearly, that should not continue. Where there are pockets of deprivation, that deprivation is as real and as punishing as in any other area. My colleagues have already referred to areas at risk.

I believe that there is still a long way to go to address the issue adequately, and I call on the Minister to set about that task.

**The Minister for Social Development (Mr Attwood):**

I thank all the Members who contributed to the debate. In his opening remarks, Mr Brady read into the record a recent press release that I issued as Minister. That must be the first time that a Member from a one party has read into the record a statement from a Minister of a different party, but I thank him for so doing, because it captured a lot of the issues around the debate. However, I differ with him in one regard. He said that people in neighbourhood renewal areas, organisations and employees were being kept in the dark. That is not a consequence of anything that I have done. As Mr Beggs and other Members made clear, if people are being kept in the dark, it is a consequence of the fact that the Budget negotiations are in the dark and are still not concluded. To go back to what Mr O'Dowd said, that is not a passing point or a political point. It is a very real and genuine point.

Four months from today, 695 people who are funded through neighbourhood renewal could potentially lose their jobs. As Mrs Kelly indicated, on Christmas Eve or on New Year's Eve, up to 695 people — 683 in neighbourhood renewal areas and 12 in small pockets of deprivation areas — may be carrying protective notices in their back pockets or in their purses. That is the reality of people being in the dark about where the Budget is today.

Let us maximise our Budget negotiation with London. That is what I was doing yesterday in respect of the welfare aspect of our Budget, and I will comment on that later. If anything should bring reality and good sense to the Budget negotiations, it is the fact that 695 people in DSD-

funded neighbourhood renewal schemes and hundreds, if not thousands, of people in other Departments, including Health, could fall victim to the same circumstance. Therefore, in dealing with neighbourhood renewal and DSD budgets, let us create certainty around all budgets, so that everybody can go forward on the basis of confidence rather than doubt. As Ms Lo said, if we do not agree a four-year Budget, and a one-year Budget is imposed, it will not be much of a Budget, and we will not be much of a Government.

I thank everyone who acknowledged that strategies for neighbourhood renewal, SPOD and areas at risk are working. The fact that it was said with such clarity by Members from all parties is a watershed moment. Historically, going back five, six or seven years, neighbourhood renewal has been caught up in community politics. The consensus on neighbourhood renewal, SPOD and areas at risk is a watershed moment because it breaks free from the notion that one community suffers more need and disadvantage than another. The consensus, which is that funding and strategies must be taken forward together to deal with the particular issues in areas of need and disadvantage, creates common ground.

What happened in the Chamber today and on the steps of Parliament Buildings last Monday represents a groundswell of support for neighbourhood renewal. In that context, I repeat what I said, which has been referred to in the Chamber. I encourage Members that, if there is a groundswell of support for neighbourhood renewal, it follows that there should be a groundswell of support for all those front line services, wherever they might be located in government, including in DSD.

As Ms Lo said, neighbourhood renewal cannot be divorced from housing. Neither of those issues can be divorced from child maintenance, and none of the three can be divorced from social security and benefit take-up. There is a family of need and a family of government responses to that need, be that through DSD, nurses, teachers or all other front line services. When I send a copy of today's Hansard report to the First Minister and deputy First Minister and to the Minister of Finance, I will implore them to recognise that family of need in any decisions that they might take on a

budgetary or departmental level. Let us also ensure that the groundswell of support extends throughout the family of services that DSD provides, because, as much as any Department, and more so than most, it is a front line service provider in tackling need and disadvantage.

Recently, there has been some mischief-making about the Department and my personal commitment to neighbourhood renewal. The fact that it has not raised its head during the debate means that that particular issue has been laid to rest. Let me repeat that the Budget bid that I submitted in July 2010 included a full bid, for capital and revenue, for neighbourhood renewal going forward in the 2011-15 period.

In August 2010, arising from the circumstances of the summer, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister and suggested that, in view of the budgetary situation, and rather than duplicating or further dissipating scarce resources, we should work to improve and to refocus our existing initiatives to create the best opportunity for success in areas of need and disadvantage.

Therefore, in my Budget bid, the information that I provided in summary and then in substance to the Committee for Social Development, my letter to OFMDFM, and in every opportunity that I have had, publically and privately, to commit myself and the Department to neighbourhood renewal going forward, I have been unambiguous. Any suggestion otherwise is, as I said last week, party political, partial and self-serving. I am glad that that issue did not raise its head during the debate.

A number of Members, including Mr Brady, Mr Beggs, and the Committee Chairperson, Mr Hamilton, asked how neighbourhood renewal should be taken forward. I am not prepared just to sit back and to say, "Steady as you go". If there are ways in which the Government in Northern Ireland, throughout their Departments, can do their work and business better, we should embrace that.

That is why I have invited organisations from across the range of DSD's responsibility to look at how they do their work. There are 7,000 charities, 4,500 voluntary and community works, 33 housing associations and three advice networks. That is the scale of much of what DSD is involved in and

funds. I have asked organisations across the range of those sectors whether there are ways that we could do things differently. At times, I have encouraged organisations to look at doing things differently, and, on one or two occasions, I have bluntly told them that they should do things differently. If there is a way of doing things going forward that protects budget lines, secures jobs, improves services and delivers better outcomes, we, as MLAs and Ministers, would be neglectful if we did not take those opportunities.

I am committed to the concept and practice of neighbourhood renewal, and I have demonstrated that through what I have done in Budget bids and thereafter. However, in some neighbourhood renewal areas, there are some matters that people need to begin to look at. Without being exhaustive or, at this stage, prescriptive, some questions need to be asked. First, is there an opportunity for more collaboration? Secondly, is there an opportunity for more shared services? Thirdly, are there opportunities to deepen interdepartmental working? Finally, are there opportunities to merge organisations? Where neighbourhood renewal is concerned, as well as in general, those are the sorts of concepts that we as a Government and I as a Minister have to grapple with and deal with if we are going to maximise the benefit to the community.

In translating that into the particular work of neighbourhood renewal, I want to lay down some further principles. When I came into office, I said, and I am saying again now, that it was my commitment that the areas of neighbourhood renewal that are working best and delivering the best outcomes will get funding for a four-year cycle. I concur with the views that hand-to-mouth, year-to-year funding is not the best way to create certainty about employment, never mind create success with delivery. Subject to the Budget being a four-year Budget and one that, I think, and everyone else in the Chamber clearly thinks, is necessary for neighbourhood renewal, my commitment is that the neighbourhood renewal projects that are working best and that deliver the best outcomes will get a certainty of funding going forward. That includes areas at risk and small pockets of deprivation, which are not being excluded from the neighbourhood renewal funding stream.

Other organisations could develop further, improve their capacity and secure better outcomes. My commitment is that the Department will work with those organisations over the short term, and potentially over a shorter-term funding cycle, to bring them to the place where longer-term funding will be available. That is a responsible position that will help organisations to mature and to fulfil their potential. By working with the Department, organisations will get to a point where they, too, are in a position to have longer-term funding.

Last week, people in the Suffolk/Lenadoon Interface Group said to me that, if one or two or a small number of organisations are not delivering the services or outcomes or are not doing all the work that DSD, neighbourhood renewal and the community expect them to do, it would be irresponsible for a community leader, a political leader or a Minister not to begin to address why that was the case. Those are parts of the principles that, going forward, should inform all our discussions and our contributions.

On such occasions as this, there is an elephant in the Chamber. The elephant in the Chamber is what appears to be a continuing effort to develop an alternative to neighbourhood renewal. It is known as the community renewal fund or some variation of that. What I do not understand is this: Mr O'Dowd said in his contribution that neighbourhood renewal had resulted in a:

*"significant change to the lives of communities".*

He said that it created "a sense of selfworth"; it had "seen what is possible"; it was "democracy at work", and it is able to:

*"open doors and ensure that agencies listen to communities."*

If that is the view of Mr O'Dowd on how neighbourhood renewal is bearing down on the conditions that exist in areas of need in Northern Ireland, the outcome of that should be to build upon neighbourhood renewal, to deepen neighbourhood renewal and to create further resources for it. That is the conclusion from Mr O'Dowd's experience in his constituency and the narrative outlined in the Chamber this afternoon.

If that is what is working and beginning to work in the lives of people in need, that is why, strategically, we cannot create a situation where that effort is fragmented, a new funding mechanism and new architecture are created, and all that architecture and the funding mechanism are developed over the heads of government — because that is what has happened — and over the heads of vast numbers of the community, who tell me day and daily of their frustration and growing anger at the fact that they are now feeling marginalised in communities that were historically marginalised for too long in this part of Ireland.

The consequence of those observations is inevitable and certain. It is that there should be more funding for neighbourhood renewal and that, if there is an alternative funding source, which OFMDFM appears to be developing over the heads of government and over the heads of the community, that money should go to neighbourhood renewal. I am putting down the challenge.

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

**The Minister for Social Development:** The challenge is this: join me in writing to Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson to say that, if there are other sources of funding that they are aware of —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time is up.

**The Minister for Social Development:** Those sources must be redirected to neighbourhood renewal. Let us build on the work on which Mr O'Dowd commented.

**Mr Beggs:** I welcome the widespread support that has been expressed for the small pockets of deprivation and for neighbourhood renewal funding generally. Several Members have spoken of the need to have the budgets finalised. We all have to recognise that, in many cases, those who are at the coalface in disadvantaged communities are making a considerable difference. We have to value them, and part of that is to enable them to have a degree of certainty about their employment, so it is important that budgets are finalised and that decisions are

taken well in advance of the end-point dates. I think of funding for community forums, etc, where frequently people do not know that there is funding for the following year until within a month of the end of the financial year. We need to plan better, and I welcome those comments from Members.

I mentioned that neighbourhood renewal has an effect on peace, and others have mentioned that it is important in certain republican and loyalist areas. Others have mentioned the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. Neighbourhood renewal can give hope to disadvantaged individuals and communities, and it is important that that funding continues to be available so that some do not fall prey to those who advocate violence as some means of creating a cause for those who may have become disenchanting with society.

I welcome some of the ideas from the Minister in his response. There needs to be joint working between Departments, because smaller groups need certainty and longer-term funding, not piecemeal funding that constantly changes so that they are constantly engaged in working out how to stitch together a programme based on two or three different issues. I fully support that idea, as well as the Minister's latter point that there are huge dangers if an independent funding source is suddenly created, possibly duplicating some of the work, specifically in republican and loyalist areas.

We ought to fund disadvantaged communities through our neighbourhood renewal strategy not through a sectarian carve-up, saying, "You get so much for your community, Martin, and you get so much for yours, Peter." We ought to use the NISRA statistics to distribute funds equitably, based on recognised outcomes and outputs from operating groups. If groups are not operating, I can understand what the Minister is saying: change has to occur and there may need to be shorter-term funding until change can be shown. However, let us have longer-term funding, projects that are seen to be working and greater certainty so that that good work can continue on improving those communities.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I thank everyone who spoke in

what has been an interesting debate. Parts were predictable, but there were some pleasant surprises. I thank the Assembly's Research and Library Service for its information pack, which brought into focus the Committee's work on neighbourhood renewal. It is a timely reminder for us all. Everybody would probably admit that when we are working on issues, they are very relevant and we know what they are. Nevertheless, it is good to see them outlined in the information pack. We will be using it as a reference point.

Mickey Brady outlined our party's support for the amendment. Neighbourhood renewal is about dealing with the small pockets of deprivation and the areas at risk. It is about making sure that, as much as possible, those who experience poverty and deprivation are not left behind. That is where many of us will probably part company, because of the variations in some of the comments.

In proposing the motion, Mickey Brady talked about the evidence of need, and other Members mentioned that. As Mickey said, it is vital that we look specifically at measures, initiatives and funding that overtly — not behind the door, not shyly or discreetly, but overtly — address poverty and deprivation.

Roy Beggs spoke about the uncertainty around the Budget and about the need to look at the 17 SPOD areas, in conjunction with the 36 neighbourhood renewal partnerships and the areas at risk. He gave some very good examples from his constituency, as did other Members.

Simon — I actually wrote Simon Cowell; it is not Simon Cowell, although I am sure that he wishes that he was Simon Cowell and had his lifestyle. I actually do not watch 'The X Factor'. I meant Simon Hamilton. Embarrassed or what?

*[Laughter.]*

In his capacity as Chairperson and as an MLA, Simon Hamilton spoke about neighbourhood renewal, health, environment and community safety. Indeed, he mentioned that capital bids went forward in the September monitoring round for 2011-15. He also spoke about the importance of looking beyond short-term funding. That is where the credit has been laid down squarely at the feet of the neighbourhood renewal work. If

funded and brought forward through DSD and the Executive, it will be one of the projects that people can identify for long-term funding, despite some of the difficulties with it. The motion is about protecting investment in that.

I know that the Minister met some of the groups involved last week. The groups say that some of the ways in which neighbourhood renewal operated were problematic. There was a great deal of focus on outputs rather than on outcomes and, without getting into the jargon of funding initiatives or their categories, workers may have felt that some of the work was merely box-ticking. Although there is a need to report, be accountable and to work according to baselines, I know, from having talked to them recently, that they felt that some of the — there is Simon Hamilton. Sorry, Simon. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that you wish that you had his lifestyle and his money.

They spoke about delivering on the needs that were identified on the ground. Sometimes, in the time that elapses between setting funding streams and reviewing them, other needs creep in and take prominence.

Mary Bradley welcomed the motion and the amendment and spoke about the need for neighbourhood renewal. Mary lives in a deprived area of the North, and she should know how successful the scheme has been in her constituency of Derry. I am sure that she will also know what has not worked. Anna spoke about the need to strengthen the impact of neighbourhood renewal on the ground and the need for additional long-term funding.

Alex Easton is like Fra McCann in many respects. There are two old friends whom Alex Easton introduces in Committee. Fra McCann's two old friends are the words "may" and "shall", and one of Alex Easton's old friends is Kilcooley — I am not even going to name the other one. I feel as if I know Kilcooley very well because of the way in which he brings up the topic. That is exactly what Members should do. If Members do not bring the needs and experiences of their constituencies into the Chamber and into debates, realistically, what is it all about?

One issue that Alex and many others raised is the need for targets to be set, with tracking and

accountability and taking on board what works on the ground. John O'Dowd also picked up on that theme when he spoke about his local college, literacy programmes in schools and infrastructural development in his constituency. More importantly — I know that the Minister also touched on this — he spoke about the avenue and outlet that neighbourhood renewal has provided for what has become known as participative democracy. We call it inclusion — people coming on board.

In many respects, when we read the report and listen to some of our experiences, it seems that we are almost ignoring some of the criticisms that partnerships made. Those include the criticism that Departments and statutory bodies come to the table with nothing. Some, but not all, departmental representatives come to the table and do not bring their contribution. Neighbourhood renewal is led by DSD and is an interdepartmental fund. Given the very nature of the scheme, other Departments have to contribute. For that reason, I wrote to all Ministers to ask what contribution they would make to neighbourhood renewal and whether they will support it in the future. I have consistently done that. If Martin McGuinness and Peter Robinson were responsible for neighbourhood renewal, I would be torturing them. As our party spokesperson on social development, I have absolutely no shame and no difficulty whatsoever in leading or organising campaigns. That is my job. We all have different spokesperson roles, and we chase and torture different Ministers. Rather than stamping their feet, people have to be honest about that.

I heard what the Minister said, and I am concerned. I am prepared to give way. Is the Minister saying that OFMDFM or any other Department has no right, and should not try, to develop initiatives that are anti-poverty in nature and that will be complementary and additional to neighbourhood renewal? If they were about displacement, I would not support them. Any initiative from whatever Department will be scrutinised in the same way as this one. Hence, it is about additionality and making sure that there is no duplication and that every initiative meets objective need, regardless of what it may be or what it may look like.

In the same vein, community safety is cited as one example in the neighbourhood renewal programme. Is the Minister saying that, in the new Justice Bill, we should not make provision for community safety or funding for groups and communities that are trying to establish and initiate community safety programmes? Indeed, the Health Minister is here as well. When it comes to the health aspects of neighbourhood renewal, should the Health Minister not have any responsibility or bring forward programmes that are, by their very nature and orientation, about community development in case it offends the Minister for Social Development and what he is trying to do with neighbourhood renewal? If that is the case, the Minister for Social Development has just undersold, unpicked and unravelled his own argument for additionality.

At the last minute, I am prepared to give way, but only on the basis that it is a genuine offer of a genuine response.

**The Minister for Social Development:** I refer the Member to my previous comments. The essence of the argument is that neighbourhood renewal and tackling disadvantage require partnership at community, governmental and statutory levels. That is what has been proven to work, and that is the model that we need to deepen and develop as we go forward. The issue is that what is being developed, in the view of many people, is exclusive and elitist. It involves one Government Department, one party, and a handpicked number of groups. That is not inclusion, equality or partnership. In those circumstances, for all the good intentions that the Member and others have, the question is whether it is likely to work.

**4.30pm**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I allowed the Minister to intervene, but he accuses people of being exclusive and elitist. I refute that allegation. It is on record that I refute it. I bear no shame, and the Committee bears no shame, in asking for additionality.

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

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have absolutely no difficulty in proposing that there should be additionality. The

Minister's party, which introduced political vetting, has a brass neck to accuse anyone of being elitist.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Your time is up.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Minister, Dolores and the rest have a brass neck.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time is up. Unlike Simon Cowell's 'The X Factor', this is not a phone-in vote.

*Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to bring forward proposals to secure neighbourhood renewal and small pockets of deprivation funding beyond March 2011.*

Extract from:

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