



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Programme for Government 2016-2021:  
Commission for Victims and Survivors and  
Victims and Survivors Forum

23 November 2016

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mike Nesbitt (Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Kennedy (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Cathal Boylan  
Mrs Pam Cameron  
Mr Seán Lynch  
Mr Philip McGuigan  
Mr Richie McPhillips  
Mr Christopher Stalford

**Witnesses:**

Mr John Beggs	Commission for Victims and Survivors
Mrs Judith Thompson	Commission for Victims and Survivors
Mr Paul Crawford	Victims and Survivors Forum
Ms Sarah Malone	Victims and Survivors Forum

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Joining us are Judith Thompson, the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, and John Beggs, the secretary to the commission. We have two new members of the Victims and Survivors Forum: Sarah Malone and Paul Crawford. You are all very welcome, particularly Paul and Sarah. It is your first time here, so please relax. You are not hostile witnesses. Judith, are you going to make some opening remarks?

**Mrs Judith Thompson (Commission for Victims and Survivors):** Yes. Thank you all for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee today on the draft Programme for Government. We aim to highlight the views of victims and survivors at what we recognise is a critical juncture in setting government priorities for the next five years.

I am pleased to introduce two new members of our Victims and Survivors Forum. As I think you will all be aware, the forum is established in legislation. All members are victims, and they put the voice of those who speak from personal experience at the centre of our policy advice. Sarah Malone and Paul Crawford will address the Committee shortly.

I will summarise our consultation on the Programme for Government to date. We coordinated a sectoral response to the first consultation, which closed on 22 July. We contacted all the victims' groups and individuals on our panel and wider database and had full discussion with the victims forum. On the basis of that consultation, the commission welcomes and supports the adoption of an outcomes-based approach. We are supportive of the partnership approach to tackling societal issues, and we see the benefits of this already in collaborative work with the Executive Office and the Victims

and Survivors Service, as well as strengthening collaboration with Health and Justice. In particular, we welcome the recognition of the importance of partnership with the voluntary and community sector; a very significant amount of work happens at community level with service delivery for victims and survivors.

The approach of the Commission for Victims and Survivors through the draft Programme for Government is to assess it against the key policy framework set out in the strategy for victims and survivors. As you will be aware, there are three key themes in the strategy: dealing with the past, improving services and building for the future. Research, particularly that on the extent and nature of mental health problems, of transgenerational trauma deriving from those mental health issues and other legacy issues that are proving corrosive in their impact on some justice institutions, tells us that the achievement of a number of the draft Programme for Government outcomes is critically dependent on dealing with victims and survivors issues and the things that are addressed in the strategy. If we are to have safe communities, care for those in need and high-quality public services, we need to address victims and survivors' issues.

Whilst many of those outcomes and indicators are in the draft Programme for Government, they are covered implicitly and too generally. They do not refer explicitly or sufficiently to the impact and ongoing legacy of the Troubles and the particular societal context of Northern Ireland. In July, we recommended, on the basis of the consultation, that there should be a requirement for an outcome that specifically referred to dealing with the past and victims' issues. We felt that the proposed measures set out in the Stormont House Agreement were important to achieving the outcomes aimed for in the Programme for Government. The commission also recommended specific indicators to deal with the past adequately and ensure the best service provision for victims and for us to build for the future on the basis that what gets measured gets done. If victims' issues and the aims of the victims strategy are not reflected in the measures or indicators of the Programme for Government, that, in our view, does not give confidence to victims and survivors that the issues will be approached robustly enough. We are coordinating a second consultation process, and we note that the most recent Programme for Government, whilst it still has no victim-specific outcomes, makes broad commitments to assessing legacy, and there are references to the past. We still feel, however, on our first reading, that there is insufficient reflection of victims and survivors' issues or of the key planks of the strategy of the recent Stormont House Agreement in the indicators.

I will stop there and ask our forum members to give a brief overview from their own and the forum's perspective.

**Ms Sarah Malone (Victims and Survivors Forum):** I was appointed to the forum in September this year. The reason for my application was that my father was a Catholic RUC officer who was murdered in the Liverpool Bar in 1987.

Further to a recent meeting with the other forum members, there were a few broad points that everybody agreed on after reviewing the draft Programme for Government. It is fair to say that all forum members — victims and survivors — feel that we do not have the luxury of not dealing with legacy issues. We already deal with them every day, and we have had no choice in that. If the approach taken by the Government is to be outcome-based, all outcomes could be delivered more successfully and with reduced risk if legacy issues were dealt with. We felt that Ministers needed to take more direct ownership of victims and survivors' issues.

Judith mentioned the difficulty of there not being specific outcomes relating to victims and survivors' issues, which are not going anywhere and are pretty consistent across the board, regardless of individual circumstances. I had also wondered why there would be engagement, especially publicly, with certain victims but not all or others. The 2006 legislation defines us all as being the same. It has already been too long. Too many people have experienced a great deal of hurt in the loss of their nearest and dearest, their quality of life or both. There is frustration that, to an extent, legacy issues seem to be airbrushed. One of the key aspects of the outcomes-based approach is care, which, we feel, includes care for victims and survivors. We are a section of society as well, and we feel that we are perhaps under-recognised at the moment.

**Mr Paul Crawford (Victims and Survivors Forum):** Thank you for the opportunity to acknowledge the huge amount of work that has been done by a lot of people over a number of years.

I am Paul Crawford, and I am from west Belfast. My aunt lost her life in 1972; my father lost his life in 1974; my cousin Patrick, who was my aunt Martha's son, lost his life in 1975; and I had an attack on my life in 1981. That is not really unusual for a huge number of people in our community. I support

what Sarah said and want to say that we in the forum — it has been an experience and a pleasure to be on it — are agreed that we are very frustrated. We think that the structures agreed in the Stormont House Agreement should be fully implemented: the full package should be implemented.

If you will bear with me for a minute, I want to put into context why it is such an issue. People talk about statistics. I talk about human beings, but statistics are important. In west Belfast, 617 human beings from every background lost their life, over 9,000 were physically injured and many more were traumatised. That equates to 18% or 20% of the population who lived in west Belfast at the time. I mention that in order to give you an idea of the impact on a community. I have been making comparisons recently because the centenary of the battle of the Somme has just passed. At that time, war was fought on foreign battlefields, soldiers came back and they were the experts, by lived experience, of our conflict, warfare or whatever terminology you use. They came back and had shell shock, as it was known, which nowadays we would probably call post-traumatic stress. If you look at it like that, we have a shell-shocked community. We did not go away to foreign battlefields; we lived in the trenches. The deaths, injuries, traumatisation, people going to jail, gun battles, bombs and the burning barricades were on our streets. That is why it has had such an impact and is so important.

We really need to get the Stormont House Agreement in, but we need to get structures to support people. We need to look at mental health and well-being and services, and we need to make sure that the victims' constituency, which is part of this community, is supported through the processes and that victims get the greatest degree of — I was going to say "closure", but I do not believe that closure exists — reconciliation that can be reached. That requires support and mental health and well-being services. You also have modern developments, such as an increase in suicide rates, an increase in addictions and high rates of addiction to prescribed medication. All those things can in some way be attributed to the legacy of the Troubles.

I will finish on the point that Sarah started with: key to all this is getting the structures in place so that everyone can be equally supported in having their personal issues addressed.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thank you. If members will permit me to speak in a personal capacity, I think that the well-being of communities is core to moving forward. I agree with you that putting institutions like the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU) and truth recovery in place without wrap-around support would be regressive. It would not be sensible to do that without support. Anyway, that is my view, not the Committee's.

Commissioner, did you say that you consulted everybody on your database?

**Mrs Thompson:** May I make a couple of points —

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Oh, sorry. I beg your pardon.

**Mrs Thompson:** I have nothing to add to what the forum members have said, but I have a couple of points about strategic outcomes. We can then, by all means, talk about the consultation.

We assume that there is unlikely to be a specific outcome for legacy issues, but the commission still sees a huge opportunity for the sector to articulate the broad impact that it can make on the draft Programme for Government. The challenge is to ensure that that is captured in the indicators set for the Programme for Government. To outline our approach, I will quickly update the Committee on some work between the commission, the Executive Office and the service on outcomes. That work has already commenced in the Victims and Survivors Service and the funded groups. There is good evidence from that of a positive impact already emerging. I know that Margaret and Oliver will talk in more detail about that in a moment.

We are working with the service and the Executive Office to articulate the new outcomes of ongoing work delivered by groups, the service and the commission. That will underpin our corporate plan and delivery plans. We already have a process under way. The comprehensive needs assessment, which was carried out by the commission initially, outlines seven key outcomes for victims and survivors in terms of their needs. All the subsequent research has reinforced that comprehensive needs assessment. Linked to that, we have four strategic outcomes for service delivery that, in turn, can be related to the Programme for Government. A process is already under way to articulate victims' needs clearly, based on the comprehensive needs assessment, including health and well-being and the need for social support. We need to address transgenerational issues. There is a high correlation between mental health, self-harm and suicide amongst young people, particularly those in the most deprived

areas. We know that there is a complex but direct relationship between conflict and trauma and the next generation. Professional and personal development is an important benefit for victims and survivors, as are individual financial needs, welfare support, truth, justice and acknowledgement. You can see the relationship between the proposed measures in the Stormont House Agreement and the seven needs identified by victims and survivors. On the basis of the comprehensive needs assessment, the outcomes, which the commission and the service are working towards with the Department, are that we improve the health and well-being of victims and survivors; we improve access to opportunities for learning and development for victims and survivors; we care for victims and survivors and help those most in need; and we support victims and survivors and their families to engage in legacy issues.

There are indicators that, again, Margaret Bateson and Oliver will outline in their presentation. They have been aligned to those different measures and needs. In the Programme for Government, they are aligned to outcome 4:

*"We enjoy long, healthy, active lives";*

outcome 7:

*"We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other";*

outcome 8:

*"We care for others and we help those in need";*

and outcome 14:

*"We give our children and young people the best start in life".*

We will find other places as well, but those seem to be core.

Our ideal scenario is an explicit outcome and indicators to address legacy issues. However, starting from the point that that may be unlikely, we still see a huge opportunity for the sector to articulate the broad impact that it can have on the draft Programme for Government. The challenge that we absolutely want to address with the Committee over the coming months until the end of the consultation is to ensure that this is captured in the indicators in the Programme for Government.

The final thought that I want to leave with you is to highlight specifically the importance of implementing the Stormont House Agreement's measures for dealing with the past. If we want to have healthy lives and address the transgenerational impact of trauma for our children and for them to have the best start in life, we need the mental health trauma service. We need historical investigations, oral history and advocacy counselling if we are to have a safe community in which we respect the law and each other. We regularly hear from our Chief Constable and other justice institutions that those legacy issues or the failure to address them are toxic. They are draining confidence in justice, which has gone through an incredibly protracted and well-regarded process of reform.

Finally, if we are truly to care for others and help those in need, we should think about pensions as well as the mental health trauma service.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I am sorry; I did not mean to interrupt. The question that I was interested in is this: did you say that you had consulted everyone on your database?

**Mrs Thompson:** My understanding is that an email was sent to our entire database.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** You could not have been more comprehensive in your consultation.

**Mrs Thompson:** We always do our best to talk to as many people as we can, and we are still doing that.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** It sounds impressive. In your view, outcomes-based accountability (OBA) is good but is not explicit enough. Sarah, you are focusing on the sense of not being taken on

board and being slightly ignored. How hurtful — I do not want to put words into your mouth, but I do not want to censor you either. Basically, I want to give you an opportunity to say how you feel about the fact that there is not an explicit outcome for victims and survivors.

**Ms Malone:** On the basis of personal experience, my view is that I am incensed, but that is nothing new. We have been ignored for 27 years. I cannot speak for anyone else on the forum, but, in a general way, I have learned a lot from my colleagues on the forum and have heard a lot of different stories from people in different ways. That has only reinforced the fact that, for me, it appears that nobody really wants to deal with us. Nobody wants to deal with legacy issues, perhaps because it is too politically sensitive — I am not sure. For me, personally, it is a very emotive subject. For me and a number of other people on the forum, I know that the reason we are there is to work together to improve things for victims and survivors. We do not say to one another, "Your story is less important than mine" or anything like that. Everybody treats each other with respect, and we would like to be acknowledged in a more specific capacity, perhaps, because it is such a unique situation and a unique group. People's circumstances will never change. Those are my feelings.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Paul, would you like to comment on that specific aspect?

**Mr Crawford:** Sarah expresses an extremely widespread and common view. For me, there are things that trigger high levels of frustration and anger. One — present company excepted, I suppose — is politicians going on TV and saying, "I am sure that I speak for all victims". That is really annoying, because the reality is that no one speaks for all victims. Another thing that is very annoying is when victims are spoken about as if they are a totally separate community who live on Mars. Victims are very much human beings and very much part of the community. There is not a separate victims community. They may well be an important constituency who need to have their issues looked at.

I sometimes find myself shouting at the television when, for example — I am speaking personally now and not on behalf of anybody else — the structures are there and they are parked. The frustration builds. The personal opinion that I form is that people in high positions, such as previous Secretaries of State, start to move to prejudge structures or truth recovery and describe other people's recollections as perfidious. I find that deeply offensive. I give that as an example, and there are many others.

In a nutshell, it needs to be recognised that victims are human beings. This is going on and is being passed on to the next generation. Everybody is aware of the impact of transgenerational trauma and all the mental health and well-being issues that I spoke about. It is so frustrating. As Sarah said, it is almost as if victims are pulled out of a hat while it is convenient. Your hopes are raised when things like the Stormont House Agreement are fanfared, but then nothing happens. Things need to move now.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** We have a focus at the moment on the second of three documents. We have had the framework PFG and are now on the consultation Programme for Government. Sometime early next year, I think that we will see the final Programme for Government. There will then be a fourth suite of documents that is probably the key in all this: the delivery documents. What are your expectations, Judith, of your input to drawing up delivery documents?

**Mrs Thompson:** Our expectations are that we get to work closely with politicians and the civil servants who are articulating the measures and the work programmes so that we can see that the work that, we believe, needs to be done is included. We believe that a lot of it is already captured in the strategy. That work will deliver or contribute significantly to a number of those outcomes. Those things should be captured, measured and valued, because they will then be a priority and will happen.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** I ask because your document states that there is an opportunity for the sector to make a broad impact on the Programme for Government. How do you physically see that happening?

**Mrs Thompson:** At the moment, I am not sure exactly how those mechanisms will work. We would like, for example, to look at the work that is ongoing on a mental health trauma service, link that work at a strategic level to deliverables and measurables in the Programme for Government and see them prioritised, assessed and measured. Do you want to add anything, John?

**Mr John Beggs (Commission for Victims and Survivors):** You will hear from the Victims and Survivors Service shortly on the new strategic outcomes that we are developing for victims and survivors, and, for the first time, we will not only report those outcomes to the Executive Office in the context of the work that it does but establish formal contacts with the Department of Health through new partnership agreements, with the Department of Justice and with the Department for Communities on the breadth of work that we do in the commission and with the Victims and Survivors Service. It is about formalising those contacts beyond the Executive Office and making sure that the good data that is now being captured by the Victims and Survivors Service gets all the way up to those Departments, so that we can demonstrate that impact. It is about being more formal and setting up a broader network of contacts in the Civil Service.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Clearly, you would have assessed it as being easier to input had you had the specific outcome on victims. You accept that you are where you are. How much more difficult will it be to work with what you have?

**Mrs Thompson:** The critical thing is to have measures against the outcomes that capture the contribution that is being made by the work in the victims strategy. If you look at some of the broad measures around reconciliation, for example, there are things that might be achieved in many years' time if we do the things that we need to do now around dealing with the past. However, we have nothing intermediate that asks whether we are doing the things that will get us to that point. There is nothing that measures specifically what we do in mental health trauma services, even though there are measures around percentage mental health in the population. There is not sufficient that specifically relates to dealing with legacy issues in our justice system, for example, which would undoubtedly contribute, if we did it, to confidence in justice and in people's sense of safer communities. It is about the measures.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Would you accept that these things will be hard to measure? While you might say that a lot of victims and survivors suffer poor mental health and well-being so we will focus on some sort of medicalised model like the trauma service, their poor well-being or poor mental health may be because of the lack of justice or lack of knowledge of what happened. It is a Venn diagram; it is not separate pots.

**Mrs Thompson:** We absolutely agree; it is complex. I think you will find that John and Margaret, with the work that is being done in the Victims and Survivors Service, are starting to articulate that. We will collect data against those kinds of measures. We want to feed that in, and we want to be clear that it is recognised.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Data and measurement is at the core of the new outcomes-based accountability approach. As you said, what gets measured gets done. That could be a great plus, but there is a danger that it becomes a negative. We have heard from, I suppose, the arch-critic of OBA, Toby Lowe, who said that the danger is, effectively, that you stop teaching a child to give them a rounded education and you teach them to pass an exam — you manipulate the data. Do you have any specific fears about how data in your sector could be manipulated to look good without actually delivering lasting impacts?

**Mr J Beggs:** We do not have any fears that the data would be manipulated. The service providers and groups do a lot of good work in the sector. This is a big opportunity now for those groups to demonstrate the impact that they have. As you said, it is complicated. The health and well-being side of things is more straightforward. If there is a counselling course or a complementary therapy for a victim or survivor, you can measure the improvement that that makes for that individual. That can be consolidated so that it gives us some headline findings. However, the truth, justice and reconciliation side of things, as well as the social support that is provided to victims and survivors, takes a bit more work. We see it as an opportunity that the sector can now consolidate and show what impact it makes not just on victims and survivors but on society and government at large in the Programme for Government.

**Mrs Thompson:** If I could add a metaphor, Chairperson, there is one that I heard in this context before, which is that weighing the pig does not make it fatter. However, where we are, in some ways, in the collection of data in this area is that we have been talking about fattening the pig without ever weighing it for a period of time. We are now getting to a point where we are starting to establish some baseline measurements. Yes, there are always concerns about getting too obsessed with measurement, but, at this point, we think that it is a healthy direction of travel. We are delighted that the service has been able to move things that way and is working well with the groups to do it.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is this new way of government well understood by the forum, Sarah and Paul?

**Ms Malone:** In what way? What do you mean?

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Previously, a Programme for Government would say, for example, "5,000 people will go on a camp" or "We are going to do 10,000 of that", whereas this is a kind of higher-end Programme for Government, where we will have longer, healthier lives or better jobs.

**Ms Malone:** It makes more sense. Not everybody is the same type of learner; some people need to sit back and observe things while others need to get involved in something to learn it. In the same way, you cannot assign things and tell people, "That will improve your life because we have taken this from a list of options, and we feel that this camping trip" — to use your example — "will improve your life". Everybody's needs are different, and it cannot be so simplified. However, the outcomes-based approach, where you have a view to what you want to achieve in all groups of society, is probably the most sensible.

**Mr Crawford:** I think that, generally, we are across it, but — there is always a "but" — though the outcomes and the indicators in the Programme for Government are good, they are strategic and, as you have said, are set high. The proof of the pudding, as they say, will be in the eating and how it actually works when you get down to the nitty-gritty and put the systems into place.

We have discussed this, and, in the opinion of the forum, potentially quite a few of the outcomes are considerably more likely to be achieved if victims' issues are addressed. For example, the well-being and health outcomes and the financial implications of them. It makes financial sense to deal with the issues rather than have them fester for a long time to come. The answer to your question is yes.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Thank you. Let us bring in the Deputy Chair.

**Mr Kennedy:** Welcome, and thank you for your attendance and your contributions. I am interested in the work of the forum. How do you think the forum assists reconciliation? I mean both reconciliation to what has happened to families and individuals and reconciliation between the main traditions.

**Mr Crawford:** That is hard to say. In the short time that I have been on the forum, I have found it enjoyable and educational. It has enlightened me to be in an environment — the forum — where the issues are and they are discussed. There is consensus on the vast majority of things. You have the potential to make a difference by feeding that up to John and the commissioner to inform what they do at their level. It is absolutely crucial because it can inform the debate and can have a positive and even calming influence on the wider debate because you generally get consensus.

**Ms Malone:** I will add to what Paul said. I agree with him. In the shorter time since I was appointed to the forum, I have found it extremely valuable and, overall, an overwhelmingly positive experience. Whilst the forum agrees on a lot of the issues that we need to discuss, there are individuals behind that, so everybody has their own viewpoint on issues. Those opinions are respected. That is nearly cathartic to watch. Sometimes, you turn on the TV and see point-scoring, arguments and always the same intransigence. In the forum, by contrast, I feel that everybody puts their absolute utmost effort into working with people whom they might not have been normally exposed to in their own environment in the communities where they grew up or just had preconceived notions about. It is an incredible experience overall, and, given that we all seem to have worked well together so far, it can only be positive.

**Mr Crawford:** I have also been very impressed, for want of a better word, by how quickly we got down to business and how quickly the working groups were formed, like the working groups on services to victims and survivors, raising the profile of the Victims and Survivors Forum, the Commission for Victims and Survivors engagement plan and the pension for the severely injured. From the word "Go", we have expressed our frustration that legacy issues are not there, so it is not that everything is wonderful. I find it difficult that there is no group on the legacy, as yet. The forum members are gelling well; we are working really well together and making progress, but there are those wee frustrations that will, hopefully, be dealt with in the near future.

**Mr Kennedy:** On broader themes, we have a Programme for Government and a new approach. First, it strikes me that it has always been important and of assistance that victims and survivors have the



opportunity to tell their story, whether in books, in articles or by other methods. What approach will be taken to that?

Secondly — this is a bit of a jump — there is always a balance between those who represent groups and those who are not part of groups and prefer to remain as individuals. How do you continue to meet that challenge and achieve the balance?

**Mrs Thompson:** I will address your second point first. We talk extensively to victims and survivors groups. I have been out to visit about 70 groups. The larger groups are major service deliverers, so I regularly meet them. However, while there are individuals on the forum who are members of some of those groups, I have been really clear with this round of replenishment of the forum that people come to it as individuals, because the purpose of the forum is to give policy advice based on people's lived experience and consultation in that room. You have to be able to come into that room on the basis that you might sometimes leave it thinking differently from when you entered it. You cannot do that if you are there to represent some other group. I hope that it has been really clear to those coming on to the group that they are there as individuals. If they choose to belong to a group, that is their choice and it is absolutely fine — we will always consult and listen to groups — but, in that forum, you are there as an individual.

Yes, there are individuals who, as part of forming a relationship in the forum, have discussed their stories or experiences to whatever degree they are comfortable doing so. My observation is that people have been incredibly open and respectful about those experiences. There is a wider thing there, and we have tended to see it as part of an oral history archive and a really important part of the proposed legacy institutions, so that something is created where different narratives are respected and recognised and recorded from an individual and community point of view. It is our sense that, when people have had the opportunity to do that in a way where they are heard and respected, they see others as well.

**Mr McPhillips:** I thank the panel for the interesting presentation, and you are most welcome. I specifically ask the commissioner how disappointed she is that victims and survivors are not explicitly included as an outcome in the draft Programme for Government. As a result of that, do you think that victims and survivors will be a lower priority with the current Executive? How will the indicators under the four outcomes that you mentioned as being relevant to victims and survivors be measured, and how will you ensure consistency in the process?

**Mrs Thompson:** In answer to your first question, I am deeply disappointed. It is really important for us as a society, as well as for individuals who have been damaged or bereaved or traumatised, and for the whole of Northern Ireland that we move forward on these issues, as they are dragging us back in many important areas. Yes, I am deeply disappointed, and it feels as if there is no confidence in government that this is doable. It reads as though there is no measure in there in case we cannot do it. We do not have an option, and that is how I feel about what is there.

Now, we are all pragmatic people, and, if we cannot get a specific measure, we will look to demonstrate other ways to deal with issues of truth and justice, with mental health trauma and transgenerational issues and confidence in our justice system and Government. These are all closely connected issues. There are ways to measure that, and you will shortly hear more from Margaret and Oliver on work that is being done and being measured in terms of improvements to people's lives, better mental health and stronger families. It is possible to gather feedback from people who are in receipt of services and to get from them what impact they think those services have had.

When it comes to measuring the impact of people's experience, if we get it, of the Historical Investigations Unit, the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR) and the Oral History Archive (OHA), that is part of a research programme that is in planning at the moment. We have secured money allocated from the Peace programme, and that is good news for us, as it allows us to work really closely with people going through those processes and gathering good data and feedback on how that works for them.

Yes, I believe it can be done, and the absence from the Programme for Government of a way of showing how those measures impact will be a terribly missed opportunity. From a victim and survivors point of view, it is worse than that; it will be like being ignored again.

**Mr Lynch:** Thank you for the presentation. Paul and Sarah and you talked about the frustrations, and you also talked about the positive aspects. No doubt you are encountering difficulties as well. Paul, can you give us an idea of other work that you are engaged in with the forum?

**Mr Crawford:** In the time I have been there, we have discussed pretty much everything that has been discussed here today: legacy issues, the pensions issue, services, the Programme for Government, setting up the working groups named earlier and looking at how the Programme for Government correlates with what the commissioner has laid out.

**Mr Lynch:** Can you give us a flavour of the consensus on issues you mentioned, such as legacy and pensions, now that some of those issues are starting to come out in the media?

**Mr Crawford:** What attracted me to the forum in the first place was not only my life history but knowing a bit about what the Victims and Survivors Service had done. When I read its core values, what jumped out at me was, "We will treat everyone equally", and I have found that in the forum. People discuss things, but they are sincere and respectful when they make a point. People have different views. I think that we have reached consensus on pretty much everything that we have discussed. Without breaking any confidentiality or going into comments — people own their comments and experience — there was general agreement on one major issue. A couple of people said that they would not be jumping for joy but could live with it, and one person said, "Absolutely not". However, we reached consensus, and that was on the issue of the pension, just to name it.

**Mr Lynch:** Just on that, Chair, I was surprised when you said, Paul, that there was no group on legacy issues. I want to put this to the commissioner: it is surprising that the legacy issue seems to have been banished among yourselves.

**Mrs Thompson:** May I respond to that? It is absolutely not banished. What happened previously was that a subgroup was set up. Some difficult conversations were had, but, when the subgroup came back to the larger group, it was in a different place and others in the wider group who had not been part of the conversations found it difficult to accept where the subgroup was coming from. We agreed that we would work on legacy as a large group, rather than break off to do that. That will be the focus of the next meeting of the main forum. We have just —

**Mr J Beggs:** Just to clarify, the new members, Sarah and Paul, really only took up their positions on the forum in September. They have been to three formal meetings and have dealt with immediate issues to do with the Programme for Government, services and standards. We will move on to legacy issues, the pension and some of the more difficult issues. I just wanted to clarify that legacy issues are on the work programme. It is a time-planning issue.

**Mr Lynch:** Commissioner, you said that legacy issues were "toxic". Why is the pension issue being isolated and brought out of the whole remit?

**Mrs Thompson:** May I clarify my comment? I did not mean that the legacy issue was toxic; what I hope I said was that the failure to address legacy has a toxic impact. If there are groups of people in different communities who believe that truth, acknowledgement or, in some cases, justice is being withheld from them as a consequence of investigations that have not happened or the results of which have not been shared, that undermines policing, despite the extent to which our Police Service has changed through reform. That was the toxic impact that I was talking about — not toxic in the forum.

In the forum, there is no sense that legacy issues are excluded or any intention to exclude them. They have been discussed and will be discussed. The pension issue was specifically raised by certain forum members in the context of an intention to go to the media, as you have seen recently. That was not because, as a commission, we had decided to separate it from other issues. We had not.

**Mr Lynch:** Finally, you said that it is important that the Stormont House Agreement is implemented. Why, in your view, is that so important?

**Mrs Thompson:** I tend to envisage it as a package of measures. I think of it in terms of delivering the four things that victims and survivors have consistently told us they want. Acknowledgement is incredibly important to everybody I have spoken to, no matter what their experience or where they have come from. The Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG) is the first body proposed to address that in a thematic as well as an individual way. Aspects of the Oral History Archive also give

acknowledgement. There is something in there that is supposed to be about truth, and I think that that will come in part from the HIU but also from the IRG. On justice, we are not unrealistic with anybody — I do not think that victims are either — about how often a case might go right through a justice process. We know that that is unlikely, given the age of some of the cases, but the principle of accountability is still there. The possibility that, where there may be evidence, the main justice process is there, and, where it is not, you have reports for families, which is truth.

The final bit, which is incredibly important, is reparation. You will have read the reports from Pablo de Greiff, the UN rapporteur. We have done a great deal, as you have heard today, for victims and survivors, but it is not being framed as reparation for the most part, as he observes. If we really look properly at having a new mental health trauma service, proper advocacy support for anyone going through the new processes and a pension for the bereaved, it will be a good start to reparation. That is why implementation of the Stormont House Agreement is so important. If you look at it as a cluster of measures and map it against truth, justice, acknowledgement and reparation, there is something for everyone, and there are choices and options for people, because people want different things.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** OK. There are two issues to finish with. In your paper, you talk about outcome 7 in the draft Programme for Government consultation document and state that there is limited knowledge on the respect index and increased reconciliation. Did you have any level of engagement with the Department on that?

**Mr J Beggs:** Yes. In the delivery plan, which is a work in progress with the Department, there was an initial consultation, and we are listed as a key delivery partner. There has therefore been initial consultation, and we will consult further with the Department on that, specifically on reconciliation.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** Is it not fair to say that the forum is an exemplar of respect and reconciliation? I declare an interest. I was at the commission when the pilot forum first met, and it was most remarkable to observe as an experiment in shared space. It was always potentially explosive but was never anything other than respectful. Has the forum been recognised as such by the Department?

**Mr J Beggs:** Not as yet, but I would say that we will suggest that it should be an exemplar model of reconciliation and respect. For the next consultation case that comes up, we will make sure that the forum is represented alongside us.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** You are a key delivery partner. You look surprised.

**Mrs Thompson:** No, I am not surprised. I wanted to add — I hesitate to say this — that victims' issues are often presented as being highly divisive. I wish I had a penny for every time that someone has said to me, "Commissioner, you will never get anywhere, because victims can't agree". People should come and watch a forum meeting, because that is not the case. When you start to divide things into different politics with a small "p", a very discordant noise can happen, but, if you put human beings with lived experience in a room together, you will find that there is far more that they have in common than they have dividing them, and I think that you have heard that today from our forum members.

**Mr Boylan:** I just want to thank you for your presentations. Paul and Sarah have been very brave and gave good presentations.

Commissioner, I heard you mention reports. There is a report by the special rapporteur: has there been any discussion of that?

**Mrs Thompson:** We have not had a forum meeting since the full report came out. We have read it and talked informally with members about it today, but it has not been on the agenda for a forum meeting. You will know that the rapporteur met the forum when he made his visit and had quite a lengthy discussion at that point, but that was last November. Therefore, it is not in the time that —

**Mr Boylan:** Has it not been discussed since? Are you saying that there has been no opportunity to discuss it?

**Mrs Thompson:** No. When Pablo de Greiff was here, he met the forum and discussed with it all the issues that he was facing. His final report was produced last Friday, since when we have not had a meeting, although we talked to the members informally about it today.

**Mr Crawford:** As a new victim member, I will clarify my experience of it. The communication is excellent in the commissioner's office, and I have the report that you are talking about. It was emailed to very forum member, I understand.

**Mrs Thompson:** Yes.

**Mr Crawford:** I have had the opportunity to read through it only once. Sarah and I are only two aspects of the victims' constituency. We had a quick chat this morning, and, at first glance, the same two paragraphs jumped out at both of us. I have circled them. They are paragraphs 111 and 112 on page 21. I will not read out the whole paragraph, but what jumped out was:

*"more work needs to be done to resolve the challenging legacy of [the] past".*

Paragraph 112 states the importance of recognising that there are many times more cases of people being injured. Pablo gives a full list of instances of illegal detention, sexual violence, torture, injury and severe harm. Those far outnumber deaths. He states that all those things are potentially human rights violations.

That jumped out at us because it illustrates — I think that I am right in saying this, because we very briefly discussed it — that, being bereaved, as both of us are, it is fairly straightforward to present your credentials, if you like, as a victim. However, there are many times more people who are physically and traumatically injured. I am not leaving out anybody on that list — it is the entire constituency. Some of the figures that I did not give earlier were that the prison population went from a couple of hundred to between 20,000 and 40,000 people going through prison as a direct result of the conflict. Those two paragraphs jumped out at us, but we have not looked at the report in any depth.

**Mr Boylan:** I asked the question because you talked about the fact that you are new members. You are on the forum now and have gone through some thematic groups. On the likes of those reports, can you personally talk about how you feel? Obviously, you have only just got the report, but how will that, as part of the conversation as you go forward, impact on talking to people from different communities?

**Ms Malone:** This may be an assumption of mine, but the report might help some people on the forum to articulate how they feel in a way that everybody can understand and identify with. As Paul said, we have not had a huge amount of time to read through the report, but it was circulated to us as soon as was feasible, which was yesterday or possibly the day before.

**Mr Boylan:** It will help inform discussion, obviously.

**Ms Malone:** Yes, absolutely. I am sure that it will.

**The Chairperson (Mr Nesbitt):** OK. Thanks to all four of you. Thanks to Judith and John and, no disrespect, particularly to Sarah and Paul. Thank you very much for sharing your time with us today. We appreciate it.

**Mrs Thompson:** Thank you.