

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 2017-19, HC 498](#)

Wednesday 31 January 2018

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Members present: Dr Andrew Murrison (Chair); John Grogan; Mr Stephen Hepburn; Lady Hermon; Kate Hoey; Conor McGinn; Nigel Mills; Ian Paisley; Jim Shannon; Bob Stewart.

Questions 71 – 179

Witnesses

[I:](#) Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; Sir Jonathan Stephens KCB, Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP and Sir Jonathan Stephens.

Q71 **Chair:** Secretary of State and Sir Jonathan, good morning. It is great to see you. We approach this session in a spirit of great optimism, given the unexpected but delightful decision by the ITC on Bombardier. We are all buoyed up and ready to go. I would like to invite you to take three minutes to give us a sort of state of the union address on how you see things at the moment.

Karen Bradley: It feels like a selection meeting: "You have three minutes, and you will sit down by the end of it."

Thank you very much to the Committee for inviting me. I know that you had originally hoped to see the Secretary of State a couple of weeks ago. I am three weeks and two days into the job. If you could count the number of days I have been in the job on your fingers, that might well have been a very pointless session from your point of view, but I will endeavour to do my best to answer all your questions. I am delighted that Sir Jonathan is here with me, though, because there may well be points of detail or history that have not yet come through my briefings. I hope you will understand if I turn to Sir Jonathan for points on those matters.

As you will know, I have focused on getting the talks restarted and I am pleased to say that the talks did restart last Wednesday. All parties are involved and, at the moment, they are in the preparedness stage where we are giving briefings to parties and allowing those parties that have what I have described as narrow but deep differences to try to work through those differences, so that an Executive can be formed. For the information of the Committee, I have said that all-party roundtable talks will start no later than Monday next week, the 5th. I will be responding to oral questions in the House of Commons next Wednesday, the 7th. There have been some reports that I will be making a statement to the House. My statement will be a topical statement as part of questions, as is the norm during oral questions. But I will be reporting to the House on Wednesday, when I do oral questions, as to the progress on the talks and what will need to be done in terms of any legislation required to be put through the Westminster Parliament, to enable functioning of the institutions.

I am happy, of course, to answer questions about the process of the talks, but I hope the Committee will understand that we are at a sensitive point. It would not be appropriate for me to go into detail at this stage as to where the talks are and what is being discussed. I will try to answer any questions, but, if I say it is not appropriate for me to answer, please trust me that it is because I want the result of getting devolved government back up and running.



The final thing to say is in terms of priorities. The absolute priority for me at the moment is to get devolved government up and running. That is the right thing for the people of Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland elected their politicians and they want their politicians to deliver those matters that have been properly devolved to Stormont by Westminster over the course of almost 100 years. We are not talking about recent devolution here; the powers that vest in Stormont are ones that have been there for many years.

My focus is on that, but I am also acutely aware of economic situations, of making sure that we promote Northern Ireland, from the point of view of bringing in inward investment, jobs, tourism. There are issues around education and the health service and these all need to be addressed. Many of them, rightly, should be addressed at Stormont by politicians elected there, but as Secretary of State I know I have a role in making sure that there is the promotion of Northern Ireland and that there is good governance in Northern Ireland to enable all those fantastic opportunities that I know there are for the people of Northern Ireland to be realised.

Q72 Chair: Smashing, thank you very much indeed. Last Monday, this Committee went to Brussels to discuss with Michel Barnier where we are with respect to the land border and his thoughts on the matter, which were very insightful and very encouraging. You will be aware that paragraph 49 of the joint report talks about specific solutions, option 2, which I assume the Northern Ireland Office is giving some thought to at the moment. I am wondering what preparatory work you have done on those specific solutions and whether you can perhaps shed some light on what they might be.

Karen Bradley: I appreciated the Committee's visit to Brussels because, the following day, I gave evidence to the House of Lords European Union Committee. It was very helpful to me to see some of the comments and views that had been expressed during your meeting as part of my preparation for that. I probably should have said in my opening remarks that there is a greater wealth of experience and expertise in matters Northern Ireland around this Committee table than I have. I am looking forward to working with all of you in addressing the issues we have.

On the issue of Brexit, you are right about the joint report and paragraph 49. It is probably just worth setting out the joint report and what it envisages. Clearly, the first option is that we want the relationship north-south between Northern Ireland and Ireland to be addressed through the overall relationship that the United Kingdom has with the EU, to enable there to be, as we have committed to, no hard border, no new physical infrastructure at the border, to enable free movement of goods and people and so that life in Northern Ireland can continue in the way it has for decades. The common travel area was in place from the 1920s. Obviously, 1992 was when changes happened in customs borders, because both countries became members of the European Union customs



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union. Then we had the Belfast agreement, the Good Friday agreement. It is important that all parts of the Belfast agreement are recognised in the relationship that we have with the European Union and how that north-south issue, and east-west issues, are addressed between the country of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Our priority and preference is that all those matters will be addressed through the overall relationship. But we clearly needed to make sure that there was an understanding and a backstop in terms of alignment on those matters where there is a need for north-south co-operation. Take, for instance, agriculture and the basic issue of there being fields that cross the border—you cannot have different pesticide regimes in a field that has one half in one country and another half in another—or the single electricity market.

You talked about specific solutions, Chairman. There are unique circumstances in Northern Ireland, and those unique circumstances are unique in the context of the European Union and any member state. There is no other third country where the country it is part of a sovereign state with is on a different island from that country but that has a land border with a European Union member state. These are unique circumstances.

Q73 Chair: Can I call you on a specific? The cash control regulations are being batted about in Brussels at the moment. As you know, they will have the effect of limiting the amount of cash that can be transferred across borders to €10,000. At the moment, that clearly does not apply, because the UK is part of the European Union, but it will apply fairly shortly. What preparations are being made for that? Unlike many things that you may wish to control by way of tariff, this clearly lies outwith that. It almost implies that there would be some check at that border even if tariffs and regulations did not diverge, because the European Union is proposing that there should be a formal check of some sort around the currency that people are potentially transferring outside the European Union. What is your thinking on how we might address that, because it implies some form of infrastructure or individuals on the border?

Karen Bradley: That is going to be an issue at every border the United Kingdom has. Those are borders that include the channel ports, the ports to the Netherlands and Germany, the ports on the south coast that take holidaymakers to and from France and where goods are transported. That will be an issue at every port we have. Therefore, the thinking around how we would deal with that sits within the Department for Exiting the European Union. We want a relationship such that there is a frictionless border at all our border crossings.

Q74 Chair: The difference with this border—and this is its uniqueness—is that at the borders to which you have referred there is already infrastructure, there are already staff and there are already checks. We are creating a new situation in the island of Ireland. It is not any old border; it is a border that has very significant security implications, which is why the



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Government have been quite clear there should be no infrastructure on that border after 29 March 2019. I have just given an example of a regulation that will shortly be enacted in Brussels that will have a very direct effect on that border and imply the need for some sort of checks, so how will we deal with that?

Karen Bradley: As I say, we want to address this through our overall relationship with the European Union, and that is a matter that is being looked at by the Department for Exiting the European Union. As the Northern Ireland Office, we feed into and are part of the discussions about our future relationship because of the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland. You are absolutely right, Chair, there are more crossing points on the border between the north and the south than there are on the whole of the eastern border of the European Union. This is a unique situation and one that we are extraordinarily mindful of.

I suspect that kind of regulation and thinking by the European Union is probably one of the reasons that 65% of my electorate chose to vote to leave the European Union, because they perhaps did not want to be part of an organisation that imposes such things. I hope we can work with the European Union so that this does not become an issue, but, to be clear, the British Government have said very clearly that there will be no new physical infrastructure at the border in Northern Ireland. We want to maintain the crossing points. We want to maintain the community interaction. There are families living on different sides of the roads; one will happen to live in a member state of the European Union and one will not when we have left the European Union. We want to make sure that we have addressed all those points.

Q75 **Chair:** Thank you. On the same day that we were in Brussels, the Scottish Minister Fiona Hyslop announced that she was going to Brussels again. This followed 17 separate visits to Brussels in 2017 by Scottish Ministers. She said she was going to “build relationships with Europe and seek to influence negotiations in the coming months to protect Scotland’s interests”. We have heard very strongly that the voice of Northern Ireland is not being heard because of the absence of a functioning Executive. That clearly is not good enough, given that Northern Ireland, of all the nations of the United Kingdom, is right in the van of Brexit. The whole thing hinges on Northern Ireland, bluntly, and it is absolutely right that Northern Ireland’s voice is heard loud and clear. What are you doing to ensure that voice is heard loud and clear? What more, in your view, needs to be done in the event that we do not get a restored Executive?

Karen Bradley: My priority and focus is entirely on getting a restored Executive, but the points you make are extraordinarily pertinent. These are exactly the reasons why we need the elected politicians for Northern Ireland to do the job that their constituents voted for them to do, which is to represent them in the Assembly in Stormont and to form an Executive that will give them the voice they need on the world stage. I am working tirelessly to achieve that. I will be returning to Belfast as



soon as possible after today's vote, to make sure that I am there and pushing that point along. I will repeat the points you have made, Chair, to the parties, because it is only with a devolved Government, an Executive, a First Minister and Deputy First Minister speaking for the people of Northern Ireland that that voice will be properly heard.

I suspect there is a temptation to say, "Oh well, that's okay; just go off and do it. You are the UK Government; you can do it on their behalf". I think the people of Northern Ireland would feel that that was absolutely wrong, and that the right people to speak for them on the matters that matter to the people of Northern Ireland are the people whom the people of Northern Ireland elected to do that.

Q76 Jim Shannon: First, the Committee wishes you, as I have done in letter form, every success in your new role.

Karen Bradley: Thank you, and thank you for your letter.

Jim Shannon: We will be here to support you and your officials, who are very industrious on your behalf.

Very quickly, I will underline the point that the Chairman has made. When we were in Brussels, we met those from the Northern Ireland bureau. Can I say very gently, Secretary of State, that they intimated to us that they needed direction? They needed someone to tell them, and they were particularly rudderless when it came to making decisions. They are in a position of wishing to do well and being unable to do well, to respond or to put their views forward. Chairman, I understand that we have already agreed to send a letter suggesting a way forward, which may help that, but it is very important. You have responded well to the Chairman, Secretary of State, but I just want to put it on record, because it is important to do so.

On the issue of budget, I am no different from any other MP in Northern Ireland. We are all getting it every day. We have concerns over projects that are almost in limbo because there is no budget from the Departments to do them. I do a lot of work personally in the community and work directly with community organisations, with their projects. We have the projects on hold; we have people with contracts coming to and end on 31 March unsure of where they are going to be on 1 April. Can you give us some idea, perhaps, budget-wise, of how you see this?

We have had meetings and correspondence with the heads and Permanent Secretaries of Departments. Last week we had David Sterling here as well. We cannot underline enough how critical the budget is for the delivery of services. I will give some quick examples that were mentioned last week: first, diabetic insulin pumps. We have something like 300 or 400 pumps sitting in the hospitals, but we cannot use them because we do not have the training or the people to follow up the service. How incredible is it to have the pumps there and not be able to get them out? It is not the Permanent Secretary's fault and it is certainly not our fault. He cannot make decisions on the budget.



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We have the issue of the out-of-hours services, which are falling apart. We are 300 GPs shy in Northern Ireland. These are the critical factors for health. On roads, they have not done white lines in my constituency for two years, my goodness me. Lights go out and they do not renew them; they just do not have the budget. We are the pothole king of Northern Ireland, because everywhere is riddled with potholes, and they are important. It is not just the damage to cars; it is the effect upon people. We really need something on the budget.

Karen Bradley: Mr Shannon, you sum up exactly the views that have been expressed to me by people across Northern Ireland over the last three weeks, which is a frustration that things cannot be delivered in this way. I have met David Sterling and I saw the evidence that he gave last week to the Committee. He has expressed his concerns about budget with me. Potholes are a classic example. In my constituency, in Staffordshire, the potholes are dealt with by local county councillors, who are on the ground, elected by people to deliver the repair of potholes, and they do a very good job at doing that. It is absolutely right that that should be done by locally elected politicians. There are locally elected politicians; they can form an Assembly. I am working with them to be in the best position for that to be the case, because people need those services to be delivered. As I say, I have met David Sterling and I have heard his concerns about budget. This is why it is imperative we get on and do this as quickly as possible.

Q77 **Jim Shannon:** Have we a timescale? David Sterling indicated last week that 7 February seemed to be the deadline, and I think you intimated in your three-minute introduction a timescale of next week. Are we in a position, come next week, where we will have at least the answers on the budget and where we are going? I tell you what; it will be an early Christmas present for everyone if we know that we have a budget in place. It will be a miracle, to tell you the truth, but there you are.

Karen Bradley: As I have said, I will be answering oral questions next Wednesday. I suspect some of the Committee may well be in; in fact, some of them have questions on the Order Paper.

Q78 **Jim Shannon:** I have a question, if it is chosen, so we will see. If that is the case it will be great stuff.

Again, I do not want to throw you in at the deep end, but automatically the responsibility falls on your shoulders, I suppose. We all know the problems with Kilroot. All of a sudden, we find ourselves potentially with no energy production in Northern Ireland. The impacts of that are clear and other Members will speak upon it as well, but we could find ourselves in a position where we do not and cannot produce energy. I was not on the Committee when they were doing the energy inquiry; I came in at the tail end of it, but there clearly was an undertaking on record, and I would suggest maybe your officials check *Hansard* in relation to that. To find ourselves in a position over the last week where potentially Kilroot is going and jobs are lost is quite disappointing, but more importantly the



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energy and the potential to produce that there is also lost. Could you give us some thoughts on what you, as Secretary of State, are able to do in relation to it? Can we, very gently—well, gently in words but firmly in action—ask you to secure the energy provision in Northern Ireland and not let it slip away by default? I tell you what: if we are beholden upon somebody else for our energy production, I would not like to be dependent upon some firms in some parts of the country not too far away from us if they were in charge of energy provision. If that was the case, it would be a dire day for Northern Ireland.

Karen Bradley: I am obviously aware of the situation in Kilroot. It was an auction for capacity that was held by the regulator. The job of Government is to ensure that energy supply is secure. The terms of the auction were such that that is something we are confident has been settled, but it is very worrying that Kilroot did not get any of the capacity from the T-1 auction. I know there are further auctions later in the year—T-4, I think it is—and I would hope that Kilroot will be one of the bidding parties for that. My predecessor met AES on a couple of occasions, and I have asked officials to set up an early meeting with AES so that I can work with it. I would urge it to think about and protect those jobs for the people who work so very hard at Kilroot at the moment, and who we need to make sure are able to bid for the T-4 capacity auction later in the year.

Jim Shannon: Every step needs to be undertaken urgently, with zest, energy and commitment to make sure that it happens. My colleague Ian Paisley has already, today, in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, asked for an inquiry on energy. I would underline to you the importance that we put upon it.

Q79 **Kate Hoey:** It is very nice to have you here so soon after your appointment.

Karen Bradley: Thank you for your note, too. In fact, I think I have to thank everyone for notes around this table.

Kate Hoey: I was surprised that you had never visited Northern Ireland, so I am really pleased that you and I are going to have to spend quite a lot of time there over the next while. Had you visited the Republic of Ireland at all before you became a Minister?

Karen Bradley: I have visited the Republic of Ireland three or four times. I had a plan to go to Northern Ireland this time last year. I was going on the first weekend in February, as Culture Secretary, to the “Game of Thrones” set and the Titanic Museum. It was all planned and then, because of the sensitivities of the collapse of the Executive, I was advised by officials not to go. It is very disappointing to me that we were never able to get back there because of the sensitivities of talks. It seemed that, every time it went in the diary, we were at a difficult point in talks, and I was asked if I would not come, in order to not jeopardise where we were.



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Q80 Kate Hoey: Getting back to the Executive, we all say we want the Executive and the Assembly back. When you talk to people about it, are they saying they want the Executive back, or do they just want to get the budget and get things done? Are you finding people clamouring to you saying, "Please, please bring back our Assembly"?

Karen Bradley: Yes, they are saying to me that they want their politicians to do what they elected them to do: businesses, colleges, people involved in inward investment. I have made it a point, every time I have been in Northern Ireland, that I have not just sat in Stormont House or in the Parliament buildings in talks, but I have gone out and met people who are involved in real life. They all tell me that they do not understand why the politicians cannot just do what they were elected to do and run the institutions, so that these matters can be dealt with.

When I was at Belfast Metropolitan College, they were saying that it was difficult for them to know about recruiting teachers and offering places to students, because they simply did not know what money they would have. Often, I hear people say, "I wish the politicians would get out of the way; they are all a waste of time" etc. This is an absolute example of what happens if politicians are not there. The civil servants are doing an amazing job. I have met directors and others involved in working in the civil service, and they are working tirelessly. They are absolutely committed and determined to deliver, but they can only deliver within the remit of ministerial direction they were given before the Executive collapsed. They are unable to take those executive decisions, because they are civil servants, they are not elected politicians.

Q81 Kate Hoey: I expect you have seen that over the last year there were a number of deadlines given by the previous Secretary of State, all of which were completely ignored in one way or the other. People are beginning to get fed up with deadlines. There is a deadline, as I understand it, for 8 February, to report back about whether, in making the budget, something would have to happen in terms of direct rule of some kind or other. Are you intending to stick to that deadline?

Karen Bradley: As I said, I am answering oral questions next Wednesday. As far as I know, the Speaker does not tend to move oral questions around the whim of Secretaries of State, so I think I will be here answering oral questions. At that point, I will need to give updates on progress with the talks and any legislation that will need to be put through the Westminster Parliament.

Q82 Kate Hoey: We are hoping that by next week, as my colleague has said, there will be some concrete move one way or the other.

Karen Bradley: I would like to be in a position to do that, yes. We would need legislation, for example, to re-form an Executive, so I will need to make announcements as to what legislation is required to be done in Westminster.



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Q83 **Kate Hoey:** Are you also doing some work on plan B, in other words, if that does not happen, how we then move towards some form of more direct rule from the United Kingdom Parliament?

Karen Bradley: I am under a legal duty to call an election, as things stand. I have to be mindful of that.

Q84 **Kate Hoey:** You do not have to call an election, do you?

Karen Bradley: I am under a legal duty to call an election in the absence of an Executive.

Q85 **Kate Hoey:** The only way you could avoid that would be to come to Parliament and get a change.

Karen Bradley: My focus is on getting success from these talks. That is what I have to focus my energies on. I want to be in that position next Wednesday. To anybody who can put any influence whatsoever on any of the parties to give me the opportunity to come to Parliament next Wednesday and say that we are bringing forward legislation for a new Executive, I will be eternally grateful.

Q86 **Kate Hoey:** Have you given any thought to the fact that a mandatory coalition really, long-term, cannot work, because one side or the other simply uses it as an opportunity to get their own demands or walk out, or whatever? Have you given any thought to really whether, long-term, if we are serious about democratic government in Northern Ireland, we have to move towards some kind of normal politics there, which would mean amending the Belfast agreement?

Karen Bradley: The Belfast agreement took many years to come to agreement on. We are coming up to the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement. It has transformed Northern Ireland; it has absolutely transformed it. I was at Visit Belfast last week, the tourism board, and I was shown a video of the tourism industry in the 1970s. It is totally unrecognisable. If there is any message I have to people watching this evidence, it is that Northern Ireland is not what you think it is from the films you remember seeing in the 1970s of the Troubles. It was transformed as a result of the Good Friday agreement. That peace process and the bravery of the politicians at that point have meant that Northern Ireland is becoming more prosperous; that there are more jobs; the unemployment rate is the lowest it has ever been.

As to the suggestion that we should, at this stage, do anything other than respect the Belfast agreement and get the institutions that the Belfast agreement put in place back up and running, we need to focus on that at the moment. That is the key thing.

Q87 **Kate Hoey:** Okay, you have made your point very clear. Can I very quickly move on to one other thing? Have you read up about Mr Downey? Did you read our report on the on-the-runs issue?



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Karen Bradley: I have seen your report about that matter. If you do not mind, I am going to refer to Sir Jonathan on this, because we did have a conversation before we came in about this.

Q88 **Kate Hoey:** I simply wanted to ask you a question. Did you know John Downey got legal aid to be able to fight in the courts here, and yet the families of the Hyde Park bombing victims have been turned down over and over again for legal aid? In your position as Secretary of State, I know you cannot tell the legal aid board to do anything, but is it something that you feel is unjust: that Mr Downey could get British legal aid but the families of the Hyde Park victims could not?

Karen Bradley: I am sure the Lord Chancellor has heard those points, and I will be happy to raise them with him again.

Q89 **Kate Hoey:** Okay. Sir Jonathan, I don't think I want to ask you anything, other than that I heard a rumour you might be moving on. Is that right?

Sir Jonathan Stephens: It is news to me. No, I am very happy here and am planning to stay here, thank you very much.

Q90 **Chair:** Can I press you on the Downey issue? Clearly what has been said may be heard by those who are directly empowered to make a determination on this matter, but you must have a personal view, having read into this in some depth by now, I suspect, on the relative merits of Downey and the victims of the Hyde Park bombings having access to legal aid. What do you think about that?

Karen Bradley: I think, Chair, that personal views and being Secretary of State are sometimes incompatible. It is therefore best, as Secretary of State, to not express personal views, because it can inflame situations.

Q91 **Kate Hoey:** Will you meet the victims?

Karen Bradley: I am very happy to meet victims. I have met the Victims' Commissioner already and we are setting up, once we have an opportunity for a bit more time in my diary, for me to have a proper meeting with victims.

Q92 **Kate Hoey:** I am talking about the Hyde Park victims.

Karen Bradley: Yes, I am happy to meet victims from all sides of the Troubles.

Q93 **Chair:** The only observation I would make is that many of our colleagues in senior positions do not feel so constrained.

Karen Bradley: Maybe not in front of Select Committees, though.

Q94 **Ian Paisley:** Not yet. Welcome to your post, Secretary of State. It is good to see you here. I must say I welcomed the fact that one of your first visits was to Invest Northern Ireland. That set a very good tone that you are focusing on the economy, jobs, employment and prosperity, which are the things that the people of Northern Ireland need and need



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to hear about. My only advice to you is not to let officials tell you where to go. Get stuck in, go everywhere and be yourself.

Karen Bradley: I am looking forward to many invitations. You have been very kind to make sure I have had a few come in my direction.

Q95 **Ian Paisley:** Absolutely, and do make sure that you get stuck in and put yourself about.

You raised the issue of an election. Do you think we will have an election at the end of this talks process?

Karen Bradley: I do not want to speculate on where we will be at the end of the talks process. Where I would like to be is that the devolved institutions will be back up and running and functioning in Stormont, which is the right thing for the people of Northern Ireland. I do not want to speculate beyond that.

Q96 **Ian Paisley:** In his questions, Mr Shannon raised the issue of security of supply of electricity. This is a really important issue, as you will know. There are jobs at Ballylumford and Kilroot that now see themselves in serious danger. We were led to believe that we had an interconnector solution to this, which we actually do not have in place yet. Indeed, if planning permissions go the way that some people think, we may never have full planning for some of this issue, so we do not have security of supply.

We are told that there are going to be major consumer savings. In fact, people are boasting of something like £175 million-worth of consumer savings. Of course, they do not tell us that £160 million of that is savings in the Republic of Ireland; only £15 million of that is savings in Northern Ireland. Would you be minded, as we do our inquiry again into this matter and raise this issue, to raise this at Cabinet, about security of supply of electricity and energy to all the people of the United Kingdom, and how Northern Ireland is now teetering on the edge of this and has significant problems?

Karen Bradley: I look forward to any work that the Select Committee does on this matter, because it will be very helpful for everybody's understanding, across the board, on this matter. I have had briefings from officials so far on the matter, but I am looking forward to meeting AES and those who are involved in this issue. Your question directly was whether I would raise the matter at Cabinet; if that is appropriate, of course I will.

Q97 **Ian Paisley:** I would appreciate that, because it would be good for Cabinet to realise that the energy issues of Northern Ireland cannot be cut off from the rest of the UK. We have a connector, as you know, with Scotland, but it is not always reliable and we need to make sure that this issue of energy supply, cost of supply and us, the people of the United Kingdom, being in charge of our energy is absolutely vital. If that can be raised, I would appreciate it.



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Last week, when we had the Permanent Secretary in, I raised with him some issues to do with what I call “showcase” events for Northern Ireland. In your evidence to us, you have been very strong about how you want to promote the good side of Northern Ireland. There is a really good story about Northern Ireland. As you know, we have the Irish Open this year, the British Open next year; we have international road races and the potential in 2019, I heard this morning, of the British Superbike Championship being held in Coalisland.

Those are all very significant stories, but the people who run those events, whether it is North West 200 or the Commonwealth Youth Games, need to know that there is going to be money in place from the local government to make sure that they can be carried off. Can you give assurances to those people that, no matter what happens, whether we have an Executive up and running or whether Westminster politicians take more and more control back, those events will continue to be underwritten and supported, so that the showcase events of Northern Ireland can go ahead?

Karen Bradley: It is another example of why a devolved Government is so important. In my previous role, the Youth Games came across my desk on a number of occasions. It was very frustrating that there was a need for an executive order to be given by a devolved Government and no devolved Government is in place. I have said to a few people that I will look to bring DCMS to Northern Ireland, rather than the other way around. I look forward to enjoying those showcase events. We have talked already about Jonny Rea and his great success in world superbikes. There are many other sporting heroes from Northern Ireland and I look forward to promoting and supporting all those events as Secretary of State.

I have always felt and believed that sport is one of those things that can bring communities together. It can bring people together. It can also make you feel really good about yourself and proud of where you live, and that is a very important thing.

Q98 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you both very much indeed for coming along this morning. I am perplexed, Secretary of State, by the fact that you have repeatedly indicated that you are going to take Northern Ireland questions next week. You seem to have ruled out a statement to the House; is that correct?

Karen Bradley: I have never talked about a statement. I was always talking about how the 7th was a deadline—a milestone is the better word for it—because it is the date of oral questions. Oral questions involve a topical statement and I will be making that topical statement. The point I want to make is that the dates of statements can be moved at the whim of the Secretary of State. The date of questions cannot be moved.

Q99 **Lady Hermon:** I acknowledge that the date of questions will not be moved and will be next Wednesday, but will there be a statement to the



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House next week from the newly appointed Secretary of State—and I am delighted with your appointment—about Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: I will be answering questions next week. That is all I can absolutely confirm: that on the 7th I will be answering questions.

Q100 **Lady Hermon:** Then let me ask a follow-up question. When did the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland last make a statement to the House of Commons?

Karen Bradley: I believe that my predecessor made a statement sometime in December. Would that be right?

Sir Jonathan Stephens: I do not know the precise date, but around about the end of November, beginning of December.

Q101 **Lady Hermon:** Northern Ireland has not had a functioning Government for over a year. It is the only part of the United Kingdom that does not have a functioning Government. Would it not be appropriate to update the House of Commons with a statement and make that commitment today? We had certainly understood from last week's evidence that there would be a statement. I am puzzled and perplexed that there is no commitment from the newly appointed Secretary of State that there will be a statement to update the House of Commons—not just Northern Ireland questions, but a proper statement to the House.

Karen Bradley: I am very grateful, Lady Hermon, that you give me the opportunity to clarify where there was misunderstanding, because I had heard people say that I would be giving a statement. I have always been clear that next week's milestone on the 7th is the date of oral questions. Therefore, I will be in the House of Commons and I will be answering questions.

The other thing I would say is that I have always come to the House of Commons to provide statements when it has been appropriate for me to do so. I did that in my previous role. I was never shy of coming forward and making a statement when it was appropriate to do so.

I just want to clarify for the Committee and for others: next week's milestone is that I am answering oral questions. I will, therefore, be in the House of Commons and I will be answering yours and other Members' questions. It is unfortunate that the word "statement" started to be bandied around by some commentators in terms of it being separate from questions. The statement I will make will be the topical statement that would always be made as part of oral questions. As to whether there is a need for a further statement and its timing, it is something that I would like to be able to do at the appropriate point.

Q102 **Lady Hermon:** I take it that that is a long way of saying to me that there is no intention of there being a statement next week.

Karen Bradley: I am not saying there is no intention. I am saying that the thing I am definitely doing is answering oral questions. I do not want



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to commit, at this stage, to whether there is a need to make additional statements to the House next week or any other date. The thing set in stone is oral questions, which will be answered next Wednesday. The determination about making a statement will be made on the basis of when it is appropriate to do something that requires updates to Parliament.

Q103 Chair: Secretary of State, you are sensing the view of this Committee on this important milestone. It is quite likely, I suspect, that Members may apply to the Speaker for an urgent question.

Karen Bradley: Of course and I would understand that.

Chair: In general, presentationally, it is better if Ministers volunteer a statement in the House rather than, as characterised, being dragged to the House by way of a UQ. I cannot anticipate Mr Speaker's reaction to a request for a UQ, but I would be very surprised, knowing him as I do, if he did not grant it.

Karen Bradley: I absolutely understand that and I have always, as a Secretary of State, given a voluntary statement when it is appropriate to do so on all matters and issues. All I am saying is that it is unfortunate that some have interpreted 7 February as being somehow the milestone for a statement, which is a long, 12-minute statement with questions on that particular topic. The point about next Wednesday is that it is when I am answering oral questions in the House of Commons. I am sorry if there has been misunderstanding about the significance of 7 February. It is the date of oral questions. During oral questions I make a topical statement, as all Secretaries of State do, and I will make that topical statement. As to whether it will be the right point to make a full statement about the progress on the talks, I really do need to see where we are on the talks at that point.

Q104 Jim Shannon: The reason why it is so important is because the following week is recess week, so we have then lost 10 days before we come back, so 7 February is vitally important. It is up to you to decide, but do you know something? I would have the statement next week, and then we would not have to put in a request—

Karen Bradley: I can see the appetite for a statement.

Jim Shannon: Just say yes.

Karen Bradley: I would not want to make a statement if I had to spend the whole of the statement saying, "I am afraid I cannot answer that question because we are at a sensitive point in the talks". I do not want to be in a position of giving you a commitment that I will make a statement at which I say nothing. I will make a statement when I have something to say.

Jim Shannon: On the budget?



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Karen Bradley: I will give the commitment to this Committee that, when I have something concrete to say about progress in the talks, I will make a statement on that point. I will not commit to a date when that will be, because I would not wish to jeopardise the talks, nor to come to Parliament and insult Parliament by saying I have come to make a statement in which I will say nothing. That would be the wrong thing to do. But I will be answering oral questions and I will, of course, during that make a topical statement on the points.

Q105 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you very much indeed. I think we have the drift that there is not going to be a statement. Well, we will be surprised if there is a statement next week. I just have to say that I am particularly disappointed for the people of Northern Ireland, who do not get an update about where in fact the talks are and how governance is going forward in Northern Ireland.

Karen Bradley: Lady Hermon, can I say that I hope we are in a different position next week and I can give you firm commitments on that, for the sake of the people of Northern Ireland?

Q106 **Lady Hermon:** Good. That sounds much more encouraging. Right, moving forward on that encouraging note then, which has taken a long time to get to, you have now flagged up that there could be good news next week. In your talks, which you have described as being at a preparatory stage, at a sensitive stage, and which are going into roundtable talks next week, what do you regard as the carrots and the sticks to encourage the Northern Ireland Executive, the decision makers, to get the Executive up and running?

Karen Bradley: There is a carrot, which is to deliver for the people who elected those politicians the devolved Government that they bothered to go to the ballot box and put a cross in the box for. That is the carrot. I do not really think it is appropriate for me to go beyond that, in terms of detailed negotiations and where the talks are.

Q107 **Lady Hermon:** Let me just remind you that your predecessor, very wisely, took independent advice about MLAs' salaries and staff allowances, and commissioned Trevor Reaney to do an independent assessment about whether MLAs' salaries and staff allowances should be cut. If my memory serves me correctly, that report was delivered by Mr Reaney on 20 December. Five weeks have now passed. He had recommended that there should be an immediate cut to MLAs' salaries. What has happened to his recommendations?

Karen Bradley: I have seen Mr Reaney's report and I am very grateful to him for the work he has done. I am considering the points he has made. Clearly, it would require primary legislation in Westminster, of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords. Therefore, I need to think about timing and other matters on this point, but it is clearly an available option.

Q108 **Lady Hermon:** May I just reflect to you the views of many people I meet



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and have met for a long period of time, who are absolutely furious that MLAs continue to receive their full salary, full staffing allowance, and we have not had an Executive functioning for 13 months in Northern Ireland?

Karen Bradley: It is a view that has been expressed to me as well by a number of people. I am very mindful of the view of the public in Northern Ireland about this issue.

Q109 **Lady Hermon:** Has the Reaney report been kicked into the long grass at the sensitive time of these talks?

Karen Bradley: I do not think that is the way to view it. It is just that we need to think about timing and other matters. The MLAs who are conducting talks are aware also of the fact of the Reaney recommendations.

Q110 **Lady Hermon:** Is there any intention on your part to implement any of the Reaney recommendations?

Karen Bradley: I will update the House of Commons when I have made a decision on that point.

Q111 **Lady Hermon:** We look forward in anticipation to next Wednesday. We will set aside the Reaney report and come to the very, very, very good news of Bombardier on Friday night. The fact that Boeing's complaint against Bombardier had been unanimously rejected in America was absolutely big news for Bombardier in Belfast—for all the people of Northern Ireland, in fact, and the United Kingdom. It has been reported that the Prime Minister had spoken to President Trump at the Davos economic summit the day before the decision was made. Can you enlighten the Committee about the impact that the Prime Minister's intervention might have had on the ultimate decision regarding Bombardier?

Karen Bradley: I would not want to speculate on that at all. The United Kingdom Government have always been clear, though, that we disagreed with the decision that was taken initially. We appealed that decision and we are very pleased, as I know everybody is around this table, by the decision that was taken. We continue to support Bombardier. We thought it was an unreasonable and wrong decision originally, and we are very pleased that the right decision has been taken now.

Q112 **Lady Hermon:** Have you spoken to the Prime Minister about what she said about Bombardier to President Trump?

Karen Bradley: She does not share private conversations with me, but she knows full well the strength of feeling on this particular matter.

Q113 **Lady Hermon:** You are the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, you sit in the Cabinet and you have not discussed the Bombardier decision with the Prime Minister.



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Karen Bradley: I didn't say that. I have discussed the Bombardier decision with her. I have not been privy to private conversations that she had with the President of the United States.

Q114 **Lady Hermon:** So you cannot confirm that that had any influence at all.

Karen Bradley: I would not want to speculate.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: It is worth saying that this is the culmination of intense work across the British Government, with a range of Ministers and Departments involved.

Q115 **Lady Hermon:** And the trade unions, the management and the local MP.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: Absolutely, and local politicians, engaging with the US Government and its agencies at a range of levels—Secretary of State, Prime Minister and below—over a large number of months. It is also the result of the objective case that was put in by Bombardier to the US International Trade Commission, which recognised the force of that case.

Q116 **Lady Hermon:** Finally, may I just bring you back to some evidence that was given to us and was of particular concern, I must say, to the survivors and victims of historical institutional abuse? That was the evidence that was given to us last week by David Sterling about the timetable for implementing the Hart recommendations. The Hart report was published and accepted, as I understood, by all the main political parties in Northern Ireland in January 2017. We have not had the Northern Ireland Assembly passing legislation, so we have had civil servants who have had over a year to draft the legislation to implement the recommendations of the Hart report. We heard in evidence last week that the legislation will take, if I remember correctly, until June.

There are some victims of historical institutional abuse who may not live to see compensation paid to them, who are terminally ill. The evidence given last week was very upsetting to many of them. There should be no excuse and no delay, so, as the new Secretary of State, what can you say to give encouragement to those people that they will live to see compensation sooner rather than later?

Karen Bradley: This is a point that has been raised with me on a number of occasions. The findings of the Hart review are shocking and horrendous, and nobody should have had to go through any abuse of that sort. You will know that when I was in the Home Office I was part of the team that put in place the historical abuse inquiry for England and Wales. We had debates and discussions in the Chamber about the territorial extent of that, but the fact that the devolved Government in Stormont had started the Hart inquiry meant that that was being addressed properly in Northern Ireland.

The point is that it was the devolved Government that set up the inquiry. It was Stormont that set up the inquiry. We have a constitutional



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framework that says it is the responsibility of the body that set up the inquiry to deliver on the recommendations. It is another reason why we need to have devolved institutions back up and running in Stormont as soon as possible. If there is no other reason, justice for the victims is absolutely vital. I would urge again that we get those institutions up and running, and that the recommendations are dealt with and dealt with properly, so that the victims have the dignity that they deserve, having gone through such horrendous ordeals.

Q117 Lady Hermon: Are you formally ruling out legislation being taken through Westminster to expedite the compensation to be paid to the victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland? Is that what you are doing today?

Karen Bradley: If Westminster had set up the inquiry, it would be Westminster Parliament's responsibility to deliver on that inquiry. Westminster did not set it up, and we have constitutional arrangements where it is not appropriate for Westminster to intervene. We are in the middle of a talks process; it is one of those matters that mean there is an urgency about these talks. It is one of those issues that the politicians should recognise as being reasons for urgency. I will do all I can to get those institutions back up and running for the sake of the victims of that abuse.

Q118 Lady Hermon: While this Parliament can legislate to reduce the salaries of MLAs and their staff allowance, we cannot have a commitment from the Secretary of State that, on this particular issue, the Hart report, these people who have suffered so much, the victims and survivors of appalling abuse, can be helped by the Westminster Government taking through legislation to specifically ensure that they have compensation. That is what you are saying today.

Karen Bradley: I am saying that there are constitutional arrangements in place that cannot easily be overridden or ignored, and need to be respected. MLA pay is a matter for Westminster. That is a matter that the Westminster Parliament deals with. The Westminster Parliament is not backward at coming forward in legislation that Westminster has responsibility for.

Lady Hermon: It appears to be backward in coming forward.

Karen Bradley: Where we have constitutional responsibility for legislation, I would suggest that there are very few Members of the House of Commons who are backward in coming forward in terms of bringing forward legislation, where it is properly done through Westminster. But we have to respect the constitutional set-up. We have to respect where inquiries and other things are matters for devolved government. But we have a role to help, to assist and to ensure that there is delivery on the recommendations that were put forward. It is one of the things that I am most mindful about during the talks process, to remind the politicians of their duty in that respect.



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Q119 **Ian Paisley:** On the Hart inquiry, you do accept that the issue is a lot more complicated? Many people will ask, as taxpayers, why they should pay compensation to victims of church and institutional abuse that they were not responsible for; surely the Churches and the institutions that carried out that abuse should, through legislation, be made to pay the compensation. You do accept that there is another side to this very tricky argument, and that does not take away from any of the victims?

Karen Bradley: None of this is simple or easy. The inquiry that was set up in England sees that, where there are failings at institutional level, there was a duty of care that the state should have been aware of. That is the same issue that we are dealing with. It is important that the state is not afraid to accept where it has made mistakes and done things wrong in the past, and that we need to have exposure and justice for the victims.

Q120 **Ian Paisley:** Where the state has done it, but, like you, hard-pressed taxpayers in my constituency work hard, pay their taxes and then hear that there is a suggestion that their money should be paid to people who have been made victims by institutions that are rolling in money. Those institutions should be made to put their hand in their pocket and pay the money.

Karen Bradley: You make a very powerful point.

Q121 **Conor McGinn:** It is very good to see you, Secretary of State. I enjoyed working closely with you in your previous role, over matters relating to horseracing primarily. I found that you listen to a range of views, but you are not afraid to take a tough decision and I am sure that will stand you in good stead in your new post. Of course, that does not place me under any obligation to be particularly nice or particularly soft.

Karen Bradley: I was never expecting you to be.

Conor McGinn: But I do say that in the spirit of looking forward to working with you.

Karen Bradley: You were never soft previously.

Conor McGinn: That is true.

I am just a wee bit confused about the choreography and the chronology of all this. When your predecessor came before the Committee last autumn, he had indicated that there was a deadline in and around November. We seemed to have a bit of hiatus then. I am pleased that you have arrested that and that talks have been reconvened, but I am unclear about what next week means. A budget has to be set; there are oral questions here. When is it time to say, "This far and no further"? You, perhaps with the Irish Government, presenting a proposal or a plan for a way forward: when does that happen? Frankly, as you have alluded to and as have colleagues on the Committee, the public are getting a bit fed up with it.



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Karen Bradley: I have been clear throughout that 7 February represented a milestone, in that I will be in the House of Commons answering questions and it is before we go into recess. Therefore, there are certain decisions around legislation and what needs to be done. Much depends on how the talks progress, so it would be wrong for me to speculate today as to where we will get to, apart from anything else because I do not want to say or do anything that jeopardises success in the talks.

Q122 **Conor McGinn:** I understand that and we support that, but you must know what you will have to do next week if there is not a successful outcome to the talks, so we can be confident that you, Sir Jonathan, you, Secretary of State and the Department understand that something needs to happen next week. That is the question that I am asking. It cannot just be postponed. There are things that need to take place next week, like setting a budget; is that right?

Karen Bradley: You have had evidence from David Sterling. You are right; there are things that the civil service of Northern Ireland, working incredibly hard in difficult circumstances, would like certainty on. I am acutely aware of those points as well. Depending on the outcome of talks, different things will need to be done in Westminster, and I would hope that next week I can provide an update as to what those things are.

Conor McGinn: I will not press you any further on that, understanding what you said at the outset.

Karen Bradley: Sir Jonathan, do you want to add anything?

Sir Jonathan Stephens: No, you have set it out very clearly. It is a milestone. There are a range of different routes going forward. Obviously, the one that we are all working towards is re-establishment of an Executive. That itself would require primary legislation at Westminster. In the event that does not happen, it is delayed or more time is taken, there is the important issue of providing certainty for planning, for the budget. That was the issue last November.

Conor McGinn: We muddled through.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: The Secretary of State acted and legislation was presented for last year's budget to Westminster. In due course, that may be necessary again. There is also the potential contingency of an election, which the Secretary of State remains under a duty to hold, and other contingencies. The opportunity next week is to provide an update on where progress is.

Q123 **Conor McGinn:** Something will happen next week, hopefully positive. Can I just ask about the structure of the talks? Who is talking to whom and who is facilitating that? The two Governments are there. You are, presumably, meeting bilaterally with the parties. Are there multilateral sessions being held? Who is talking to whom? Presumably, the detail of



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an agreement needs to be worked out between the DUP and Sinn Féin. I know you will try to facilitate that with the Irish Government, but other parties are meeting too, so what is the structure of the talks?

Karen Bradley: All parties are involved in the preparedness stage. Briefings are available to all parties on any matters that they wish to discuss. Bilaterals are occurring between a variety of different parties, but I have been clear that all-party roundtable talks will start no later than next Monday, the 5th. That was on the basis that on the 7th I will be in Parliament for oral questions, and therefore I need to be able to say something about where we have got to on that point, but the 5th is the “no later” point.

Q124 **Conor McGinn:** For the roundtable talks.

Karen Bradley: For all-party roundtable talks involving all parties, yes—all main parties, I ought to say, to be clear.

Q125 **Conor McGinn:** Lady Hermon and other colleagues have raised issues where a lack of any accountability or decision making has had a huge impact on people’s lives and on the community as a whole. One area I am particularly concerned about is policing. I hope you will accept that I have been a very strong supporter of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and I have not been afraid to challenge politicians from all quarters, but particularly civic leaders in nationalism, to be emphatic about their support for the police. That is the context in which I say that I have been very disturbed by headlines yesterday in the Irish news that Special Branch recruited a loyalist and allowed him to murder at will, and about news this morning that Freddie Scappaticci, widely acknowledged as another paid informant of the state, who is perhaps responsible for up to 40 murders, has been arrested too.

My concern is that that has a corrosive effect on the confidence of the whole community in policing. That is not fair to the current Chief Constable and the men and women of the PSNI, who are doing their job today, fighting and preventing crime and keeping people safe. Nonetheless, someone has to be answerable for this, because if the state paid, through Merseyside Police, a serial killer or serial killers for a decade or more, there would be absolute outcry. What is your view on that? What mechanisms are in place to address some of this? How do we ensure that people have confidence in the police, that the police can do their job and that we take this weight of difficult, sensitive awfulness about the past away from the police, who are trying to do their job today? How do we resolve it and sort it out where it needs to be sorted out?

Karen Bradley: Thank you very much for the question. There are a few points that need to be made in response. First, I have seen the news reports about this case, but it would not be appropriate for me to speculate any further; it is a matter for the courts. But I have met the Chief Constable of PSNI; he does fantastic work, as do the officers of PSNI. There are some issues. There are issues about governance. The



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lack of a devolved Administration means that the Policing Board is not properly constituted at the moment. That is really important. We need to have proper governance structures in place. They were set up in a way that works for PSNI and gives PSNI the confidence to police with the consent of the people. Again, I urge politicians, MLAs who are involved in the talks and others to recognise that point and to come together to address that by getting those institutions back up in place in Stormont, so we can have the proper governance.

Q126 **Conor McGinn:** That has been a concern, because the Policing Board is meeting but just with independents and no political members, so its powers are very limited. That has led to a growing concern about accountability.

Karen Bradley: Exactly, and the point has been made to me by both the Chief Constable and those independent members of the Policing Board, who are concerned about the public's perception.

The final point, which you touched on, is about legacy. It is important. The Government respect the decisions that were taken in Stormont House about legacy institutions. We will be consulting on those institutions at an appropriate point, bearing in mind sensitivities around other things at the moment. But it is very important that we get those institutions up and running, because that will mean that PSNI can police for the problems and the crimes that exist today, and not be looking at the historic crimes of the past.

Q127 **Conor McGinn:** I understand that, and, for victims, survivors and their families, the need for full disclosure and the ability to pursue justice for their loved ones is vitally important and fundamental to that too.

My final observation would be that I was really pleased to hear you talk about communities when you talked about relations north-south, and how Brexit will affect Northern Ireland and those particular border areas. I would encourage you to go there, to meet people, to do what I felt you were very good at in your previous role, which was to engage with all manner of individuals and organisations, from Irish language activists to survivors of institutional abuse. I know you will do that.

I will just say, finally, on Bombardier, there was a team effort. It involved lots of UK Government Departments, trade unions and others. Would it not be great if it did not need a crisis for a UK-wide approach to help, encourage and promote business in Northern Ireland, and the links between England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Republic? That is one lesson that perhaps we should take from Bombardier. As Mr Paisley said, there are lots of brilliant things happening in Northern Ireland, and you have a very important role in articulating that.

Karen Bradley: If I could perhaps express a frustration, when I speak to my fellow territorial offices' Secretaries of State, they are focused on promoting the country that they represent in Cabinet. They are focused



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on bringing jobs and investment. That is what the Northern Ireland Office should be doing. We should not be having to broker talks around devolved government. We should be doing the things that the people of Northern Ireland need and deserve. The locally elected politicians should be delivering the devolved government, absolutely rightly and appropriately, in a way that works for the people of Northern Ireland. There are fantastic civil servants within the Northern Ireland Office, an incredibly dedicated team, and I am sure they would love to be part of those kinds of cross-government pieces of promotion and work.

You are right; we do not want that to be necessarily when there is a crisis. We want that to be part of day-to-day life. I want to be out there visiting all the incredible parts of Northern Ireland and meeting the people, who have been so warm, so friendly, so welcoming and so proud of everything there is to offer in Northern Ireland. I would encourage that: it is a very short hop on an airplane; it is not very far at all.

Q128 Bob Stewart: Secretary of State, you said in your statement that all the people of Northern Ireland really want their elected politicians to get local Northern Ireland government functioning again. That does not seem to be right, does it? If, for example, supporters of Sinn Féin felt that way, we, as politicians in this room, would understand. We try to follow through the directions of our electorate. Are you sure that the people who supported one party in the Northern Ireland elections really want them to get on with it?

If they did, if they really did want their elected politicians to get on with it, they would put pressure on them and they would respond, but they do not seem to be responding to come to the table easily. If you cannot come to the table with an open mind, prepared to compromise, prepared to come back, it seems to be almost a fruitless task. There seems to be a contradiction here: the people want government restored, as you said, presumably with evidence, yet the people they have elected do not give a damn. There seems to be a dichotomy of approach there, which seems, to me, strange.

Karen Bradley: I do not think it would be fair to characterise it as the politicians not giving a damn. The politicians do care. They care desperately about the people who elected them and they want to represent them. There have been differences and things have happened. Everyone knows what happened this time last year; everyone knows what has happened since. I truly believe that the politicians want to make a success of this. The voices of everybody I have met—

Q129 Bob Stewart: On all sides?

Karen Bradley: On all sides.

Q130 Bob Stewart: Therefore, why are the politicians not complying?

Karen Bradley: I hope they will. This is not just business leaders or civic leaders.



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Q131 **Bob Stewart:** They are moving at the speed of a striking slug.

Karen Bradley: The girl who did my make-up at the television said to me, "We all want this to work". The people who were driving cars told me they want this to work. Everybody has said to me, "Please make a success of this".

Q132 **Bob Stewart:** That seems strange. Why are they not coming to talk? It seems odd.

Karen Bradley: The parties are talking. The parties are there, but I do not want to speculate or provide a running commentary.

Q133 **Bob Stewart:** I am not asking you for speculation. The evidence that you have suggested is that people really want their politicians to get on with it, and they are saying that to you. In a way, I am saying this for a wider audience to support you. Believe you me; it is not an attack on you. It seems to me that the people want executive government to function, and the politicians are not following through on that. They have that right. They have that right because they are not delegates. They are representatives. In their representational role, they seem to be taking a slightly different tack to what the people want. Forgive me; I know you cannot answer this question easily.

Karen Bradley: In that case, I will not answer it at all.

Q134 **Bob Stewart:** In a way we are grandstanding here. I am not grandstanding—we are asking the people who represent the people in Northern Ireland to please sort it out, come to a meeting and get it going again. It is absurd that we are even having to consider direct rule when we have set up the institutions. We, the Government—I am not part of the Government, but the Parliament of the United Kingdom has set up an institution. You do not have to answer; it is not a question, is it? It is a statement. Please, the people of Northern Ireland, this great place, want government to work. They want their local services to work. They want to get their contracts sorted out. It is absurd that we are now approaching 13 months without a proper Government.

Chair: We can agree on that.

Karen Bradley: I could not have put it better myself, Mr Stewart.

Q135 **John Grogan:** I will associate myself with the remarks of the now departed member for North Antrim about the power of sport. One thing he missed out: I read that Belfast is on the shortlist for the UEFA Super Cup. That could bring the world's greatest footballers in 2020—

Karen Bradley: Manchester City will be in it, I'm sure.

Q136 **John Grogan:** We will see. On devolution, have all the parties accepted that they will be round the table with you no later than Monday?

Karen Bradley: That point has been made very clear, and it is something that has been said publicly and privately.



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Q137 **John Grogan:** They have accepted, and we fully expect to see them on Monday.

Karen Bradley: It will happen.

Q138 **John Grogan:** Good. I admire your confidence. You showed commendable initiative, Secretary of State, to get this going so quickly. Some people have said, as Lord Murphy argued last year, that if you look at the past history of these sorts of talks it usually requires the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach to get people over the line. Is that still a possibility next week?

Karen Bradley: Again, I do not want to provide a running commentary on what we are doing and what the next steps might be. I am being very flexible in terms of my approach and very pragmatic. I will do what is needed to make this work.

Q139 **John Grogan:** Obviously the Prime Minister is very busy in China this week, but presumably you have spoken to her quite a bit about these talks.

Karen Bradley: I can assure you I have had lengthy conversations with the Prime Minister about this.

Q140 **John Grogan:** Just to clarify one other thing, when I read some remarks you made, I think it was last week, I thought you were being very brave. There seemed to be the suggestion that the extra £1 billion could only start being spent when an Executive was back in place. I thought you were being very brave. On the Labour Benches, we were looking at that with interest. Just to clarify, that was not the intention, was it?

Karen Bradley: The £1 billion recognises the unique circumstances and specific pressures that Northern Ireland is under. That is why £50 million has already been made available for addressing the immediate pressures in the NHS and education. Much of the money has been promised for infrastructure, things like the York Street Interchange. While the money could be given, it is not realistic to ask civil servants to make those decisions about contractual arrangements.

Broadband was the other thing I have referred to. In order to deliver the rollout of the £150 million that has been allocated to broadband, ministerial direction is needed. The point I was making is that the money could be made available through the estimates process tomorrow, but, without devolved government in place, the things that it has been allocated to address cannot properly be delivered. The York Street Interchange is a perfect example of that.

Q141 **John Grogan:** Just to clarify, £50 million of the £1 billion has been spent.

Karen Bradley: It has been made available, for both this financial year and next financial year.



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Q142 **John Grogan:** You now seem to be suggesting, and you are being slightly brave, that for a lot of the infrastructure, York Street and so on, there is no way that the contracts can be signed without Ministers signing them. The only way that would happen would either be an Executive being formed or, I presume, direct rule. It would have to be one or the other, would it not? Civil servants clearly cannot do it.

Karen Bradley: As I have said already, the civil servants in the Northern Ireland civil service are exemplary public servants. But public servants in the civil service have a duty to act on the direction of Ministers, not independently. That is not what we employ our civil servants to do.

It has been agreed that these important infrastructure projects are needed in Northern Ireland. The money has been made available, but there will be things that require Ministers to make the appropriate direction or contractual arrangements. I would urge the politicians in Northern Ireland to listen to Mr Stewart and his remarks, and come together to deliver for the people.

Q143 **John Grogan:** That is very clear.

Another area is full alignment. I am trying to tease out what it might mean. The Northern Ireland Assembly identified 141 areas or policies from the exit of the EU that it thought would impact on the Northern Ireland devolved settlement. Everyone always mentions agriculture and electricity. Is that it? When you look at trade north and south of the border, agriculture dominates, but there is a lot of other trade as well. How much of the single market and the customs union might there be alignment with—about 10%, 30%, 50%?

Karen Bradley: There are two points there. There is the point about the powers that are currently in Brussels that would return to Westminster and the devolved Administrations. That is what the 141 number is. That is the number that reflects the debate we have had about clause 11 of the withdrawal Bill, which is now obviously in the House of Lords. That is the number of powers that would normally vest with the devolved Government but currently vest with Brussels, and therefore need to be returned to Stormont. It is a different number than it is in Scotland or Wales, because of the different devolution settlement.

The issue of alignment in the joint report is an issue about the north-south issues on which there needs to be alignment. The single electricity market would be an example of that. Resolving the arrangements between the north and south through the main EU-UK deal is the UK's Government's preferred option. We want the first of the three approaches: that we will agree, through the UK-EU deal, an arrangement that enables the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to be seamless. That is what we want to do, in the same way as we want a frictionless, seamless border at Dover, Felixstowe and all the other points of entry into the United Kingdom.



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Alignment is a backstop option. If we are unable to reach that agreement and do that through the main agreement, we need to have something in place to ensure that things like agriculture and electricity are maintained, and that we do not see a problem with electricity supply, for example.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: It is worth saying, on the areas identified around north-south co-operation, that some of those will be impacted by leaving the EU; some of them will not be. Some of them are not particularly dependent upon EU laws and regulations. Those are included within the 141, will not be affected and will carry on.

Q144 **John Grogan:** If we get to full alignment, it will be full alignment with the whole of the United Kingdom, not just Northern Ireland.

Karen Bradley: Yes. We have said that the internal market of the United Kingdom will be respected.

Q145 **John Grogan:** There has been some speculation on no physical infrastructure, but the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union has mentioned the possibility of cameras back from the border. Warehouses have been mentioned. Would that fall under the definition of physical infrastructure, or is it just physical infrastructure at the border? It could be 10 miles back. Mobile vans have been mentioned.

Karen Bradley: We have been clear there will be no new physical infrastructure at the border, as have the Irish Government and the European Union.

Q146 **John Grogan:** A bit back we could have physical infrastructure.

Karen Bradley: As I say, we are looking to make the arrangements through the wider EU-UK trading relationship to ensure that it is frictionless, seamless, and life can continue. A border was drawn in the 1920s between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and that border has been crossed. There are farmers who are crossing the border every day. There are houses in which you cross the border to go between your kitchen and your sitting room. These are the unique circumstances and situation of Northern Ireland.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: It is worth saying the joint report commits the UK to no hard border, physical infrastructure or related controls or checks. Just to emphasise the point, the joint report also commits the UK to no new trade barriers within the UK. That is unless, consistent with the Good Friday agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly exercise their right under devolution to make different rules.

Q147 **Chair:** Can I just press you on where on the Order Paper on Wednesday you see an opportunity to make a statement or talk a bit about the milestone to which you referred?

Karen Bradley: I seem to recall questions 4, 5 and 6 might allow an opportunity.



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Q148 **Chair:** That is fine, because the word “topical” crept into the conversation.

Karen Bradley: Only because it is the usual format that, when answering T1, a Secretary of State makes a topical statement at that point about pertinent matters. The point I was making is that there was always going to be a statement made during oral questions, because the T1 answer is a topical statement.

Q149 **Nigel Mills:** There are no topical questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, so there is no T1.

Karen Bradley: Are there not?

Nigel Mills: There are not.

Karen Bradley: I understand now. I thought the last five minutes was topical. Is it DfID where the last five minutes are topical?

Nigel Mills: Yes.

Karen Bradley: I apologise for that. I have sat through lots of Northern Ireland questions and I had not noticed the fact there were no topical questions.

Q150 **Chair:** You can be forgiven, because of course you are used to answering for DCMS, where there are indeed plenty of topical questions.

Karen Bradley: There are definitely topical questions. Even when we only had 30 minutes we had topicals.

Q151 **Chair:** None are available to you.

Karen Bradley: In that case, it will be during questions 4, 5 and 6. You will find they are the appropriate points.

Q152 **Chair:** It is not for me to advise on procedural issues, but can I ever so gently suggest that would be an unusual way for a Secretary of State to mark the milestone to which you refer? Probably, on reflection, you may feel that a statement is appropriate on Wednesday.

Karen Bradley: I take the point, Chair, but, as I say, I would not wish to insult the House by making a statement that meant I said nothing during that statement.

Q153 **Kate Hoey:** Secretary of State, that really—anyway, I suppose there is no point. You have obviously decided.

Karen Bradley: It depends on where we are. It really does depend on where we are, and I do not want to prejudge.

Kate Hoey: If we are somewhere in between, or wherever, surely Parliament and particularly those with an interest in Northern Ireland have a right to know where we are in this great void between something and nothing.



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Q154 **Chair:** I do not want to prolong this conversation. We have agreed that the last statement that the Secretary of State made was probably November or December. I cannot be entirely clear in my mind. Given the situation with respect to the Executive, and given your special role at the moment, perhaps it would be appropriate to update the House more often than that.

Karen Bradley: I take the point, but I will just allow myself to say that I will make a full statement at the point it is appropriate to make a full statement, and which gives us the best chance and opportunity of success.

Q155 **Nigel Mills:** Picking up from some of Mr Grogan's questions, can you define what a hard border, which we have guaranteed we will not be having on the island of Ireland, is?

Karen Bradley: I can define what it is not, which is what we have today. There will be no checks, border crossings, passport controls. It will look as it does today.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: No physical infrastructure or related checks or controls.

Q156 **Nigel Mills:** When we are codifying the joint report—presumably you will have to define a hard border when you codify what we have guaranteed—that is the definition: no physical infrastructure at the border.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: That is the commitment: no physical infrastructure or related checks or controls.

Q157 **Nigel Mills:** That is what the EU and the Irish think we have agreed.

Sir Jonathan Stephens: That is what is in the joint report.

Q158 **Nigel Mills:** That is a slightly opaque use of words in that situation. Are you involved in the codifying work, or is that being done by DExEU or elsewhere?

Sir Jonathan Stephens: Yes, we are closely involved. The point I would make about all this and exactly what it means is that it fundamentally depends upon the nature of the agreement that is reached during phase 2 of the talks. That is the three-tier structure that the UK Government have set out. They want to achieve their ambitions around the border and Northern Ireland through a comprehensive deep and special relationship with the EU that deals with those issues. To the extent that is not able to deal with them comprehensively, they have the option of putting forward special arrangements to deal with the unique circumstances in Northern Ireland. Then there is the final fallback position.

We have not really started on phase 2 of the negotiations yet. It is important that phase 1 was resolved, and that provides a firm basis for going forward. Until we know the outcome of phase 2, we cannot



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anticipate the precise nature of what the arrangements are going to look like. That is for the negotiations in phase 2.

Q159 **Nigel Mills:** We accept that is logical, but, as I understand the EU's preferred phasing, we have to agree the codified text to the joint report before we move on to sorting out the future relationship. At some point somebody has to put into legally clear and presumably binding language what is currently a little waffley, repetitive and opaque in the joint report. Is that something you are working on, or is it wholly being done by DExEU or some clever lawyers?

Sir Jonathan Stephens: No, we are working very closely with DExEU on that, as you would expect. It will also be a matter for agreement with the Commission. The basis of it is the joint report. It is turning the joint report into legal commitments. To the extent that those legal commitments are commitments about different options to be pursued during phase 2 of the negotiations, that itself will need to be reflected.

Q160 **Nigel Mills:** Creative solutions may need to be built upon the overall agreement to make the Northern Ireland situation work. Are those the ones that were in previous White Papers around exempting small and medium-sized businesses, or are you working on new things that you think might be needed?

Sir Jonathan Stephens: I think you are referring to the customs paper published last summer or so, which set out two broad options. Those remain very much on the table.

Q161 **Nigel Mills:** Can I just switch on to the talks? Secretary of State, is this the best chance of a deal?

Karen Bradley: I do not want to get into a running commentary about where we are or likelihoods. I want these talks to succeed and for devolved government to be up and running. I do not want to say anything that may in any way hamper that.

Q162 **Nigel Mills:** You made some comments about how very close the talks were to being successful before Christmas.

Karen Bradley: In my statement that I made two weeks ago, when I announced the resumption of talks, I said that there had been good progress in the talks, but there were differences between the main parties. They are narrow differences, but that is not to say they are not deep differences. The talks are involved in trying to find a way to address those differences.

Q163 **Nigel Mills:** Mr Stewart's questions implied that one party was to blame for there not having been the progress we would all like to see. Is that a fair summary, or would you say that perhaps more than one party is stalling?

Karen Bradley: I do not want to be involved in trying to attribute responsibility, blame or anything else to any party. The fact is the parties



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are talking. The parties are in Stormont and the Parliament buildings, speaking to each other and trying to find a way to reach an agreement, so that we can form a devolved Administration.

Q164 **Kate Hoey:** Are both parties putting forward preconditions?

Karen Bradley: Again, I do not want to speculate or comment on what may or may not be going on during the talks. It is fair to say that the talks are happening.

Kate Hoey: I think the public in Northern Ireland probably know a little bit more than you are prepared to say.

Q165 **Nigel Mills:** When you put a backstop date in place, is there a point at which there has to be a Government in place in Northern Ireland, and we really cannot limp on with nothing?

Karen Bradley: Again, I do not want to start speculating or devoting energy or attention to what might happen if the talks do not succeed. I want to make the talks succeed.

Q166 **Nigel Mills:** The evidence we had last week from the Northern Ireland Permanent Secretary suggested that he needed you to at least set out what you thought the budget should look like next week, if there was not an Executive in place to do that. Is that something you are prepared to do?

Karen Bradley: I have met David Sterling. He has made his points to me. I am reflecting on them.

Q167 **Nigel Mills:** That is not a yes that you agree with his timing. Do you think you could wait longer than that?

Karen Bradley: Again, he has made clear to me what he needs, and I am reflecting on how best that can be achieved.

Q168 **Nigel Mills:** I have probably asked this of a few Secretaries of State now. We are very close to having transparency of donations to Northern Ireland parties. The order is laid and we are awaiting a slot for it. Have you any idea when we might have that in force?

Karen Bradley: I would not want to speculate on when business managers will allow anything to come forward. There are perhaps other distractions at the moment in legislative terms.

Q169 **Nigel Mills:** You would expect it to be in force before you became minded to call an election. You would not want to have another election fought without us knowing where the money going to parties was coming from.

Karen Bradley: I am not privy to the information about the business managers. It is a matter for the Cabinet Office rather than the Northern Ireland Office.



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Sir Jonathan Stephens: It is worth saying that, whenever it comes into force, it is backdated to have effect from last summer.

Nigel Mills: Yes. It would be a bit bizarre to have an election in the meantime and then find out afterwards where the money had come from.

Q170 **Mr Hepburn:** What is happening with the legacy case investigations?

Karen Bradley: I have spoken already about the need to get the institutions that are in the Stormont House agreement up and running. We will be consulting on that matter at an appropriate time. When the institutions are there, they can carry out the appropriate work to deal with legacy.

It is worth saying that the view of legacy cases in Northern Ireland and the need to address those issues are perhaps not properly understood in Great Britain. I know there was a very good debate in Westminster Hall last week, which I was not able to attend because I was in Belfast. We should all remember that it is for the sake of the victims of what happened in the Troubles that we need to get the institutions in place, so that we can have transparency, and victims and victims' families can have their opportunity to learn what actually happened.

Q171 **Mr Hepburn:** Would it be for Westminster to set a plan for the future, or would that be for the devolved authorities?

Karen Bradley: The way the Stormont House agreement works is that there would need to be legislation through the Westminster Parliament. Once the institutions are up and running, they clearly are Northern Irish institutions.

Q172 **Lady Hermon:** Why have we delayed the public consultation? Why do we not consult with the public? The paper has been ready for a period of time, as I understand. This is a legacy issue. It affects so many people, and time is passing; time is passing. Why can we not just consult with the public and let them see what is in the paper?

Karen Bradley: I would like to get on with it, but there are clearly sensitivities around it. I want to make sure that the Victims' Commissioner, for example, whom I have met, and others have had a chance to properly consider the consultation. One of the things I have learned is the importance of language in Northern Ireland and the importance of dealing with sensitivities. I want to make sure that all the bodies and people affected have an opportunity to look at this before we put it in the public domain. I do not wish there to be any unnecessary suffering for victims or families of victims.

Q173 **Lady Hermon:** No. You are not implying that in fact it is the Victims' Commissioner, an excellent commissioner in Northern Ireland, who is delaying the public consultation.

Karen Bradley: No, not at all. I am just saying that I want to go through a process to make sure that people like the Victims' Commissioner and



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others with an interest in this have an opportunity to see this document before it goes into the public domain. That is why I want to make sure we do it at the right time.

Q174 Lady Hermon: Is it the political parties in Northern Ireland that are stopping the rest of the public seeing what is in the recommendations for dealing with legacy issues?

Karen Bradley: No. It is just making sure that everybody who needs to see it has seen it before it goes to the public. I have been working on it. It came on to my desk three weeks ago, and I have been working on it since then. I want to get on with it, because we want to get these institutions up and running.

Q175 Lady Hermon: How many other people are on the list and have to be consulted? This is a hugely significant issue in Northern Ireland. We have already had it mentioned that it is a huge burden for the PSNI that they have to police both the present and the past. It seems ridiculous that we are held hostage, endlessly waiting for somebody to say, "Yes, let's have public consultation on this", or, "Let's implement the Reaney report", or the Hart report. It is deeply frustrating. I would like to reflect the view of certain of my constituents, and people right across Northern Ireland, that we just have to move on with some of these things. The public are entitled to know what is in this consultation about legacy issues.

Karen Bradley: I fully understand and appreciate your comments. They are very wise and well made. Perhaps I can suggest that we meet privately and I can discuss some of those points with you.

Q176 Lady Hermon: A better idea would be, when we do not have topical questions next week, that in Northern Ireland questions, whichever number it is, you give us something positive. Give the people of Northern Ireland something positive when you respond to those questions next week. That is a plea from the heart.

Karen Bradley: I very much hope I can.

Q177 Kate Hoey: Very briefly, Secretary of State, just for the public record, could you tell us who your advisers are? Who have you appointed as personal advisers or department advisers?

Karen Bradley: Jonathan Caine remains a special adviser. Peter Cardwell is special adviser in the Department, and Kris Hopkins.

Q178 Chair: Secretary of State, there is one last one from me, going back to the joint report, which refers to the all-Ireland economy now and in the future. In the evidence you have given this morning, you have mentioned electricity and agriculture, which is a fairly restrictive interpretation of the all-Ireland economy now and in the future. Can I suggest to you that issues like pharma, IT and manufacturing, generally speaking, fall within the definition of all-Ireland economy now and in the future? Would you agree with me that that is a more accurate reflection of the meaning of



that paragraph 49 than a restrictive one based purely on agriculture and electricity?

Karen Bradley: I was not suggesting it was just agriculture and electricity. I was citing those as examples of where there are specific, unique circumstances. In terms of the single electricity market, there is no other part of the European Union or part of Europe where there is a single electricity market between two countries, one of which is a member state of the European Union and one is not. Agriculture is an obvious example, but pharma is another example.

There are issues that are north-south, but also east-west. The specific north-south issues are perhaps not as wide-ranging as the full list that you have suggested, Chair, although of course there is north-south trade in goods, services, supply chains and many other things.

Q179 **Chair:** Thank you ever so much. You have been extremely generous with your time. We have drilled you on a whole raft of issues and we very much look forward to seeing you again in the not-too-distant future.

Karen Bradley: Thank you, and my apologies again on topical questions. Goodness me. I am sure I would have found out once I had seen the list.